

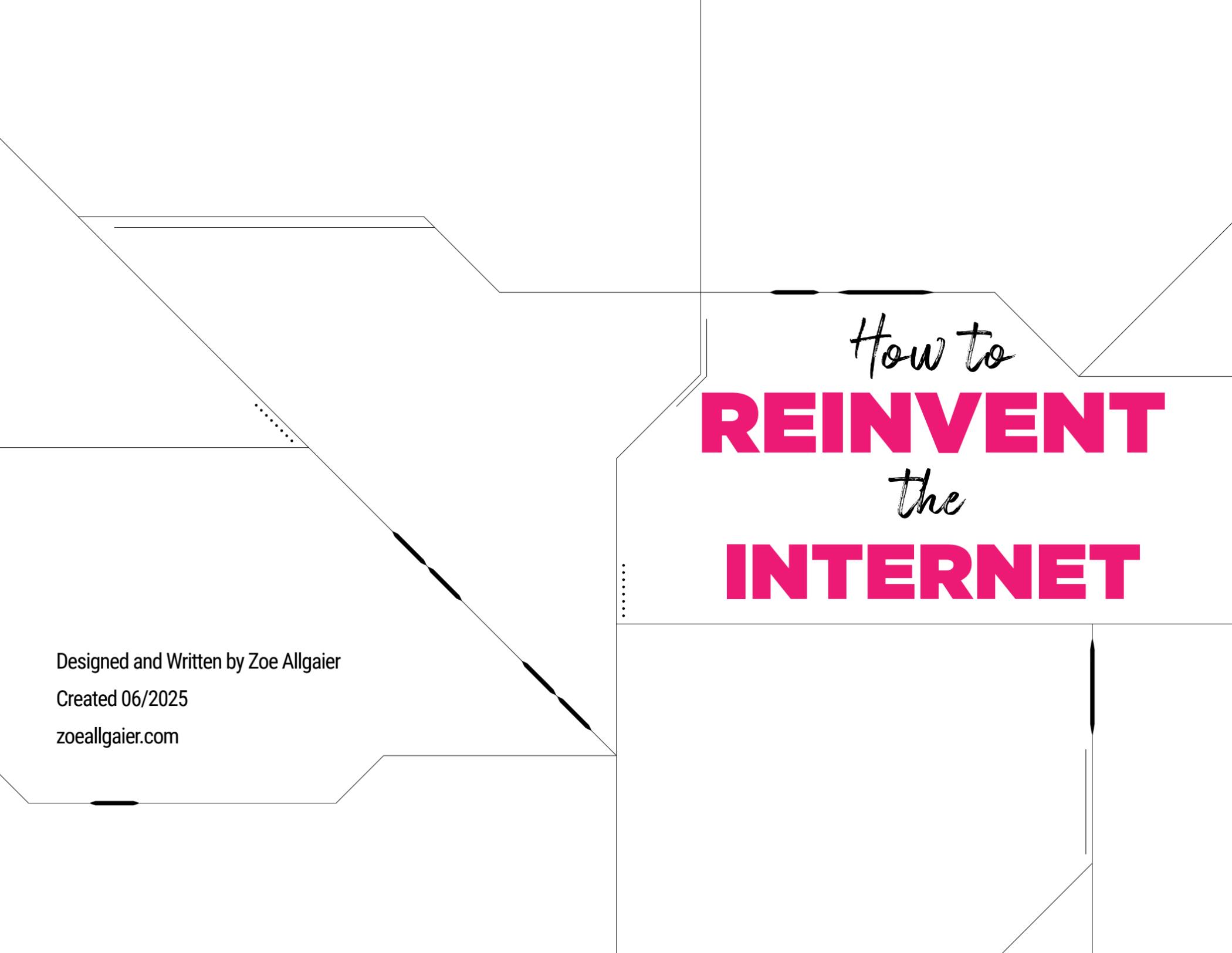
How to

REINVENT

the

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Zoe

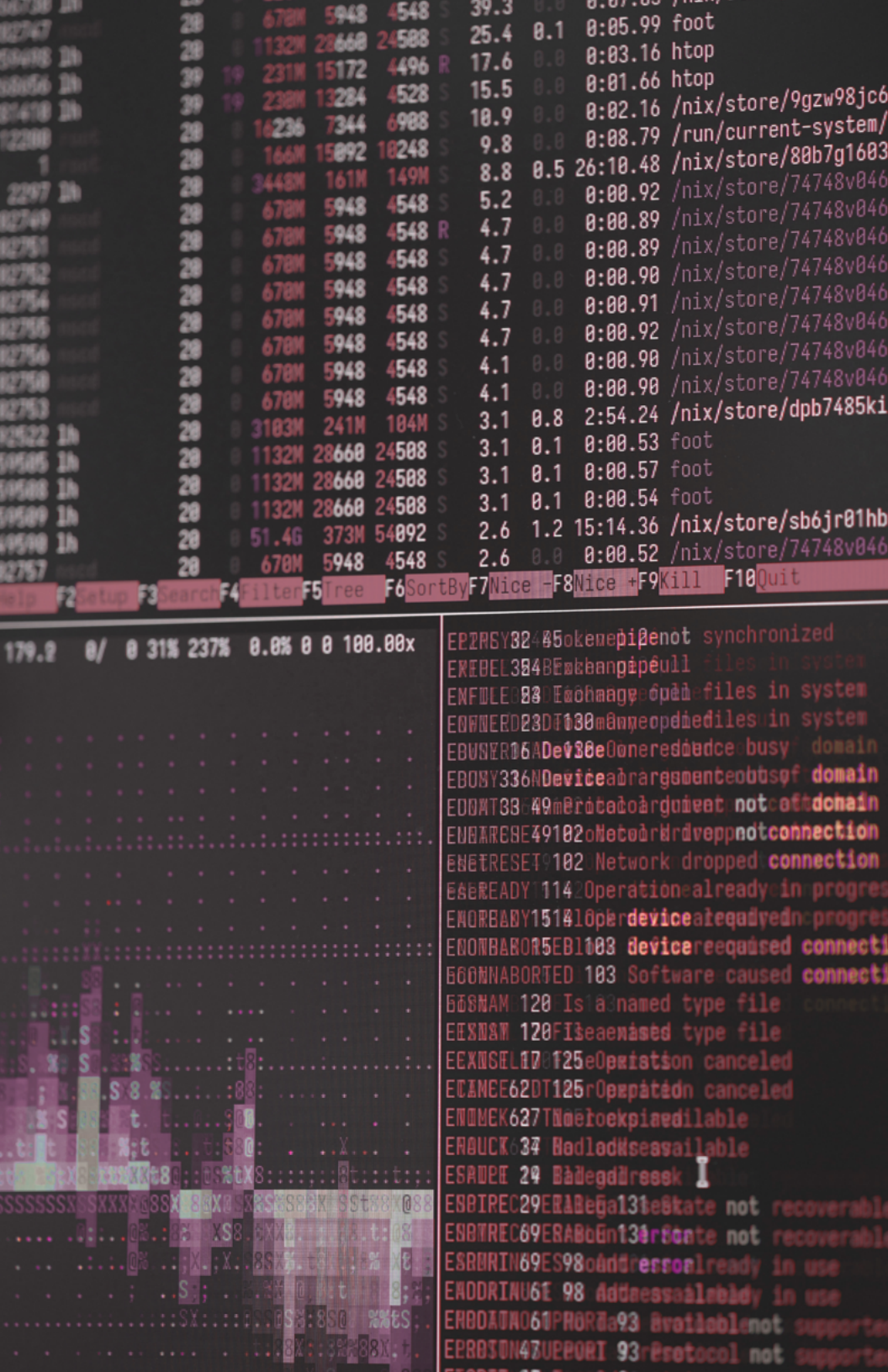


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Designed and Written by Zoe Allgaier

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Introduction

Do you enjoy using the internet? Are you fulfilled when you use social media? How do you feel when ads are thrown in your face in between each click, swipe and tap? Has the technology you use daily improved your quality of life?

