FINDING OUR WAY
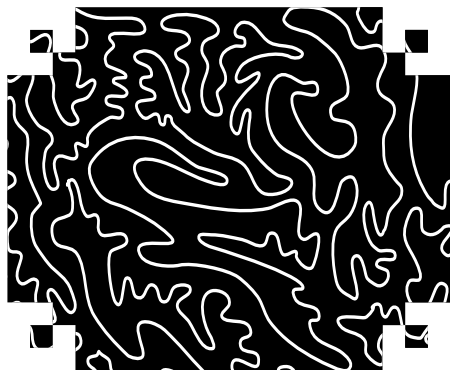
Gathered and edited by Marie LeBlanc Flanagan

TECHTECHTECH

FINDING OUR WAY is a compilation of contributions from coresearchers on Ada X's Tech Tech Tech project. Together we are exploring alternatives to the tech giants for artists and artist-run centers.

To create this zine, I organized and ran a series of short cowriting workshops where we gathered together online for ~60 minutes to share problems we each are facing as well as solutions we have uncovered. The structure of "problem" and "solution" is here to support us in our writing, not to constrain us. Solutions can be understood as explorations, ideas, of places for expression.

The final page is for you to make your contribution.

Thank you for being here with us.

Marie LeBlanc Flanagan

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I am Prakash Krishnan

I am loose ephemera housed in a brown body, artist-researcher, cultural mediator, at the end of a Saturn return.

I study art and media with a focus on digital diasporic networks and disability justice.

The Problem

The problem is the interlacing between my phone's memory and my own. If I haven't taken souvenirs in the form of photos, calendar events, messages, or reminders, important moments become lost to me. Life online is too many connections, is information overload: news cycles and celeb tea, new babies and dogs, jobs and degrees, vacations and birthdays and anniversaries. Once I scroll past, retention drops to zero. To be present in the [digital] moment is to be everywhere at once, and to log out is to be exiled from the city of connections.

A Solution

I have tried to break up with my phone. To instead build relationships to objects, feelings, memory IRL detached from digital traces/data points (photos, text messages, etc.). Thought process: if there are no traces, and I value this relationship, I will be forced to reconfigure my orientation toward, and rely on, my own internal storage and security of memory.

Yet, in doing so, I've forgotten important dates, birthdays, plans, conversations, commitments. Whole encounters are lost because we didn't exchange @usernames, and now I can't remember so-and-so's name and how we met.

I'm working now on modifying my relationship to digital documentation to find a working equilibrium. A note-taking-journaling approach using my own methodology and an asocial platform to record my thoughts to come back to. Something not public, not shared, without notifications, but that I know is always there.

I mute notifications and log out once overwhelmed. I've transitioned from SMS to voice notes and regularly declutter and reorganize my photos, making sure to tag ones to come back to. Precious moments with friends, flowers, hot selfies.

Finding a fluid, individualized approach that appropriates the affordances of digital documentation.

✦ I am Crystal Chan

As a writer and editor, I illuminate, mediate. I facilitate storytelling projects: often digital, decolonial, and by Indigenous creators. As a connector between authors, artists, web developers, filmmakers, and between forms, catalogues, and labels, communication is key. Clarity is key.

The Problem

Which is why you'd expect me to be organized. If you walked into my home—you wouldn't be shocked. It's tidy. But if you wander into my digital home, you'll find an antique store of data: piled up in dusty towers, ready to topple over and crush you.

Every few weeks I try something else to keep my digital home neat: idiosyncratic colour coding, weird file naming, a new app that promises to fix things. After a few days, I get overwhelmed.

Later, nothing makes sense. I pay money. I hire the digital equivalent of a 1-800-take-my-junk truck and my "ephemeral" data sits in a tech giant storage locker. Who owns that data? Me? Really? data? Me? Really

A Solution

At work, I've learned to respect cultural protocols, beyond the copyrights required by law. Data requires sovereignty, attribution, and context. The audio recording of an Indigenous Matriarch is sacred. The film of a dancer in regalia raises as many questions about ownership as the blanket in the film, stolen and sitting in a museum.

Where is your data stored in the world, by whom, and who has access to it? What is the balance between the open-source u/dys-topia of "everything available for all" and respectful stewardship?

I challenge my colonized mind to see animals, plants, stones as beings. Why not data? We find creative ways to mesh and reshape existing, open-source, customizable platforms to build new pathways (ex: Reciprocal Research Network / Local Contexts).

A week and a half ago there was a death in my family. I dropped everything. I slept in my grandparents' empty bed. The shelf held photo albums. There aren't many. My grandparents lovingly curated the mementos. What is important, is kept. The selection criteria is personal. Follows your own spirit and rule. Each remaining photo is preserved with loving care in an album: an offering and a gift, for current and future kin.

How do I treat my digital belongings with the same care? Like physical objects, digital objects deserve our protection, our responsibility, and our tenderness.

I am Remina Greenfield

I am a researcher and artist interested in the hybrid possibilities that can emerge from coordination between living things and computational systems. In my work, I explore ways to think about technology through an ecological and biological lens.

The Problem

There's no transparency about the lifespan of digital objects, data that exists online, etc. Me says: If our technologies followed a more ecological model, we would have more transparency about when and how our online data or personas will decay or disappear. .

At some point in my young adult life, it began to dawn on me just how many traces of myself had been smeared over various profiles, blogs, university websites, etc. Especially as a student you are encouraged to post your work as a way to benefit universities and institutions before you really know what it means to have this early work made public.
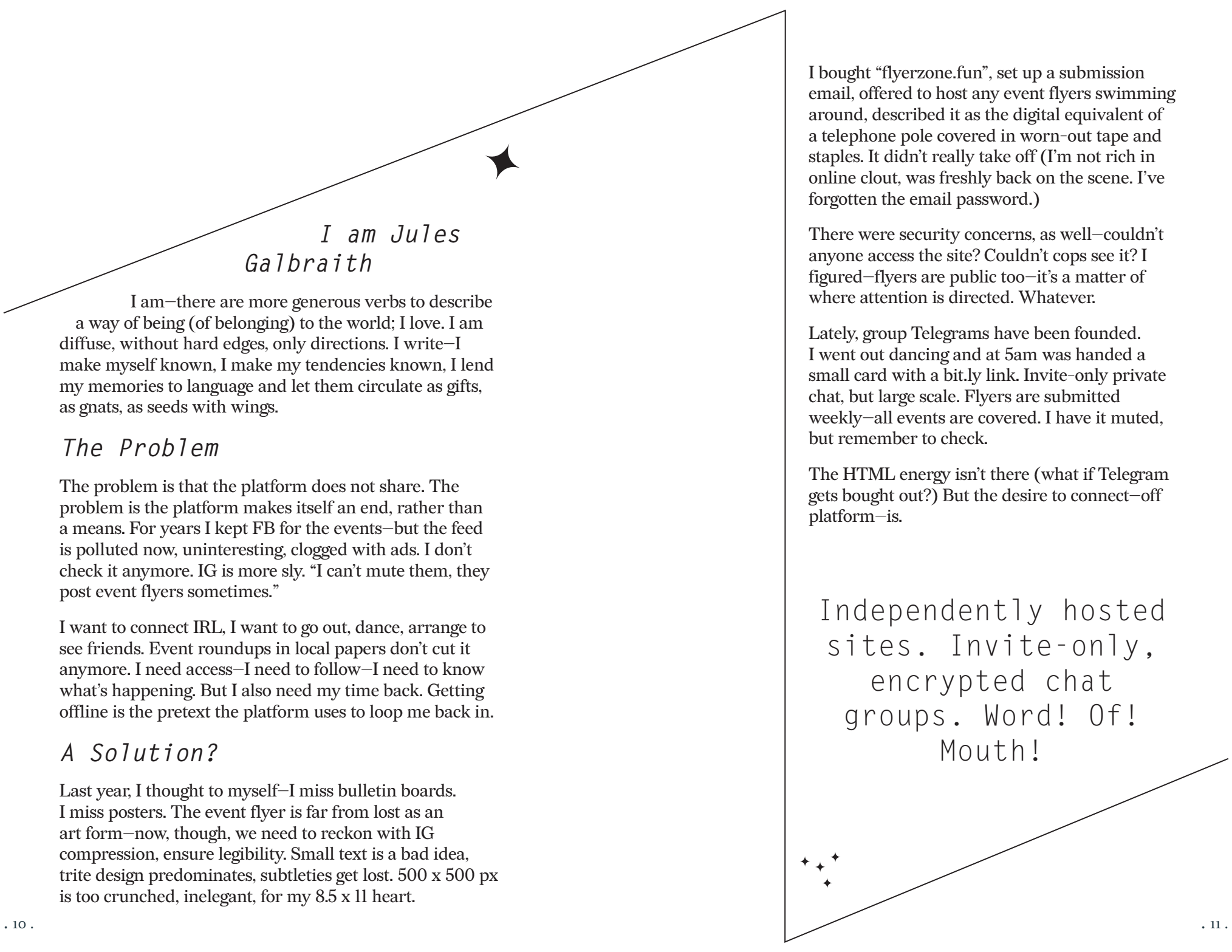
There are certain cultural myths about technological immortality, for instance that one could live indefinitely on a server. However, which digital fragments of us will become part of an archive or dataset for a company is actually completely out of our control.

