

Drawbridge: A New Internet

The Internet Is Against Us

It's commonly understood that the history of the internet is one of centralisation, accumulation, and lessening agency. The 2010s saw a rapid corporatisation of the internet with the arrival of smart phones, funnelling the majority of traffic into a handful of tech giants. With this total subsumption into Capital, the modern internet is now being finely crafted into strictly serving two purposes: generation and consumption of Content for profit-driven data harvesting, and providing the infrastructure for a budding Techno-Fascism. The advent of AI has sped up the progress of both these goals significantly.

Our modern incarnation of Fascism is intertwined with digital industry. Since Trump's reelection, tech giants have been competing to provide the infrastructure for his deportation machine. Palantir have been contracted to build 'ImmigrationOS', implementing the tracking and surveillance of immigrants for use by ICE. Elon Musk had been given access to federal data of US citizens, with Palantir supposedly also building a 'national database' on US citizens as well. OpenAI are being given numerous defence contracts to develop and extend AI to new military applications, and the history of such military contracts already show how readily these use cases also apply domestically. AI is being used to monitor social media for dissenting opinion, making it trivial to link posts to real identities, leading to deportations and visa revocations. This is all what is already happening, right now, today, and the broadening of this oppressive infrastructure, along with the widening scope of who must be tracked and removed, is well underway. The content we share online today will be used to detain us tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the days when the computer was fun have long past. We are in a generalised state of dissatisfaction, where the majority of people recognise how unfulfilling the internet is, but increasingly have nothing else to engage with as social isolation becomes the norm. In recent years especially we have

seen the domination of short-form video Content, the ‘tiktok-ification’ of major platforms moving to recommendation driven engagement, and aggressive censorship coupled with creator self-sanitization to appease advertisers. Internet use has transformed from a social engagement to atomized consumption; ‘new media’ is another iteration of TV. The internet is against us, and it has the same hostile intentions towards us as fast food: engineering a compulsion which never satisfies.

We Need A New Relation To Cyberspace

The approach of this cyber-dystopia has been clear for years now, but 2025 has given rise to a generalised sense of just how pressing it is, which can be tapped into. People are eager to be prompted to rethink what the internet can be. Previously, such energies have struggled to overcome the inertia of getting people to make a switch in their digital services (BlueSky over Twitter, Matrix over Discord..), but in re-imagining a new internet altogether we are not just escaping current problems but creating the opportunity for new and better ways to engage with online spaces. Much of the previous inertia is a product of not having anything concrete or tangible to really offer people when switching platforms. Privacy, for instance, is nice but has no impact on the day-to-day life of most people (for now), whereas leaving a bigger platform often really does have direct downsides. Suppose though instead of being told that some new platform has better privacy, or is run by a less bad Capitalist, you were told there’s somewhere that centres social interaction over content consumption. Imagine a digital world where you were allowed, even encouraged, to have a personal investment in the services provided and the communities created. Think about how satisfying it would be to take back deliberate usage of our devices, and abandon the half-conscious dopamine scrounging we so often find ourselves engaged in. This is how you create a new internet.

A vision of a new internet can be found in how the old internet was transformed into the one we have described here. As capital develops in a particular industry it seeks to streamline how consumption takes place. There is only one beauty standard, because that’s the one that requires our products. There is only one strain of banana, because we’ve engineered it into being the easiest to grow. Demand is manufactured. The personal computer has also undergone a similar transformation:

“Personal computers are no longer “universal machines”: their possibilities are limited by their assigned interfaces and programs so that they function only

as the terminus of digital capitalism. This is justified as “user-friendliness”: anyone who uses a computer for reasons outside of research, development and production today is no longer supposed to understand what is going on in the device, and is instead made dependent on digital services. [...] On the contrary, we find ourselves in a situation in which the widespread usability of computers is paired with an extensive digital illiteracy.” - Contours of the World Commune

The transformation of the internet is closely tied to that of the personal computer. Silicon Valley has decided for you how to use your computer – to consume Content – as well as how it connects to others – through centralised corporate owned servers. Building something that works for us then means overcoming this restricted set of use cases, expanding our idea of what the personal computer can offer, and building autonomous, private networks.