Born in '01, I'm a digital native. Now, I'm a graphic designer, specializing in digital design. I've seen what the internet was supposed to be, and what it's become. Most web pages are now AI-written slop, rigged for Google's ranking system and stuffed with ads. Social media isn't "social," it's a slot machine for your attention. In 2025, the internet is frustrating, unintuitive, and barely usable. Factual information is indistinguishable from blatant lies. The design of the postmodern internet is not just broken — it's anti-human.

We've been misusing and misunderstanding the most connective tool ever created. We've forgotten what the web is capable of. Gone are the days of techno-optimism; only fast fashion ads and "relatable" short form video remains. Why did this happen? How do we utilize the internet in a way that lifts our quality of life? What should the internet be used for? What are our expectations for the digital world we continually construct? These are the questions this magazine will explore. I'm furious, but stubbornly optimistic. It's time the internet got redesigned, from the ground up.

A Brief History of the Web

Before I get into the details of what's wrong with the internet, and what a new internet could look like, it's important to have an understanding of the history of the web. The internet has changed drastically in 50 years and knowing how it changed is crucial to constructing a new internet.

ARPANET

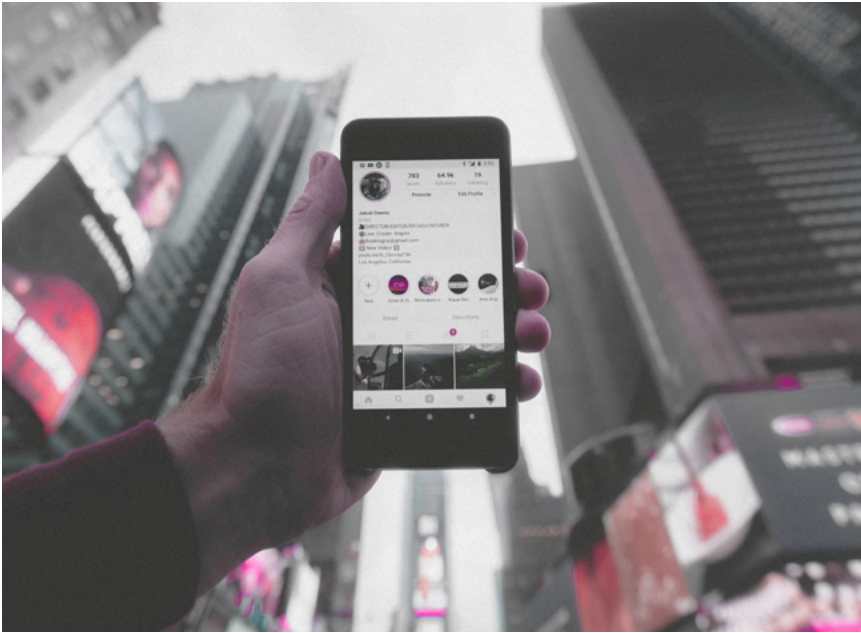
Contrary to popular belief, Steve Jobs and Bill Gates did not invent the internet. Originally, the web was a publicly-funded Defense project called ARPANET. According to a 1981 Defense Technical Information Center report, ARPANET "initiated extensive changes in the Defense Department's use of computers as well as in the use of computers by the entire public and private sectors, both in the United States and around the world. Just as the telephone, the telegraph, and the printing press had far-reaching effects on human intercommunication, the widespread utilization of computer networks which has been catalyzed by the ARPANET project represents a similarly far-reaching change in the use of computers by mankind." The earliest version of the internet allowed researchers to share information at an unprecedented pace. Scientists could research and devise solutions

to scientific problems at a more efficient and effective rate than ever. The goal was information-based connection for the purpose of improving research.



WEB 1.0

Soon after this, in the late 90s and the turn of the century the internet became widespread. Millions of users now had access to the digital world via home computers. Creativity flourished outside of the ARPANET. Personal websites, digital tools and helpful resources became abundant. Most content at this point consisted of personal websites and blogs, intended to share art or information. There were no algorithms, no suggested search results, no personalization. Just people creating their own digital spaces. We call this stage of the internet "Web 1.0" and it spanned from the early 90's, to the mid 00's. The era was drenched in optimism. Digital interfaces were connecting people in more intimate ways, and allowing us to learn from one another at a rapid pace, the same way researchers did in years prior. The web wasn't just a tool, it was also fun! People spent time creating their own custom websites and hardware was designed to look friendly (remember those colorful, clear plastic Macs?).