★ A Solution?

I went through the process of hunting down and erasing most of my digital traces. Some of this was easy to do – simply deleting a profile or closing an account. However, other materials were more difficult as I had to go through a 3rd party to get certain things taken down. Another detail is that this process was erasing only what was external on these various sites. I wouldn't know what pieces of data are kept by the various tech companies and to what ends they would be used. At some point you feel like you are being haunted by past versions of yourself and not allowed to progress through the normal growth and evolution process.

This process was by no means a solution, but a personal experience of the difficulties trying to metabolize one's online presence. I find poetic resonance in rights that exist in other countries such as the "right to disappear" or the "right to be forgotten." What about the right not to live forever? To be allowed to enter a deeper ecological life cycle.

I started an entire artist practice about what metabolism – including decay – might look like in a computational system, but inspired by and drawing from biological processes.

I am Jules Galbraith

I am—there are more generous verbs to describe a way of being (of belonging) to the world; I love. I am diffuse, without hard edges, only directions. I write—I make myself known, I make my tendencies known, I lend my memories to language and let them circulate as gifts, as gnats, as seeds with wings.

The Problem

The problem is that the platform does not share. The problem is the platform makes itself an end, rather than a means. For years I kept FB for the events—but the feed is polluted now, uninteresting, clogged with ads. I don't check it anymore. IG is more sly. "I can't mute them, they post event flyers sometimes."

I want to connect IRL, I want to go out, dance, arrange to see friends. Event roundups in local papers don't cut it anymore. I need access—I need to follow—I need to know what's happening. But I also need my time back. Getting offline is the pretext the platform uses to loop me back in.

A Solution?

Last year, I thought to myself—I miss bulletin boards. I miss posters. The event flyer is far from lost as an art form—now, though, we need to reckon with IG compression, ensure legibility. Small text is a bad idea, trite design predominates, subtleties get lost. 500 x 500 px is too crunched, inelegant, for my 8.5 x 11 heart.

I bought "flyerzone.fun", set up a submission email, offered to host any event flyers swimming around, described it as the digital equivalent of a telephone pole covered in worn-out tape and staples. It didn't really take off (I'm not rich in online clout, was freshly back on the scene. I've forgotten the email password.)

There were security concerns, as well—couldn't anyone access the site? Couldn't cops see it? I figured—flyers are public too—it's a matter of where attention is directed. Whatever.

Lately, group Telegrams have been founded. I went out dancing and at 5am was handed a small card with a bit.ly link. Invite-only private chat, but large scale. Flyers are submitted weekly—all events are covered. I have it muted, but remember to check.

The HTML energy isn't there (what if Telegram gets bought out?) But the desire to connect—off platform—is.

Independently hosted sites. Invite-only, encrypted chat groups. Word! Of! Mouth!
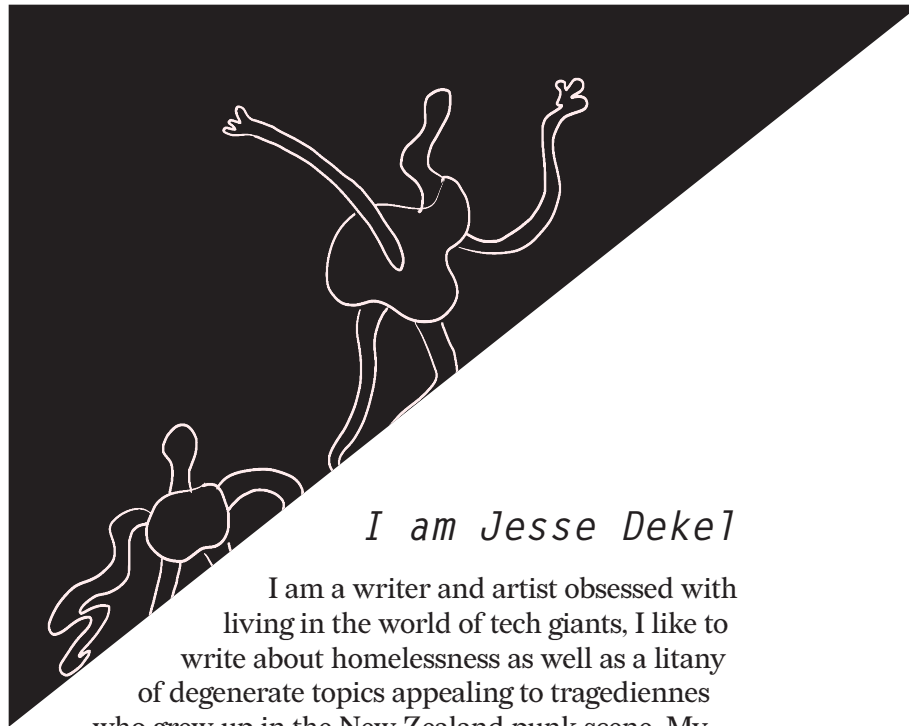
I am Jesse Dekel

I am a writer and artist obsessed with living in the world of tech giants, I like to write about homelessness as well as a litany of degenerate topics appealing to tragediennes who grew up in the New Zealand punk scene. My interests include shoplifting from record stores.

