

# Introduction to Data Introspection

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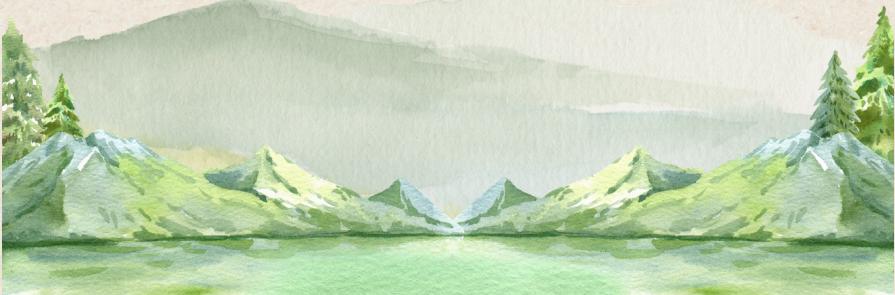
Liv Erickson

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Whose algorithm are you living?

**Our digital lives are increasingly noisy**, shaped by the gigabytes of information that we consume on a daily basis. The bits and bytes that make their way into our psychology via messages, articles, videos, shorts, and podcasts are algorithmically curated to latch into relevancy. Platforms that serve information to us use our attention to personalize recommendations and advertisements, leaving us in a swirling vortex of information. Within this landscape of information, our software can become truly individualized, facilitated by thoughtful design of emergent applications that center user privacy, customization, and co-constructed features.

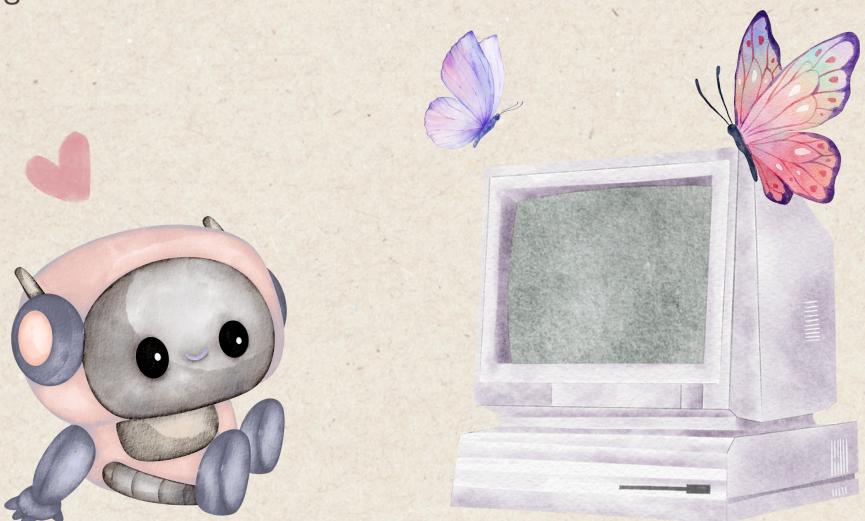


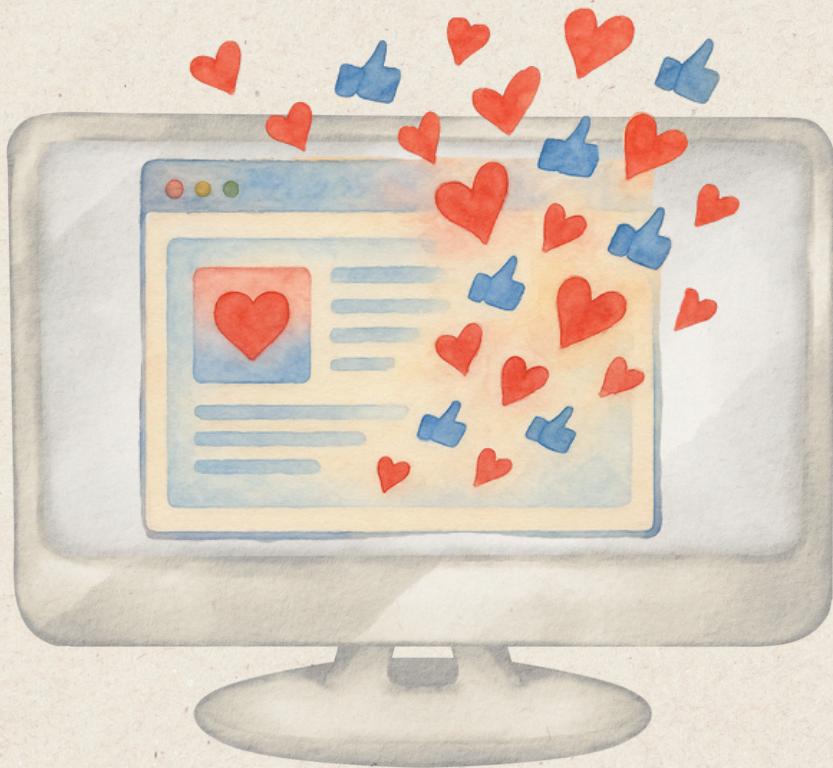
Noise is not inherently bad, especially in a computational sense. Noise creates the environment necessary for randomness to occur, and **in human creativity, randomness is thought to be a key ingredient in novel innovation**. One way that this manifests itself from a neurological perspective is in the creation of new pathways as disconnected and disparate ideas are suddenly joined together by new synaptic connections. **The noise we're exposed to allows us to have new ideas**, which in turn prompts us to explore novel information – and the creative cycle continues.

