UNFINISHED

December 30, 2022

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

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2022: ✌️

Thanks for following along this year. We're excited about 2023 and the opportunity to continue delivering the best insights, ideas, and articles at the intersection of technology, ethics, and social impact.

What ideas or people should we feature next year? What important stories need to be told? Simply reply to this email and share your ideas!

Now, on to the second group of the best articles from 2022.

The Best Articles of 2022 (Part II)

😟 **"The Age of Algorithmic Anxiety."** That's the title of an essay published in The New Yorker, where the journalist Kyle Chayka explored 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!)

📉 **Will Blockchain survive the crypto crash?** An opinion piece from the journalist Maria Bustillos in the *New York Times* argued 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 wrote. "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 compared 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.”

🚗 **The world of data connected to our cars**: Most drivers have no idea what data is being transmitted from their cars—not to mention who is collecting, analyzing, and sharing that data, and with whom they’re sharing it. In ***The Markup***, Jon Keegan and Alfred Ng identified 37 companies — including car companies, insurance companies, music system providers, navigation providers, and telecom operators — that make up the largely unregulated connected vehicle data ecosystem.

🤰 **Digital Privacy and Abortions in America**. Sociologist and author Zeynep Tufekci wrote in ***The New York Times*** that privacy is a more urgent topic than ever as (at the time of writing) the U.S. Supreme Court appeared poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade*: “Surveillance made possible by minimally-regulated digital technologies could help law enforcement track down women who might seek abortions and medical providers who perform them in places where it would become criminalized … What’s needed, for all Americans, is a full legal and political reckoning with the reckless manner in which digital technology has been allowed to invade our lives.”

🔍 **Your attention didn’t collapse. It was stolen.** Social media and many other facets of digital life are destroying our ability to concentrate. In this excerpt in ***The Guardian*** from his book *Stolen Focus*, Johann Hari outlines the epidemic of un-focus sweeping across society. He writes about the anxieties from those who are studying our decline in attention: “The evidence is strong and these anxieties are like the early warnings about the obesity epidemic or the climate crisis in the 1970s.”

📱 **Social media’s risk to teens**: 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 social media and the internet. ***The New York Times*** reported that anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide now present the greatest risk 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? (A recent article in ***The New York Times*** featured teens who are rejecting smart phones altogether).

🧠 **Democracy as a form of collective intelligence**: 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** — wrote 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 argued, and we need to leverage emerging technologies to make our democratic processes and institutions smarter.

Digitally modifying the faces of politicians: 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.

🏘️ **Metaverse real-estate and crypto real-estate**: Nothing typifies the craziness earlier this year around crypto than speculators spending millions of dollars on virtual plots of land in the metaverse, Maxwell Strachan reported in ***Motherboard***. " The artificial scarcity coded into many metaverses has frustrated some blockchain purists who want the new digital world to create a truly fairer, more decentralized version of Earth. It can instead feel, at times, like an even more commodified and consumerist version of the reality humans naturally inhabit, in which a few power players are already dominant, and passion and hucksterism can look the same." In the ***Wall Street Journal***, E.B. Solomont and Katherine Clarke reported on massive real estate investments from "newly minted crypto-millionaires and crypto-billionaires, who have either invested in or have helped build the infrastructure that enables digital currency."

Thank you for reading.

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See you in 2023!

The Unfinished team