

Building in private

For the past year I've been consumed by two projects that took shape mostly in private. Doing the work has been more important than talking about doing the work.

This has been a relief. As much as I love to write and communicate, I find myself wary of being too public about what I'm doing and thinking. It starts to quickly feel performative and not who I am. To be able to immerse myself in a project deeply with only my closest collaborators and friends knowing what's going on, suits my nature much more.

But in the next few weeks, both projects will become either newly public, or public in a sharper way than before.

I want to share a bit about those projects and what they mean to me. I also want to emphasize that, despite recent mantras about the importance of building in public, in my experience quality work depends on the focus and rich potential of privacy to take chances, find novel solutions, and explore larger leaps forward. When it comes to making work that matters, depth and time are far better friends than attention and popularity.

DFOS (Dark Forest Operating System)

The first of these projects, the Dark Forest Operating System, or DFOS, is explicitly about privacy and these exact questions. We have made DFOS as a new kind of shared private internet. A desktop of apps, files, and capabilities that you and your group and no one else can see and use.

This week we leaked an alpha version of DFOS to Metalabel's most hardcore community (the sickos, as I lovingly call them). The experiment has been a huge success. Hundreds of people joining and using the system. More than 200 people online at once for the first time. This weekend, people are starting their own spaces for the first time.

People seem to really like it. Four quotes from within DFOS:

"Haven't closed my DFOS tab since joining. I can see how this can become a "thing" for communities of all types"

"Feels like we're all pulling up to a peaceful village in Southern Italy, and breathing air for the first time in decades"

"I clicked on the link in my email with no idea what to expect and I have to say that I am completely obsessed with this....space."

"Amazing space, as others mentioned. I feel like I just stepped into a void on the internet in the best way possible, haha. Clean and undiluted, shrouded in darkness that indicates a new beginning."

One irony of the work is that we've made a product that's inherently private, however it's also my job to talk publicly about it. The dance between mass channels for advertising and broadcasting and private channels for connection and planning is an important one that our product approaches in new ways. We think we see a different approach. There's a tension and a buzz with this project that feels very right.

The full proper release will be in April, and we'll be gradually expanding our private beta until then. Ideaspace readers can check out the space we made for my podcast with Josh Citarella — the first public DFOS — [here](#).

Artist Corporations

The other major project of the past year, which has been public, is Artist Corporations. But it's the private part of the work that's been most consequential.

Last year I made four trips to Colorado to connect with business, cultural, and political leaders about the possibilities of Artist Corporations in their state. Thanks to readers of this newsletter (thank you Ryan!) I got connected with actual politicians and important people in Colorado. After lots of work behind the scenes making connections and sharing ideas, we find ourselves on the brink of the first-ever A-Corp law being introduced as legislation very soon.

A bill proposed and a bill passing are very different things. There will be hearings and a whole process to go through. Soon we'll publish the actual text of our draft bill, which I'm very proud of. It breaks new ground for how creative businesses can be structured, including laying out and protecting artists' rights; allowing the creation of equity and shares by checking a box; a new approach to IP ownership; and much more.

People more experienced in this keep telling me that to be in this position after a year is remarkable. This progress has come through building connections and relationships with people who share the same dreams, combined with the power of the idea itself. The public elements of this project have been critical for opening doors, but all the most significant progress since has taken place in private.

What happens in private

In both cases, while the work was private, it was far from solitary. Both efforts stem from extremely small groups of people — no more than four or five humans on either project. But all of us experienced at what we do, with zero overlap in our duties or skills. Behind this output is a collaborative culture of everyone unleashed to bring what makes them great to the work.

These have been two of the most rewarding creative and professional projects of my life. Both are great teachers, rewiring how I think about what I do. Both, I hope, will become meaningful in the lives of others. My gut tells me they will. But the process of making them, in private, with people I respect has already paid immense rewards.