We believe this starts at the personal level, by moving to self-host as many of our services as possible. This is a common practise referred to as ‘unplugging’ or ‘de-googling’, replacing corporate owned services with open source alternatives you can run yourself. File shares, maps, chat rooms, media servers, a self-curated library – these can all be self-hosted, without subscription fees or giving up personal data. The progression to an inter-personal level follows naturally from here: when you self-host your own services, you can share them with others, you can use ones that others have shared with you. We shift from a top-down client-server relation to groups of equal peers, made up of trusted friends on private networks.

As our relation to computing and networking changes, so too does our understanding of how and why we use them – when we are no longer told by the device how it is to be used, inspiration and investment returns to decide for ourselves how to use it, as well as how to exist in and contribute to a network. We writing this do not have to tell people how to use their computers – what services to host, what to provide for others - because they will figure this out themselves once the relation has been changed.

How To Start The Process

Our goal is to jump-start the open process which strives for such a relation. We begin by aiming to collect and distribute the tools for anyone to start self-hosting services on their machines, and create their own virtual private networks for trusted friends. We do not mean VPNs here in the sense of paid

services used to mask your IP address, but VPNs in the real sense of the term. Virtual networks which can exist alongside regular internet usage, while providing secure and private communication to only those you allow. We believe using closed networks is especially important, both to shield us from the AI driven mass surveillance of the open internet, as well as to emphasise that this is not a competing product in same eco-system of existing platforms.

We plan on bundling software that can run on a Raspberry Pi to host common services, as well as join or set up a new VPN. This could be in the form of a custom Linux/Debian based OS (or possibly just a docker image). The VPN will use an open source mesh-net client called Tailscale. This allows users on a network to communicate directly to one another instead of having all traffic routed through the host, which significantly lowers bandwidth demand to host a network. This software bundle can then include pre-configured tools to host common services. We hope for this to be accessible even to people with minimal technical literacy.

Building this software bundle will take time. We will then also have to get it to the right people, write tutorials, and generally spread our ideas to both make a real difference, and broaden the perspectives that might contribute to developing these ideas further. If you would like to help, please reach out.

Visions For The Future

We said we don't need to tell people how to use their computers, but we still have some ways we hope these ideas might be applied in mind. There are two main approaches we envision, each a direct response to the two dominating functions of the modern internet we have outlined.

By providing the tools to build accessible private networks with secure end to end encryption, this project could potentially provide the infrastructure for activist organisations which might come under government scrutiny. For instance, the Stop Cop City movement in Atlanta has been engaged in intense fighting against local police forces for years to prevent the construction of a multi-million dollar police training super-complex. This type of action represents some of the most radical elements in the US today, and this fact is reaffirmed by the state's response:

“The 109-page indictment reveals deep state surveillance of activists, including the monitoring of zine publications and flyers stating opposition to

Cop City and internet accounts mentioning the coordination of mutual aid activities like buying food. The indictment accuses Atlanta Solidarity Fund activists of being the brains behind the “criminal enterprise,” and the organization accordingly faces money laundering and racketeering charges for essentially raising money to bail protesters out.” - Skyscraper Jails

The need for secure networking infrastructure here is self-apparent. While existing e2e chat apps like Signal are a start for these groups, the needs of long term, large scale activist work goes beyond simply chat groups. However, it must be noted that we are not trying to provide a product which activists could pick up wholesale. What we want is for people, especially activists, to understand the gravity of our current digital situation, and begin exploring different (and more secure) ways to use computing in general.

The second possibility would be the proliferation of digitally autonomous communities. As a tool to host a community, our idea of a closed private network already has a rough parallel in the popular group chat platform Discord. When most internet users think to host a private space for their friends, to share memes or play games, they typically host a Discord server. Many project based communities from anything to DIY HRT groups, open source development, or shared learning in any creative pursuit, also all exist in Discord servers. The problems with relying on a platform like Discord don't bear repeating - they include anything we've discussed here (data harvesting, censorship) and more (e.g. VC driven 'enshittification').

Not only would moving to host these communities on VPNs leave all these problems behind, it also opens up far more potential than Discord allows. Instead of only having a chat room, you have a whole network of services centred around your community. Private Mastodon instances between friends, file shares for collaboratively building shared resources, discussion forums, and with all of this belonging to the community it exists for. In an increasingly censored and sanitised internet this becomes a necessity for some communities to exist at all.