Whether we realize it or not, **we all house data and information** in some way. Our browsing habits, social media posts, and online preferences create a trove personal data, rich with insights about who we are as individuals. Our health records, held by our doctors, or our LinkedIn profiles, our old Facebook messages – **they all store information about us that can reveal more than we might expect.**

This **data is the lifeblood of artificial intelligence**. Machine learning algorithms that power ChatGPT, Copilot, and Gemini find patterns in internet-scale pools of content that are then used as the ultimate probabilistic generator, capable of cutting through the noise that exists within our online footprints.

**What if we had better visibility into our data as a tool to understand ourselves?** Imagine a world where you have all of your personal data in your own vault, with seamless protections and sharing, with a context-aware personal agent that guides you through understanding how you've grown over time.





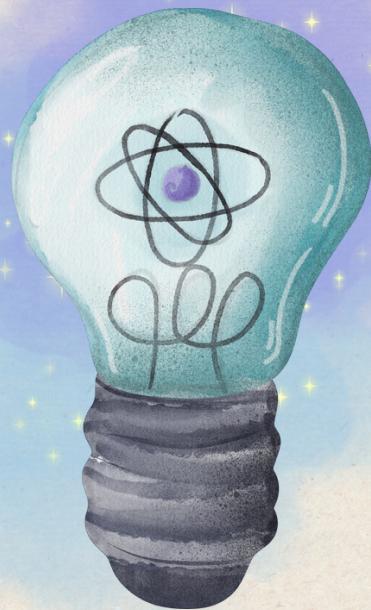
Today, **most social media algorithms are designed to maximize attention**. User interfaces prioritize easy, repeatable interactions that keep users engaged. Some apps utilize controversial dark patterns to make users feel urgency or anxiety, nudging them into actions they might not have taken if the interface were more transparent or respectful of their intent. **But these defaults can be challenged**, especially in a world where we make **introspection** a design goal of the tools we are building in this age of emergent interfaces.

For most online platforms, **using a given site or application means that you are granting an irrevocable right to the data** that you give the platform to use for their own purposes. While lawyers argue that this is necessary to provide services, these clauses have also been used to create a \$550B+ digital advertising market.

It's hard to opt out of surveillance capitalism. Leaving Meta's ecosystem entirely means shutting off avenues of connection that people have come to view as the default. In this regard, **we can consent only so far as that consent comes with a side of social coercion**, which isn't really consent at all.

In a world where platforms optimize for attention and extraction, **our personal data becomes a commodity rather than a site of reflection**. How can we unlearn the default surveillance paradigms of big tech and reclaim our data through the development of non-extractive tools that nurture agency, memory, and meaning?

Mainstream platforms often present identity as a fixed profile and flatten the emotional experience of revisiting artifacts from our past, **but we can unlearn surveillance culture by recognizing the act of remembering as an emotional one**. With this lens, we can shift the design paradigms from extractive applications to tools that support multiplicity, neurodivergence, and introspection.



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Reclaiming authorship and ownership over our knowledge and attention is a necessary form of agency for this next generation of computing. We can defend our thinking by considering not just the idea of knowledge development or management, but our knowledge as a tool that shapes and leads us through the world.

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The brain rewires itself based on new information and ideas. This neuroplasticity is how we can ‘change our minds’ about something when exposed to new information, whether that information is about something within us, or about our world.

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Within our personal data landscapes, we’re confronted with a challenging truth of our times: there is no ‘base’ reality that everyone experiences. Each individual’s experience and the context that they bring with them reflects a unique web of interdependent individuals, culture, experiences, and institutions that the person is – or has been – a part of. Modern technological tools must embrace this multiplicity, not flatten it.

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Data  
introspection is  
the practice of  
using data as a  
playground for  
personal  
development.



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Through a data introspection practice, an individual collects, analyzes, and reflects on their digital footprint in order to surface insights about their habits, preferences, patterns, growth, and well-being.

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“What happens when artists play puppeteer,  
shaping AI not for growth, not for profit, but  
for personal agency, creative discovery, and  
community power?”

– M Eilo, BlinkPopShift



The data introspection movement centers around growing insights, resiliency, and community through the process of reclaiming the information we've been giving up to technology giants. It is comprised of projects, code, art, and people who want to see a world that celebrates the diversity within it. It is an effort to rebuild technological tools in service of individual empowerment and access. It is a form of self understanding and personal development, aided – not replaced – by technology.