The Problem

The problem is the first thing I do in the morning is pick up my phone. The problem of dealing with the social devastation that comes with living amongst tech giants is my brain doesn't work properly,
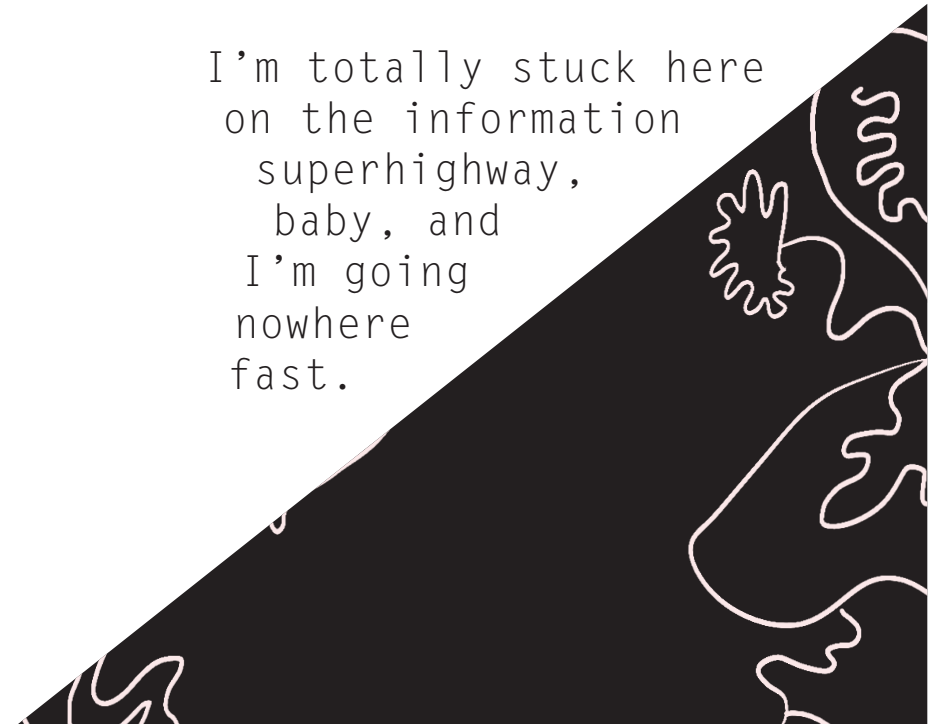
I stare at my phone 6 hours a day and it feels so awful. And if you're under 30 most of your life has been like this. It's completely eviscerated any semblence of 'accessibilty' in the Uberized gig economy to any working class person and fixated itself on an underclass that doesn't have access. Techies are also gentrifiers - the 21st century yuppies.
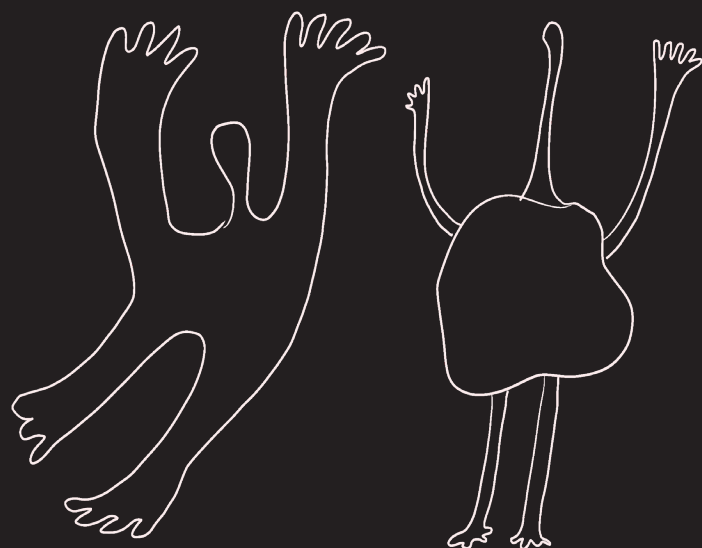
A Solution?

I try to teach myself not to obsess over social media, and actively try to suppress the urge to keep extremely up to date with news and takes. None of this has ever worked. I try to go on walks and enjoy the company of others and know people that I have absolutely zero shared digital footprint with (impossible). I also go on app-breaks, which feels so pathetic to put into words, but I don't know what else I can do. I tried that trick where you turn your phone monochromatic so your brain doesn't fire the same dopamine receptors that bright flashy lights excite, but I can only do that for about a day max, and then I need the colour again to see something. It reminds me of what people say the problem with quitting smoking is, it's trying to quit an anxiety created by itself. I'm addicted to my phone and it's the most socially acceptable addiction out there, despite everyone sharing the same hatred for it.

I'm totally stuck here on the information superhighway, baby, and I'm going nowhere fast.

and temporal reality. The way that I perceive time, especially when using very addictive apps like Instagram, is what has become most problematic for me. I feel that living in this time-frame, that is ultimately determined by pace-of-chemical-addiction, feels very bad for my productivity – in fact, it creates a pole around action/ inaction. This object-time emphasizes a distinct lack of action, in relation to my passive consumption. This is not good for self-esteem, it encourages envy and self-pitying.

A Solution?

In order to solve our addiction to apps, many people delete them. Facebook, for example, many people delete for a time, but relapse. I wanted to leave room for visiting friends' pages and photos *if I want to*.

I kept Facebook, but unfollowed everything, so that I no longer have a feed. This has essentially weaned me off the Facebook feed, prompts, and endless chemical reward circuit. It has left room for my own autonomy to decide whether I would like to navigate Facebook to find a particular thing, rather than have the algorithm offer me items based on most-emotionally-drastic-from-the-next.

Unfollowing everything is initially time-consuming. But deliberately curating my apps and eliminating addictive feeds increased my virtual autonomy and I think it's ultimately helped my well-being in the long run.

The older generations are uniquely vulnerable to these detrimental cycles.

I am Kat Hutton

I am a social scientist and an artist. I work as a freelance researcher who helps companies prepare and innovate for a sustainable future.

My academic background is centered around well-being, in the field of medical anthropology. And my creative focus is inspired by cultures of labour, particularly farming and fruit-picking in the Okanagan Valley, BC.

The Problem?

The problem I have with technology is time-based. Each interface, and series of prompts and decisions one makes in each app, has a corresponding time-frame,

I am
Natasha Chuk

I am a writer, scholar, educator, and stubborn overthinker who operates in a state of in-betweenness. My identity is situated between broad categories, which informs my research interests: perception, language, and the creative potential of technologies. I write about and spend a great deal of time with visual media, like photography, moving images, and most things that require participant interaction. I relish my privacy.

The Problem?

One of the problems with most technologies — apps, websites, creative software — is they are designed to get to «know» users. Low-level predictive analytics seem to be embedded in everything, which translates as the system trying to anticipate my next move, or worse, making a suggestion for it.

This is a kind of soft surveillance, in that my actions are being observed, studied, and assessed. It interferes with my freedom to create, to take a chance, to follow my instincts. It tries to categorize where a category may not exist, preventing new ideas, combinations, and forms to emerge.

Even if this isn't technically the case, it feels that way from a creative standpoint. Email does this. Social media apps do this. Text editing software does this. My next move, and maybe my next idea, seems to be ushered in by software design. Merely using the software in question engenders a kind of thinking through and with its design.

A
Solution?

I used to try to write by hand, then copy my words onto a digital «page». While time consuming, it's satisfying to code switch between two different mediated systems. My hand, pen, and paper produce some ideas, and transitioning to typing and using text editing software forces an internal editing process, filtering out weaknesses and developing and refining my ideas. My work seems to encounter both a different writer and reader during this process. I also move between digital "pages". I'm always taking notes on my phone. I like to import that gibberish into a working document to impose a glitch effect between them. But writing itself is shaped by other, perhaps more uncontrollable problems. The sheer access to information—useful, inspiring, supportive, as well as competing and distracting—extends and contracts my thinking process in ways I'm not always prepared to manage. I respond well to deadlines, preventing me from straying, but information overload feels unavoidable. I'd rather not contribute to it. The analog habits I maintain help keep me grounded, providing materiality for what I write in what would otherwise feel like endlessly streaming lines of text.