WEB 2.0

As the web became part of everyday life, people formed communities online. Some websites became platforms for sharing images, videos and art. “There is the structure, provided by the platform, and there is the network effect, which emerges if large numbers of people find the platform valuable. Combined they create new content and much more, including new forms of user engagement, communication, and information gathering. We define Web 2.0 as: Using the Internet to provide platforms through which network effects can emerge” (Blank, Grant. The Participatory Web. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, 2013).

In the early 2000s, a college student named Mark Zuckerberg and his friends had devised a way to rank the attractiveness of women

on campus through a digital program. After this program gained popularity locally, it was turned into a website and modified for mass distribution, then turned into an LLC. After rapid growth, Zuckerberg and his friends devised a way to siphon profit from their platform. They did this by selling the information that you “willingly” gave them to advertisers. Shortly after the arrival of social media, the internet became littered with ads, and plentiful in personal information and data. Nowadays, the attitude surrounding technology has become less optimistic, and more apathetic. We know we’re addicted, we know it’s not really contributing meaning to our lives, and yet we continue to embrace it – or, more accurately – we have been culturally primed to embrace it because of the attitude in the previous era and the manipulative business model that arose from digital networking. Now, we are increasingly reliant on algorithmic platforms as they become more integrated with material reality.

This brings us to the current internet. There exists only one way to create increased quarterly profits necessary for upholding the corporate internet – taking and selling more information. In order for this to happen, they need to get more data from you. Thus began the intensive process of devising ways to extract more of you to sell to advertisers.

The internet today functions as a data-mining tool for the ultra-wealthy. Trackers from Amazon, Google, Facebook and others follow you relentlessly to steal and sell your information. The information collected is used to learn how to best manipulate you into becoming a pure consumer. You are being exploited for your data without compensation, while a group of tech-bros get rich beyond imagination by selling you to advertisers – advertisers which they most likely own shares of, further enriching themselves. It’s a vicious feedback loop designed to steal your time, livelihood, and money.



The Dying Internet

Make no mistake, the internet is dying. You probably feel this on some level already. The dying internet is destructive to our minds, communities, politics, personal freedoms, and the planet.

“Eversion” best describes the effect that these algorithms have on society. “Eversion is a complex process of turning. The web is processing what we enter into it, and turning it inside out, by design. As a metaphor, eversion calls attention to the messy and uneven status of that process, the network’s leaking, spilling its guts into the world. The process is ongoing, and the results continue to complicate our engagements with humanities archives and new media... layers of data and cultural expression combining with the ambient environment via sensors and processors, with obvious risks to privacy and civil liberties” (Matthew K Gold, Lauren F. Klein). Because of eversion, the internet is imploding and it’s taking humanity with it.

Remember that old saying: “Don’t believe everything you see online”? Online content has become hyper-personalized in the last decade, making it difficult to discern what is true and what is not. If every answer is tailored to you, how would you know if it’s a lie? What if the algorithm decides to give you an answer you want to hear rather than the truth, just because it leads to ad revenue? From a design perspective, it’s clear that current internet content is made to manipulate creator and user behavior for profit. Questions googled are answered with ads. Websites are stuffed with cookies and trackers. Pop-ups appear before you leave a tab. Videos are 15 seconds long with 5 second ads in between. Social feeds serve you media precisely selected to maintain your attention – it’s all designed

to take data and force-feed you as many ads as possible. Take it from me: I design for the web. Online content isn't made for people, it's made for algorithms. The content that gets published must appeal to the algorithm in order to be seen at all. Algorithms which are owned by powerful people with dangerous agendas. Current internet content is inauthentic, but everyone is addicted to it. This is the death of the mind – a prime example of the internet's eversion. The parties responsible for this type of user-interface hold zero accountability for the death of our minds. We are left to fend for ourselves, while "content" wreaks havoc on our attention spans and social skills.

