We live our lives surrounded by info, data, and the means of getting it into our hands. When we use a social media platform — or any other "cloud based" application — we're not running all of Facebook, or Instagram or whatever on our phones in our hands, we have a connected portal to the data that those platforms have, the data their algorithms allow us to see. These platforms sell themselves on allowing an easy way to offload photos, documents, thoughts, into this concept of a "cloud", where it can be accessed on another, different device, and retrieve it. It's become a constant buzzword in the last 10 years, the idea of the "cloud".

It's calcified itself as an important way of how things work on the internet now, marking a turning point in the internet and its history. And the closer I find myself to understanding it, the more I see it as

fragile

It's just some other servers, somewhere across the world, owned and run by someone else, run at their whim. The moment the connection is severed, our fantastically smartphones now become nothing but warnings telling us to reconnect to the wider network, assured that in some way it's our fault there's no connection.

The assumption everywhere, in every error message, in every systems design ethos, is that the systems we've built now will somehow outlast entropy, and last forever. Or well, as long as it's profitable to run them anyways. But we know they can't last forever.

And they're so deeply woven into who we are. How we talk, how we meet, who we meet, all have been dictated by the internet. I wouldn't be who I am without it, and know what I know. I know people I've never met in person almost as well as the ones I do everyday. It's an important stepping stone in our life, even if it's mostly out of our control. We're enriched by the small samples of the data these companies have used all the money to maintain and hold on to, our little corner of a server's hard drive, rented out in exchange for them to pass it along to advertisers. It's the kind of exchange we've made to allow for the systems we have now.

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So what if all of our data, which makes us part of who we are, is soon to be dead without any way of knowing what was there? What will remain? What will fall away instantaneously, and what will crumble without the systems that traverse distance — and time — to hold it together. How much of ourselves will we lose?

How do we think this will be seen in the future? We know these systems can't last

forever but will they even try? Or will everything left be liquidated, sold for scraps. Our data sold on, written over or left to rot?

In the far future will we be seen as naive or primitive, our knowledge unknown due to our hubris and our inability to prevent bit rot, or prevent "market forces" from dictating who we are? Will our machines feel like magic to a society that no longer can manufacture what we used so widely? Our technology only good for displaying smug error messages?

From what remains, what will they see our data as? Some mythical concept, some currency we all exchanged, some unknown variable, hypothesised to be some kind of format they've not found evidence of yet?

Will the victors of our systems dictate how it was seen? We buy into the myths other civilizations told about themselves, the lies they told about their enemies. Will our data be some precious (capital m) Meta data?

The metadata we have now is for the platforms we think will last forever, does the metadata of dead social platforms, of your MSN messengers or IRC or whatnot make any sense to people now, years after it's been shuttered? Is it even visible to anyone, or lost?

Do we have metadata for our current digital humanity, or just the platforms and systems that need it. Is this data going to be valuable?

Why, all of a sudden do I feel alone. Are we alone in a temporal moment of connection?

We don't often consider interfaces outside of technological terms. We interface with these systems on black screens that illuminate when the power, literal and metaphorical, allows them to. Without some greater structure, they would show nothing, or not turn on at all. But this makes our interactions ephemeral. There's no distinct button, just moving pixels and a sensor that interacts. You touch it and it connects you, using electrical currents to more directly connect you to the interface You're reading this essay, surrounded by a computer's attempt to recreate touch, to create hands grasping and connecting and writhing — based on a small dataset, trained incorrectly by an amateur in AI engineering.

Our data emulates touch, the sensations of receiving touch. Our views, our faces, and our recognition of both. But none satisfies.

It will vanish as quickly as every interface, protocol, peripheral, and database has before. On abacus and diskette, on paper and silicon. What dust will data return to?

Noise.

We will have memory and memories, written in languages dead and never spoken,

unable to be translated and never to be read by others besides the backend engineers and enthusiasts. We will find the messiahs of our time were as much made of clouds as the systems they built.

I've lived lives in infinite multitudes in these clouds. I have names and secrets, different to everyone who knew me. We've exchanged notes full of jargon, transferring nothing, back and forth. Now, as I see clearly, its death will come, has come. The databases of Alexandria will burn.

I am made of clouds now, partly. A part of my brain is noise, featuring plugs, inputs and outputs designed by moneymen. I write, trying to map my vapor, replace it with something mine, something better. But look at the best our computers can do. I'm doomed. What difference does knowing, self reflecting on this give me over just continuing on with my day to day? It doesn't matter. I'm made of nonsense now.