Mixing analog with digital feels disruptive and the best way to fuel my creativity.

I am Sarah Choukah

I am somewhere in between

a failed engineer,

someone who moonlights as

someone who moonlights as an artist,

and a very imaginative snail.

I collect loose threads of all kinds while wondering how they fit in the overall patchwork. Sometimes I try to weave some threads together through technology and art. I'm trying to get comfortable with leaving a lot of thread unused, just in case.

The Problem?

Every app I use thinks it's the only app I use. The problem is with apps that come across as especially egotistical and selfish beings. And every giant thinks it's the only giant. Tech giants don't like to hang out with each other. They compete all the time, to the death if possible, like a Game of Thrones saga gone very very wrong because every house thinks it's got the throne. This makes me feel very scattered and awful. Egotist apps think I'll be using them forever. Parts of my brain, neurons, fire goodness and crazy ideas that find their way in this little database that is closed off to me if I stop paying membership. Or that offers impractical ways to export. Of course I can. Or that gets wiped out with the newest update, or that didn't autosave even though it told me it would.

A Solution

I try to avoid the psychopathic apps, and instead use modest and humble programs. Apps that are made by one or two people who put effort in making something simple and efficient, something that will try and hold on a little more to my ever disoriented and wandering thoughts. Something that will accompany them on their scampering way.

I also try to make my own little garden of small solutions: a seed of note-taking here, another containing just a little culture of something, a few reminders perhaps. Other apps have drawings in them, and a lot more have music and sounds that I try not to mind too much losing.

I try to learn how to make my own apps so that I can create tiny little servers that are hospitable to the unconventional, the dreamy, anxious, apprehensive or hopeful little threads that line my brain.

I try to remake for myself this idea that the computer was once thought akin to a brain. But the person who theorized that kind of architecture was a brilliant math mastermind with permanent memory. I can't ignore the possibility that the model of the brain used for thinking of a computer's architecture at first was this man's brain. And I wonder what other computers are possible if we start to think of them from a neurodivergent brain's point of view.

I try to get comfortable with loss, to get comfortable with everything eventually catching rust and moulting back into the earth's mantle.

I am Shalaka Jadhav

I am a quickly-paced walker, mind-mapper, an urban planner holding restless curatorial intentions, dreaming up futures of belonging, craving a re-learning around how we listen with one another.

I ruminate over how to make a good cup of tea. I am remembering how to use the library again. I am nursing my first curry patta plant after years of buying them in bags at the groceries. I hope I can keep it alive for a long time.

The Problem

The problem is new to me. I love the strength that radiates when someone is grounded in their voice. I love my strength when I'm grounded in my voice. But today, I am tired of that strength. I repeat the same stories word-for-word when sharing updates about my day to make it easier to get through the details.

When once, repetition helped me remember, now it makes details even more slippery. I am overthinking and overthinking. I am talked out. The voice is detaching itself. The Voice. Not My Voice.

I am losing connection to place, but I respect the placefulness of the Internet. I love phone calls. I am tired of phone calls. I dim video calls and putz around on wooden laminate floors fussing with my things.

To remember the thingness that is flattened through small talk and pixelized faces. To remember sound again, and not have a sensitivity to someone's joyful laugh when it's screaming through an earphone.

A Solution

1. on sticky notes, write the script

let the script sprawl across   tables, walls, glasses half-full.

2. practice the script with a friend

you both cry. you are holding each other's grief.

3. let the script guide the conversation

they misunderstand. you feel unwell. you know this is not helping, and the start of a new problem.

4. recover the failed attempt

disentangle from the mess.

To remember how to listen again is to grow past first conversations.

To remember how to listen again is to work with the people who make space with you.

I am Jacqueline Matskiv

I am reading on the train, and writing occasionally. I am a lover of the realist novel and wacky scholarship. I have recently emerged from a master's program in Media Studies, or two years of reading, thinking and writing about the Digital Ordinary under neoliberal biopower.

The Problem

The problem is all the paradoxes. It's the fact that I'm "opting out" sporadically after having opted in a long, long time ago. The problem is that my efforts to disengage, to delete or withhold data, to renegotiate the terms, are reconfigured into valuable behaviour metrics all the same.

The problem is my Instagram Ads--not that they know too much, but that what they know is not exactly right. But it's also not the platforms themselves so much as the habits and dependencies they've instilled in me, which

persist no matter how much I intellectualize them.

A Solution

A lot of people talk about leaving--the great exodus of our social imaginary. But leaving has been repurposed into a solution for long-term living with our platforms; it's become a strategy for staying.

Influencers and "lay users" alike take "digital cleanses" and return with increased vigor. Let's face it: "farewell" posts get a lot of likes, and leaving for good isn't a realistic option for those of us sustaining ourselves in digital economies.

The real solution probably has more to do with hacking and trolling and peer-to-peer models, but I'm not tech savvy enough to tell you--I use the toilet but I don't know how it works.

My personal solution-that's-not-a-solution has been trying to untangle the paradoxes in writing. I may be complicit, but at least I'm trying to understand what's going on, right?

Fail in new ways and put it down on paper.

Look to the tech-savvier for instructions.

I am
Frances Pope

I am easy to make friends with, not easy to pick a fight with. I mostly enjoy moving, sounds, and words, and when all these things intersect I feel like I'm dreaming. I write and translate by day, and by night I'm a music journalist. I'm probably typing away at my desk with my headphones on, making a cup of tea, or out dancing.

The Problem

The problem's well documented. We open our laptops like oyster shells while we're still bleary-eyed, brewing coffee. The glow is bluer than our fuzzy brains would like. The day jolts in shades of concentration, we stretch and yawn, we clack at keyboards, we get distracted, we cross tasks off a list. The sun slips. We start to think of noise, friends, cash, sneakers, exits, beer, laughter, news, crushes, buses, dark skies. We want Out. That isn't so much a problem anymore. But what about the in between? We want to look, read, explore, catch up, and everything's written, everything hums through the screen, warm and setting our nerves a-buzz. And me! I want to read about music and sound, about artists and projects, about history and movements and raves! And my head hurts.

A Solution?

A Solution is a to-and-fro, I think, we think, we're still not sure. I went in to find a way out. I spent ninety British pounds on a forcefield for my glasses, to banish blue light.

Then I searched out bits of paper. People who know a lot of things I don't know have made beautiful things – journals and zines, prints and pamphlets, collections of pastings, stapled. I sent my electronic payment a few ways, lived life for a week or two, and found padded envelopes on my parents' doormat. I was thrilled. I sat on the garden steps with my coffee mug staying warm in the un-leaf-shaded sun, and through cheap shoddy sunglasses I read page after page. I took a chunky music journal to the castle and lay around in the ruins, reading about a folk singer's broken relationship. I pored wide-eyed over colour combinations and unfamiliar fonts. I woke up on weekends and took my steam-whirling mug back to bed, tried not to splash white sheets, and read clean, chiselled write-ups like gems – looked through their colour spells at the weird effects of sound-into-language. I tapped out names on the screen I wanted to avoid, and the music woke me up. I shoved my phone under a blanket and scooped the pages back into my hands.

If all day's refracting words through pixels, I need the power-off of paper and pages, alone.

*I am
seeley
quest*

I am a trans disabled artist,
organizer and environmentalist
from the US, in Montreal since 2017.
i worked in bookstores 12+ years in the
San Francisco Bay Area, and only began
carrying a cell phone in 2018, when accessing
smart phone mapping emerged as helpful in a new
city. i haven't yet joined social media.