The dying web offers near-zero support for true community. Sure, there are facebook groups and subreddits, but all of those are subject to manipulation via algorithms. By forming community and friendships offline, you can meet a great variety of people with different ideologies and interests. Diversity is crucial to forming deep connections within a community. By contrast, online communities are dictated by algorithmic feeds and recommendations. Algorithms, by design, lasso people into groups with similar ideas and interests – which isn't a bad thing inherently, but leads to a "bubbling" effect. Within bubbles, users are unexposed to new ideas unless the algorithm decides it will drive ad revenue. Building community is supposed to be hard. It's supposed to challenge your preconceived notions and ideas. Online, it's as easy as leaving a couple comments, at the cost of authentic connection. By prioritizing social media and algorithmic programs, our real communities are actively dying.

How often do you come across political content online that you completely disagree with? How often do you see content you agree with? How often does the agreeable content misconstrue opposing views to sow division? Examples of eversion in political discourse are seen far and wide. Families have been torn apart due to minor political differences – differences which have been inflamed

and warped by individualized algorithms. Rather than unite on the issues that we all face as working class Americans, politicians (and their techno-lobbyists) focus on identity politics or insignificant differences in policy, while our infrastructure crumbles and wages plummet. Doing so leads to increased watch-time and thus ad revenue, while no real solutions are presented. People who would be united otherwise are stuck fighting. Unknowingly, the people using algorithmic-driven software to develop political opinions contribute to a surge of wealth going to technology empires, and the decline of productive discourse. Companies, products, and basic necessities have been further commodified in order to appease mindless online consumption. Can we not see how completely addicted we are to our own demise?

I've written an entire magazine about the climate crisis (Symbioticism). TL;DR: It's really bad. At our current rate of global warming, we're on track for a mass-extinction event that could rival the Dinosaur's extinction event. Unsurprisingly, the dying internet makes the climate crisis so much worse. Because the internet is built to support commerce instead of community, CO2 is rising faster than ever. Study after study demonstrates that AI isn't worth the resource-cost that it takes to build and operate – the same goes for any algorithmic, data-siphoning software. Algorithms aside, the internet contributes to worse emissions anyway. Online shopping may have helped people purchase products they wouldn't otherwise have, but at the risk of drastically increasing the emissions required for global shipping and commerce.

The internet became what it is today because corporations took advantage of publicly-funded technology that was too new to understand. A promethean act of corporate greed. The world wide web, as it stands, is not suited for the digital age. A new era has arrived and it's time we embrace it.


An Experiment

This year I decided to delete social media, for good. Reading *Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* by Jaron Lanier, a virtual reality pioneer, solidified my decision. I became painfully aware of the detrimental effects of social media and I had to do something about it – so I took matters into my own hands. I switched to an ad-free, AI-free web browser, deleted every social media app from my phone, and all of my accounts. 5 months later, my life has improved tremendously. I'm never going back. I feel clear-headed. I'm less angry, and I have much more energy to put into my real-life relationships and hobbies. I haven't stopped using the internet – I still search the web for questions, read books online, and use it as a tool to improve my graphics – but my phone and computers are tools, not social gambling machines.

Looking up from my phone has made me realize how inhuman the internet is. We've designed the entire system to maximize the flow of data for profit, in direct opposition to enhancing quality of life. Looking up has made me hopeful. I dream of an internet run by us, without corporations begging for our attention at every click/tap. People don't get how much of a blank canvas the internet really is. I think it's an existential, spiritual mistake to be using the most connective structure in history for online shopping and social media. The internet should be owned and operated by the public. We should have massive digital libraries, AI without influence, tools for building community, greater access to true information, and broader solutions to massive problems like climate change. The web should be by us, and for us. To connect, to inform, to inspire, to educate.



Redesigning the way I interact with the internet improved my life, but it's not enough. There are only so many personal choices you can make, when the structure you make decisions within is inherently oppressive. So, the structure should be changed. But how? What would a new internet really look like?



Starting the Digital Revolution

The new web will take years to build. It will be the most collaborative project ever, with the most connective benefits ever seen. In the meantime, we need to demonstrate that change is needed in the digital sector. This can only be done by making tangible changes in the way you interact with the existing internet. There are plenty of realistic options that exist right now, so that you can use the web for the better. Using the web intentionally today sets precedent for the way it will be used in the future.

