

Splitting the Web

by *Ploum* on 2023-08-01

There's an increasing chasm dividing the modern web. On one side, the commercial, monopolies-riddled, media-adored web. A web which has only one objective: making us click. It measures clicks, optimises clicks, generates clicks. It gathers as much information as it could about us and spams every second of our life with ads, beep, notifications, vibrations, blinking LEDs, background music and fluorescent titles.

A web which boils down to Idiocracy in a Blade Runner landscape, a complete cyberpunk dystopia.

Then there's the tech-savvy web. People who install adblockers or alternative browsers. People who try alternative networks such as Mastodon or, God forbid, Gemini. People who poke fun at the modern web by building true HTML and JavaScript-less pages.

Between those two extremes, the gap is widening. You have to choose your camp. When browsing on the "normal web", it is increasingly required to disable at least part of your antifeatures-blockers to access content.

Most of the time, I don't bother anymore. The link I clicked doesn't open or is wrangled? Yep, I'm probably blocking some important third-party JavaScript. No, I don't care. I've too much to read on a day anyway. More time for something else. I'm currently using kagi.com as my main search engine on the web. And kagi.com comes with a nice feature, a "non-commercial lens" (which is somewhat ironic given the fact that Kagi is, itself, a commercial search engine). It means it will try to deprioritize highly commercial contents. I can also deprioritize manually some domains. Like facebook.com or linkedin.com. If you post there, I'm less likely to read you. I've not even talked about the few times I use marginalia.nu.

Something strange is happening: it's not only a part of the web which is disappearing for me. As I'm blocking completely google analytics, every Facebook domain and any analytics I can, I'm also disappearing for them. I don't see them and they don't see me!

Think about it! That whole "MBA, designers and marketers web" is now optimised thanks to analytics describing people who don't block analytics (and bots pretending to be those people). Each day, I feel more disconnected from that part of the web.

When really needed, dealing with those websites is so nerve breaking that I often resort to... a phone call or a simple email. I signed my mobile phone contract by exchanging emails with a real person because the signup was not working. I phone to book hotels when it is not straightforward to do it in the web interface or if creating an account is required. I hate talking on the phone but it saves me a lot of time and stress. I also walk or cycle to stores instead of ordering online. Which allows me to get advice and to exchange defective items without dealing with the post office.

Despite breaking up with what seems to be "The Web", I've never received so many emails commenting my blog posts. I rarely had as many interesting online conversations as I have on Mastodon. I've tens of really insightful contents to read every day in my RSS feeds, on Gemini, on Hacker News, on Mastodon. And, incredibly, a lot of them are on very minimalists and usable blogs. The funny thing is that when non-tech users see my blog or those I'm reading, they spontaneously tell me how beautiful and usable they are. It's a bit like all those layers of JavaScript and flashy css have been used against usability, against them. Against us. It's a bit like real users never cared about "cool designs" and only wanted something simple.

It feels like everyone is now choosing its side. You can't stay in the middle anymore. You are either dedicating all your CPU cycles to run JavaScript tracking you or walking away from the big monopolies. You are either being paid to build huge advertising billboards on top of yet another framework or you are handcrafting HTML.

Maybe the web is not dying. Maybe the web is only splitting itself in two.

You know that famous "dark web" that journalists crave to write about? (at my request, one journalist once told me what "dark web" meant to him and it was "websites not easily accessible through a Google search".) Well, sometimes I feel like I'm part of that "dark web". Not to buy drugs or hire hitmen. No! It's only to have a place where I can have discussions without being spied and interrupted by ads.

But, increasingly, I feel less and less like an outsider.

It's not me. It's people living for and by advertising who are the outsiders. They are the one destroying everything they touch, including the planet. They are the sick psychos and I don't want them in my life anymore. Are we splitting from those click-conversion-funnel-obsessed weirdos? Good riddance! Have fun with them.

But if you want to jump ship, now is the time to get back to the simple web. Welcome back aboard!

- [Traduction en français par Nicolas Vivant](#)

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