The Problem

A problem i've encountered is the growth of designing
websites for Chrome, unstated assumptions that site
visitors will be using compatible browsers, and
no consideration for inaccessibility with other
browsers. Why isn't there a standard across web
design that all public site material must meet tests
of being browseable and without broken functionali-
ties, with all browsers?

A Solution?

The lack of clear communications about what interfaces
are needed to access site materials has serious
consequences. For example, Canada's Immigration
Department, on one of its dozens of website pages, has
a statement that 'Chrome is recommended'--but it does
not say, 'the PDFs applicants must fill won't load without
a Chromium-based browser.' When i see 'recommended'
and not 'required' i go with my default choice, Firefox,
because i hate Google. But i've found without the
government website spelling out more clearly how to
interface, that i couldn't access and submit documents i
needed to by a deadline, which affected my status as an
aspiring immigrant and my available choices as a disabled
person in precarity.

A way to navigate these barriers is to try Vivaldi
browser--i researched a variety of Chromium forks and
decided it has decent enough characteristics that i can
use it minimally for a backup. Pages that require Chrome
seem to render adequately with it. Another way to address
it is to bring attention to the 'powers that be' in charge
of coding and web decisions, and say the means of
access must be broadened, and made fully clear.

If you need a Chrome
variant, try Vivaldi,
and keep calling for
moreaccessibility
and non-Google
reliance.
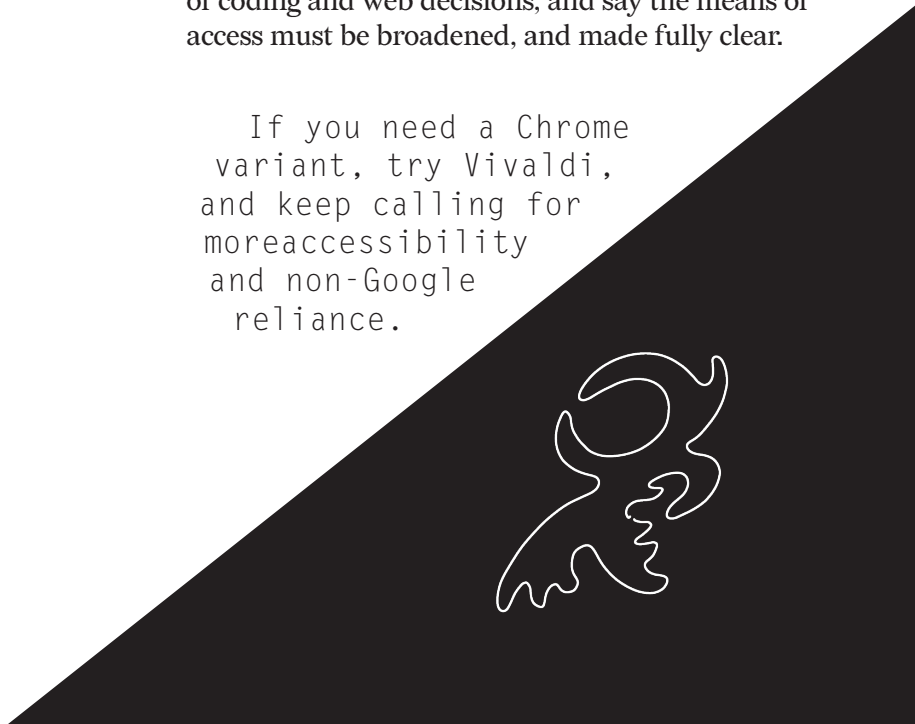
I am Agustina Isidori

I am Agustina. I come from a background in film studies and photography. I am, amongst other things, an artist from Argentina based in Montreal.

The Problem

The problem is I am having a hard time recognizing myself. What do I like? What do I want to watch? What do I wish to read? What do I care about? What events do I want to attend? Whose lives do I want to know about? Feeling overwhelmed, even lost sometimes.

I scroll and it tells me I care about things I don't even recognize. Who are these people? Why are they in my phone? What are they doing in my bed? Why do I wake up with them? Still, I get stuck, scrolling, distracting myself, scrolling...

A Solution?

Lately, I've found myself stuck on social media multiple times every day. And it gets worse when I'm feeling stressed, anxious, or feeling down. I tend to go there looking for a distraction.

It has become a daily choreography of distraction. I am working. Grab my phone. About to complete a task. Open a New Tab. Check my emails for the 10th time. Or about to make an important decision. Phone. Unlock screen. Instagram. Scroll. WhatsApp, new messages, must answer. Answer. Open a New Tab. Wait. What was I doing?

I am hiding behind these platforms. The result, besides wasting a lot of time, is that I end up consuming content that I don't even care about. I end up absorbed by whatever Instagram has decided for me. I don't even understand where these recommendations are coming from. That is not me.

I've tried searching for who I am, what do I like, who do I want to know about, where do I want to go. But it's a trap. Another problem. Then I get too much of it, I know too much about them, I only go to those places on a flat screen. It's confusing, it's overwhelming. Still. Scrolling.

Still looking for a solution.
Grab my phone.
Open a New Tab.
Google, search:
...solution?

Je suis Liane Décary-Chen

Je suis une artiste organisatrice communautaire dans le milieux des nouvelles technologies. Ces jours ci je m'intéresse aux algorithmes de médias sociaux et aux enjeux éthiques associés à leur fonctionnement. Je m'intéretesse aussi au techno-mysticisme comme cadre pour explorer des phénomènes numériques qui dépassent notre entendrement.

The Problem

The problem is I've trained my music streaming algorithm so much that its become better than me at scratching my musical itch. I'm concerned about the way in which it can modify individual and group behaviors at the whims of the people behind the scenes.

Streaming services are connected to large data collection networks that follow you through digital and physical space, which is pretty scary. I'm having a very difficult time untangling from the algorithm due to its emotional and digital hold on me as well as music streaming services' general omnipresence.

A Solution?

I've tried changing streaming services, but my concerns stay relatively the same, even on «indie» apps like Tidal. If I want to keep using music streaming services I'd probably start looking for curators who make playlists with specific intentions.

Like that I could build a library I can rely on through getting to know people's musical taste.

Ultimately I'd like to develop these skills myself and become better than the algorithm at playing music for myself so I'll stop being drawn towards it. Many of my friends are DJs and I'm excited to start learning how to find new music and put sets together. In the meantime, my main solution has been to go back to listening albums.

At home I listen to CDs and when I'm on the go I'm starting to carry either a cd player or mp3 player. It feels really nice to not be plugged into the matrix. :-)

Returning to previous methods of listening to music:

CDs,

tapes,

mp3 players,

radio shows,

etc...

I am Marie LeBlanc Flanagan

I am working in the spaces between people and the dreamy regrowth of our relations through connection and play. I make playthings. I make spaces for people to find each other. I feel very alone. I've been hunched over my computer for the past two pandemic years, wondering what it means to work, to live, to play. I've been trying to let my body do what it needs to do.

The Problem

The problem is that my laptop feels smooth and soft, like skin. It is always there, when I am sad, when I am restless, when I am hungry for touch or learning. It gently vibrates under my palms, it sings, it shines with a moving rainbow of light. It was just a toy, at first. I underestimated the magic. It has braided and knotted and looped into me, unravelling the sweet brain nectar, unbinding me from the earth, replacing my own roots with something hard and permanent and unyielding.

A Solution

Oh I've tried. Meditation retreats. Self-control apps blocking feeds. Shame, restriction. No screens in bed. Deleting apps again. No screen Sundays, time-stretching into oblivion.