The first step in creating an internet by and for us, is to stop using the platforms that abuse our time and attention. Delete social media. I have not lost contact with anyone since deleting social media – in fact, the contact I have had has been much more authentic and fulfilling. There are a plethora of ways to connect without ads being shoved in your face. Because the physical world is now so deeply tied to the digital, we can create a healthier, shared future for ourselves by deleting social media. Delete it, and be a part of the digital revolution of the early 21st century.

Along the same lines – be aware of the software that uses manipulative design or algorithms, and delete your accounts. Any apps with an infinite scroll feature, predatory account creation made to take personal information, or personalized feeds are made to steal your data. Streaming services can be easily swapped with purchasing

physical media. In fact, I've been buying CDs and DVDs instead of relying on the web, and it has improved my life. Having a personal collection of all of my favorite media is much more fulfilling and fun.

Using an ad free, AI-free web browser will improve your attention and the quality of information you search for. On my phone I currently use the Safari app and DuckDuckGo's search engine, with ads and AI answers turned off. It's a decent option for now, while we develop the new web. The summarized AI answers are nothing but a combination of what the top-ranked SEO sites say, many of which are owned by large companies and deliberately written/designed to be placed well in SEO, not provide factual information. Additionally, always say no to cookies, and clear your data often. Not having logins saved may be inconvenient, but it's more secure and private.

There are a multitude of personal decisions you can make now that will improve your connection to the internet. We must also exercise our political freedoms, to make certain that the new web will be owned and managed by ourselves. Advocate for the new web in the small ways that matter. The short term political aims of the new internet should be to advocate and implement bills that improve the current internet, until we get legislation on a nationwide scale that will allow for the funding and structure of the new internet to exist. Expanding current Net Neutrality laws would ensure that internet companies cannot price-gouge or set paywalls behind faster internet. Restricting the use of cookies and trackers would allow greater privacy on the internet. Creating a publicly funded search engine would allow for democratic information control. Developing proposals for parts of the new internet to be made separate from the corporate web will reduce misinformation and guarantee access to public needs and services.

The Digital Revolution is now. We, the creators and users of the new internet, can and will devise new modes of creating connections

that don't yet exist. Will you take part? Will you set an example of what the future can be? I urge you to contribute. This vision of reinventing the internet is incomplete without you and your ideas. This is not something that can be pursued alone. The new internet will be created by all of us, for our benefit.

RECOMMENDED READING

Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Right Now, Jaron Lanier (2018)

Project 02: Media, Power, And Ecology At The Google Data Center In The Dalles, Oregon, Adam Diller (2021)

Simians, Cyborgs, and Women – The Reinvention of Nature, Donna J. Haraway (1991)

Standing with Dr. Timnit Gebru, Google Walkout For Real Change (2020)

Debates in the Digital Humanities, Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, editors (2016)

AI has an environmental problem. Here's what the world can do

about that. United Nations Environment Programme (2024)

Explained: Generative AI's environmental impact, Adam Zewe MIT News (2025)

The Uneven Distribution of AI's Environmental Impacts, Shaolei Ren and Adam Wierman Harvard Business Review (2024)

The future of human-artificial intelligence nexus and its environmental costs, Petr Spelda, Vit Stritecky (2020)

Algorithms in Social Media Platforms, Maria Alessandra Golino (2021)

The Internet Used to Be a Place, Sarah Davis Baker (2025)



About the Author

Zoe Allgaier is a digital artist from Utah. She is inspired by the early age of digital art; Her abstract work explores the intersectionality of digital and physical life. Using overlays, textures and recursive geometry, Zoe creates graphics that explore visual nuance, as well as reject the minimalist design trends that have become the standard in the postmodern era. She has a lifetime of experience as an artist, and 7 years of professional experience in digital media and design roles.

Zoe

How to Reinvent the Internet

The corporate-dominated web has been allowed to wreak havoc on our livelihood for too long. In this magazine I explore a solution: reinventing the internet. By redefining our relationship to the digital world we can enable ourselves to create a more holistic physical world.