But my machine takes the shape of the hole, whatever shape the hole takes today. I shake in the hollow of my brain, hunched over, tethered to the electrical outlet. An animal, I am bound by these cords.

As a child, I read all night. Sometimes 2 or 3 books, reading until the sun rose. The machine pulls even stronger. I query, I get responses. I am invisible and also seen. Some days I unplug and let my machine die in my hands because it's the only way I know how to stop.

I scratch and bleed pen on paper. Pixels popped, screen shake out of body. I try sourcing the vessel and slipstreaming past consumer hunters. Adblockers running, only catching the decoys. Every phrase is memetic. Drifting in the void, I see a radar mirage but in it, the truth. But quick, a thread, the unwinding. The growth, our slowest, gentlest touch.

It isn't easy. It is easy. The winding and rebinding, the way the weave leads the way. Reciprocal emergence. Sister-hand mirrors me, we are bound and uncuttable. Revelation. And begin again.

These words are coming from my keyboard.

I am touching the machine right now.

✦ I am Janaki Ranpura

For more than two decades I have been working as a non-natural engineer designing ways to motivate people through inspiration rather than authority. I invent, make art, build, and code.

I have struggled for a while with the utopian promise of open-source technology and the too-frequent let-down of its reality. However, during the pandemic, I have come to a new positioning. (By "open source," I mean design files that are posted on the internet with the intention of making them publicly usable.)

The Problem

We need a non-corporate economics. Open source promises a system outside of current manufacturing throughputs. I do not accept the argument that corporations are legal persons with civil rights (Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, 2014). I am not alone. The mortgage crisis of 2008 deepened the divide between haves and have-nots in America and sparked a backlash against corporatist greed, given form by the Occupy Wall Street movement.

We are beginning to reject the idea that the intangibles of nature are consumables that can be assigned a dollar price. Open source, with its focus on freely shared data, is a proposition meant to provide an alternative to corporate value systems.

A Solution?

I worked in the largest Fab Lab in Europe, designing ridiculous things for the robots
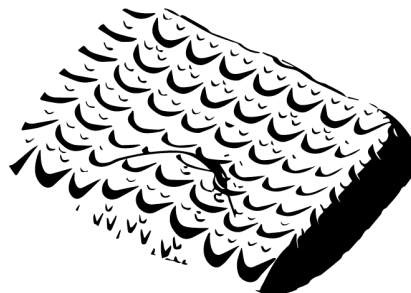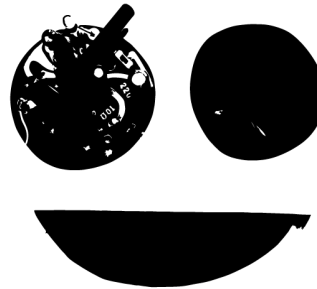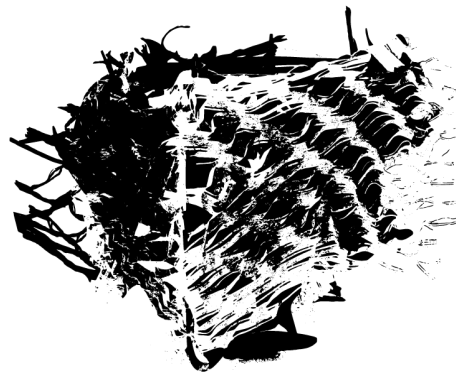
to manufacture: a speaker that stuck out its tongue. A seat cushion that jiggled your bottom every 25 minutes. The director of the lab gave me a talking to.

Fab Labs have been advertised as sites of revolution, whose inventive local power could break the throttlehold of corporations. They have not lived up to this promise. But when the pandemic hit, Fab Labs across the world thrived as pinch hitters for local manufacturing of personal protective equipment, mostly face shields.

What if local fabrication labs served as sites to play, to practice invention when there is no reason to invent? Why not foster the social motivations that keep people engaged and limber for sudden action in times of need?

This could be a radical way of organizing infrastructure for manufacture: on-demand supply. This could eliminate the need to "sell product" that accumulates through the more common model of constant production. People would be on staff to play, with the shift in thinking that "play" means priming for action. Clowns riding spotted ponies turn into the cavalry.

Emergency response can be primed with play in non-emergency times.

I am Dawn Walker

I am a researcher and designer interested in creating internet infrastructures that are equitable and low carbon. I look at history, values and how we build tech in order to do so.

The Problem

The problem framing that helps me make sense of the current situation and where I think we should head is: Most people don't have the ability to make decisions about how the platforms and services they use are run, and how (or whether) their data and identity from using those things is used to make money and seek profits by tech giants.

Without this power and control, you see platforms that sell personal data or use it for advertising (Twitter), treat users like a science experiment without informed consent (Facebook/Meta), and allow racism, misogyny, and harassment to continue online because it would hurt profits to spend money to fix it (TikTok).
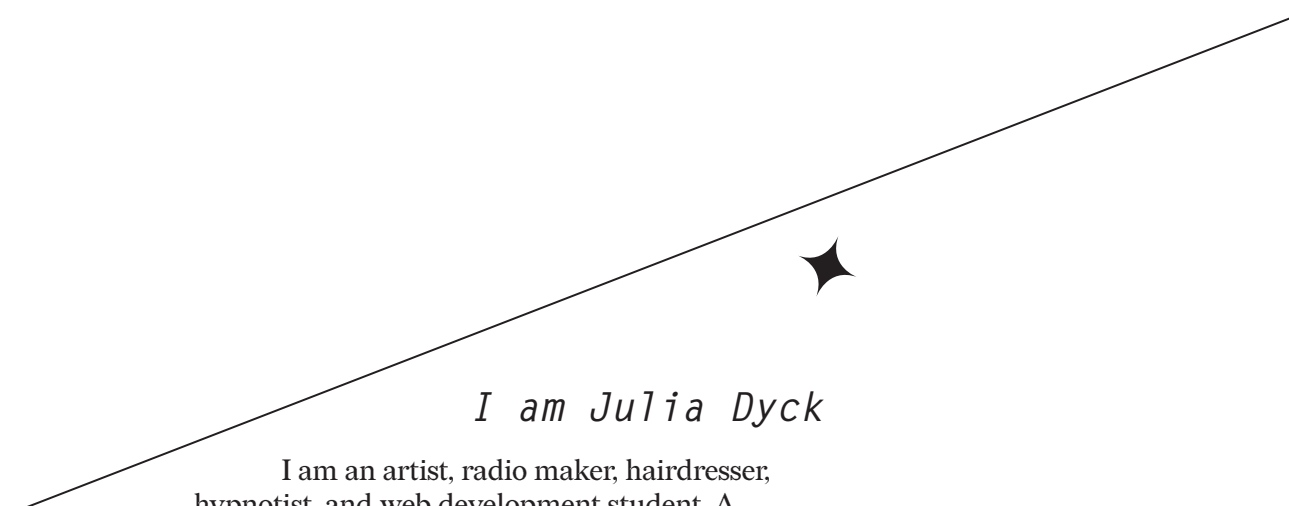
A Solution?

We need to try lots of new things to address the current situation, for me what is important is these approaches should aim to give power and control back to individuals and communities away from big tech. I am a member-worker of Hypha, a tech worker co-operative where we build technology that every member has a say in.

Current examples I find inspiring: Mastodon, a federated social network where multiple different organizations and groups run the servers instead of a single company (think more email vs. twitter). Digital democracy's Mapeo which is built in close collaboration with indigenous partners in the Amazon and is a set of tools to create maps and community datasets that live on your phone or device instead of automatically adding the data to Google Maps. And co-operatively owned platforms for ridesharing (Drivers Coop), streaming (Resonate), music criticism (New Feeling), and more (see the Platform Co-operativism Consortium).

All these projects are exciting and deeply engaged building technologies that are accountable and situated. Yet they are the early seeds not a mature field. To truly take back technology for ourselves and/or defund big tech (https://doi.org/10.21428/93b2c832. e0100a3f) we will need a diversity of tactics and to devise new ways to work together.

We're just getting started, but we can build something different so long as we do it together!

I am Julia Dyck

I am an artist, radio maker, hairdresser, hypnotist, and web development student. A wearer of many hats. I research the possible connections between the body, technology and consciousness. Alto in the choir. I question the boundaries between real and fantasy and I write sci-fi sometimes.

The Problem

I feel like I don't own my own memories. When I was 14 I got a digital camera and took photos of my friends at punk concerts, in the mall, at protests. I uploaded them to Photobucket to host them for posting on my Livejournal (where I fussed over the css endlessly to have the perfect LeTigre background). Fast-forward a couple years to the MySpace era and somehow all my photos are broken links. I was never able to recover my photos from Photobucket and those memories feel somehow lost, I have so few photos from those years. Fast-forward again and now Facebook owns all my photos, then Instagram.
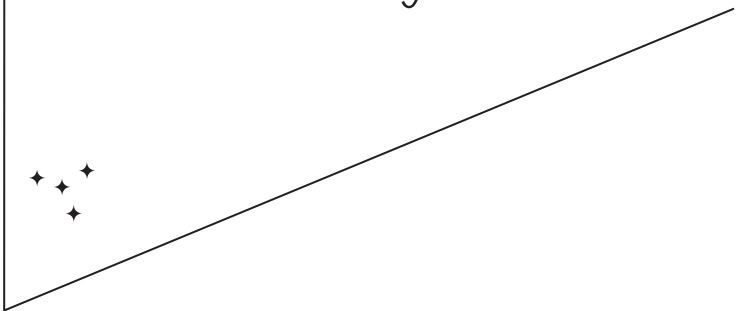
A Solution?

In high school I started getting back into disposable cameras, and then vintage 35mm cameras and I've shoot between 3 and 6 rolls of film a year since then. This has been the best way for me to capture the moments I know I want to remember. It stops me from over documenting and losing beautiful photos in a sea of selfies and

screenshots. I have boxes of prints in a filing cabinet and digital folders from each year on multiple hardrives. The quantity is manageable and they feel real. They're mine. If my Instagram gets hacked tomorrow or my Google Drive is somehow deleted, the photos will still be in my filing cabinet.

multiple backups always
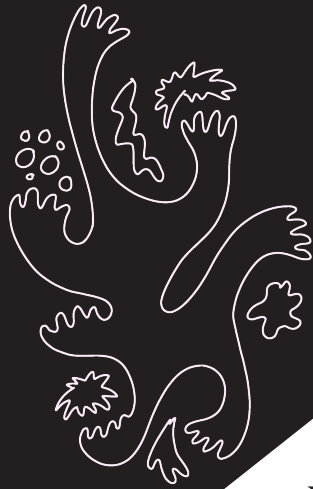
Je suis
Amélie
Brindamour

Je suis artiste en arts
visuels, travailleuse culturelle et
enseignante en art. Je suis fascinée
par les champignons, les créatures
marines et les relations interespèces. Je suis
membre de plusieurs communautés: des centres
d'artistes autogérés, un club de plein air, un cercle
de mycologie, etc. Je crois en la force du doux.

Le problème

Voici l'histoire de comment je me retrouve à regarder
Facebook ou des sites de Design lorsque je dois
commencer une tâche sur l'ordinateur que je trouve
difficile, ou quand je suis dans le milieu d'une
tâche, et que je me sens fatiguée. D'un côté c'est de
la procrastination, mais d'un autre côté, décrocher
de ce sur quoi je suis en train de travailler m'aide
parfois à «débloquer» pour poursuivre mon travail. Par
contre, je tombe parfois sur des images qui font surgir
des émotions désagréables: un mariage auquel je n'ai pas
été invité, d'anciens amis qui me manquent, un collègue
dont le succès me cause de la jalousie, etc. Étant parfois
nostalgique, je trouve difficile de savoir ce que font toutes
les personnes que j'ai rencontré au cours de ma vie.

Une solution?

Lorsque je prends une vacance de une à deux semaines,
comme durant le temps des fêtes, j'arrête de regarder
Facebook. Tout d'un coup ce que font les autres n'est plus
si important, et les personnes avec qui je suis, les livres
et même les films deviennent plus vivants. Je ressens
alors un un sentiment de bien être et une capacité de
concentration inégallée. Mais lorsque mes vacances se
terminent, je recommence après seulement 3 semaines à
regarder Facebook dans mes moments libres, et lorsque je
travaille à l'ordinateur. Le problème est que comme une
machine à sous, 1 fois sur 20, l'information est pertinente
et m'aide dans ma vie personnelle et proffessionnel, mais
19 fois sur 20, ce n'est pas le cas. C'est ce qui me garde
dépendante. S'il y avait une application qui permettrait de
seulement sélectionner le type de publication qu'on désire
consulter, cela sauverait énormément de temps à tout le
monde.

La meilleure solution
lorsque je travaille
serait de simplement
me lever et marcher
2 minutes dans
l'espace
disponible.

Je suis Chahinez Bensari

Je suis passionnée par l'expression artistique sous toutes ses formes, particulierement le design et la technologie et leurs implications sur la communauté et la culture.

Je suis écrivaine, chercheure et artiste visuelle. J'ai un background en critical science and technology (STS) et cultural studies et cinema.

Le problème

Plus j'utilise les réseaux sociaux, moins je me sens comprise dans mes besoins. C'est contre-intuitif, non? J'ai l'impression que Instagram, Twitter et Google se basent sur 1) quelques achats que j'ai faits 2) une certaine écoute ou surveillance (IRL et cross-platform) pour bâtir un profil de qui je suis... qui me rejoint peu. Je crois que nous sommes plus que ce que nous achetons.

Malgré que les entreprises mettant en marché ces technologies disent que celles-ci peuvent faciliter nos vies en apprenant a nous connaitre et nos centres d'interets, elles recommandent majoritairement des produits VS des opportunités d'explorer ces interêts.

Une solution?

Au debut, j'utilisais la fonctionnalité proposée par Twitter et Instagram: «I am not interested in this». Mais au lieu de me montrer du contenu qui m'interpelle, elles m'ont proposé du contenu presque identique... de créateurs differents.

La solution que j'utilise presentement est l'inverse: je tente de rechercher plus de contenu qui rejoint mes interets sans être nécessairement rattaché a un produit. Et surtout, de diversifier ces recherches dans l'espoir de diversifier mon feed.

Une piste de solution que j'aimerais explorer prochainement est de «confondre» ou perturber l'algorithme en recherchant des sujets plutôt «random», qui sont moins alignés avec mes interets courants. J'aimerais retrouver la curiosité, le fun et ce charactere aléatoire qui m'a fait tomber en amour avec l'internet.

J'use de curiosité pour pousser l'algorithme vers le hasard, de nouveaux horizons et, surtout, vers le plaisir.

Je suis Goldjian

Je suis un.e artiste qui pratique la performance, le dessin, l'écriture et la vidéo danse. Je facilite des processus collectifs, comme le soin des conflits, des cartes mentales immersives et des forums ouverts. J'ai passé trop de temps devant un ordi aussi, depuis 15 ans, j'essaie de les côtoyer autrement, par en dessous, par en dedans, par ailleurs et moins souvent.

Le problème

En 2 ans, le monde s'est mis à vivre en ligne. Moi qui aime les courbes, j'ai développé différents troubles. De l'humeur certes, mais aussi des nausées, des vertiges, des migraines et des sueurs froides. Zoom est devenu l'ennemi n°1 de mon système vagal. Son blason, ses couleurs, ses fonctionnalités, ses possibilités d'enregistrements et capacités de capture-captation, tout invoque la monopolisation. Ce qui me fit perdre pied et lever le cœur, c'est de voir se muter nos assignations à résidence en relocalisation sur des fenêtres de 2 pouces. Mon corps ne savait plus où se mettre, ni comment lire, recevoir et transmettre, tout ce dont il a besoin pour se co-réguler.

Une solution?

J'ai d'abord ritualisé ces rencontres saugrenues. J'ai dédié un espace connexion et m'habillais en conséquence, avec mon kit de pilote de vaisseau spatial, me préparant à décoller à chaque appel.
Le jeu s'est perdu à mesure des rencontres. J'ai tenté de rediriger les proches vers des solutions
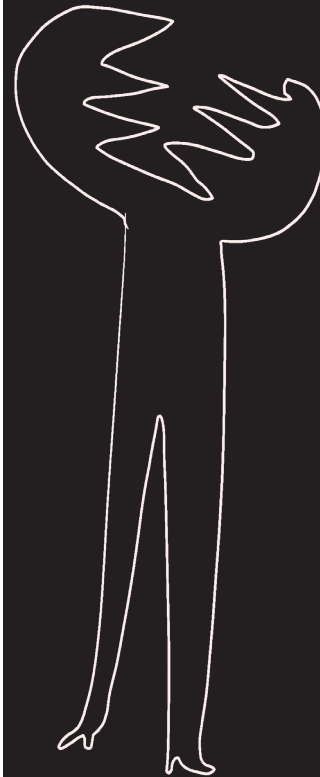
libres, jitsi (open.meet), appear.in devenu whereby. J'ai installé en fond d'écran une carte des serveurs féministes réalisée lors d'une résidence en Autriche.

J'ai insisté pour intégrer nos corps, pour nous montrer nos mondes au-delà des fenêtres. J'ai décris mes symptômes aux collègues, les sueurs, la panique qui montait. J'ai tenté de fermer les yeux, les fenêtres, de n'utiliser que mes oreilles.

J'ai pris de longues marches : 4h en forêt pour 1h de travail en ligne. J'ai initié des rencontres sur un banc, avec un gros thermos, des protocoles de distanciation, de couvertes et de chaufferettes sous les doigts pour endurer les -20. J'ai écris sur la nausée, les migraines et les planètes sans gravité qu'elles me font traverser. Je me suis demandé si je somatisais mon rejet du travail. J'ai revendiqué mes somatisations. J'ai annoncé au monde du travail que je me réincorporais et que ne me livrerais plus à Zoom. Je ne me retrouve qu'à mesure que j'évite les écrans et les caméras. Parfois pourtant, je prends plaisir à me plonger dans un projecteur, à condition que tout mon corps y soit convié.

A grand coup de vertige, mon systeme vagal prenait les appels Zooms pour des assauts.

Pour me relier a d'autres humains, j'ai demultiplie les retours au corps et l'exploration des espaces libres.

Je suis
AM Trépanier

J'ai grandi dans une maison aux briques roses, sur une rue portant le nom d'un missionnaire et d'un mammifère semi-aquatique, dans laquelle nous avions un ordinateur branché au réseau Internet dans le sous-sol. Aujourd'hui, je m'intéresse aux modes de transmissions entre les gens, à la façon dont nous parvenons à nous mobiliser ainsi qu'aux outils qui permettent de telles convergeances.

Le problème

Le problème est lié à la définition du concept de sécurité. Les géants de la technologie l'ont compris à travers l'angle de la légalité, occultant le fait que les lois peuvent en opprimer certain-es, pour la «sécurité» des autres. Ce qui ne tombe pas dans la norme devient menaçant, susceptible d'être source de danger. Depuis quelques années, Facebook exige que ses uti-lisateurices emploient leur nom légal sur sa plateforme. Et depuis quelques mois, je tente tant bien que mal de changer mon nom pour celui que je préfère employer au quotidien.

Une solution?

J'ai essayé, certes, sans succès. J'ai compris que l'autodétermination ne se conformait pas à la structure rigide et opaque d'une plateforme comme Facebook, où l'authenticité et le catalogage de profils de consommation l'emportent sur l'affirmation identitaire. Ce n'est pas moi qui me donne un nom dans ces espaces, mais bien lui qui m'assigne pour mieux

traiter, mesurer qui je suis. La transmission de mon nom d'usage passe plutôt par mes signatures de courriel, mon site personnel, mes publications, mes textes biographiques. Elle passe aussi par des ami-es attentif-ves qui prennent le temps de me demander comment je préfère me faire appeler: c'est un processus qui nécessite du temps, de l'engagement, qui se définit dans l'usage et dans l'écoute active. Or, je ne trouve pas d'interlocuteur-trice dans l'architecture de la plateforme. C'est une conversation à sens unique, un input erroné dans la séquence traitée par l'algorithme. Les majuscules inhabituelles ne permettent pas d'ouvrir de discussion. Je n'ai pas l'énergie disponible affronter le service à la clientèle: la conclusion est donc finale.

J'ai appris a lacher prise, a me dire que je ne pouvais pas compter sur ces espaces «les plateformes baties selon les normes dominante» comme lieux d'emancipation. Ceux-ci existent ailleurs.

★ *Je suis Stéphanie Lagueux*

Je suis une artiste et travailleuse culturelle, curieuse et bricoleuse numérique. Je travaille chez Ada X depuis 2001 et j'ai vu grandir des géants qui en ont remplacé d'autres moins immenses mais tout aussi gourmands...

Le problème

Dans ma recherche et celle d'Ada X pour des alternatives, nous avons choisi une plateforme de développement ouverte et libre pour notre projet de médiation en ligne, Mozilla Hubs.

Et dans notre désir d'indépendance et de prise en charge, et pour offrir plus de souplesse aux artistes avec qui nous travaillons, nous avons choisi de gérer notre propre serveur, pour un coût d'opération plus grand - celui de l'indépendance ;)

Dans les options offertes, nous réalisons que nous n'avons pas vraiment le choix d'utiliser le serveur d'Amazon, le seul qui offre du support technique.

Une solution?

Avec les frais d'installation déjà engagés, et l'échéancier du projet qui file, nous allons devoir continuer notre développement avec ces plateformes malgré la dichotomie de notre démarche : travailler avec le valeureux logiciel libre et le vilain serveur du géant. Et payer, au final, le géant avec notre argent sonnant et trébuchant.

Est-ce que nos données et celles des artistes

seront mieux sauvegardées dans ce contexte ?

Je l'avoue, je n'ai pas eu le temps de lire tous les caractères des dizaines de liens parcourus à travers la configuration du système : le temps presse, nous devons lancer

Allo Ada bientôt, y installer des œuvres et rencontrer des publics ! En contrée semi-libre sous l'œil mi-clos du géant...

✦∵✦

Ma solution est en chemin, j'espere toujours que le temps fera emerger de nouvelles reponses, que d'autres avanceront devant nous pour nous eclairer et migrer du pays des geants vers celui des independants, encore une fois...

I am

_____

*A problem I have encountered living in the
time of tech giants*

_____

A Solution?

_____

T H A N K   Y O U

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Ada
—x

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