



Death, and how tech forgot about mortality

Michael Kibedi • @uxmichaelco

To the **writers** influencing my thinking

Maggie Appleton • Neda Atanasoski • La Tanya S. Autry
Kimberly Juanita Brown • Simone Browne • Ingrid
Burrington • Tina M. Campt • Adrian Daub • Saidiya
Hartman • Tamara Kneese • Enuma Okoro • Olia Lialina
Katarzyna Nowaczyk-Basinska • Thao Phan • Legacy
Russell • Francesca Sobande • Tonia Sutherland • Tiera
Tanksley • Julia Ticono • Suzanne Van Geuns

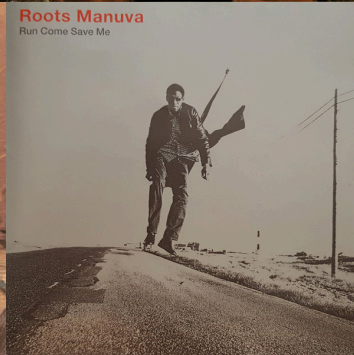
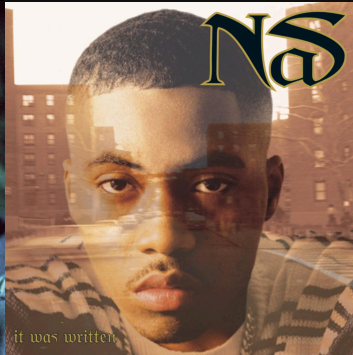
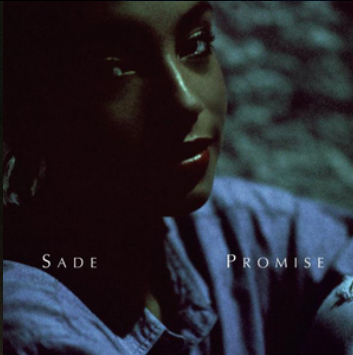
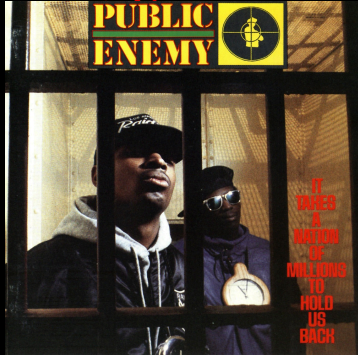
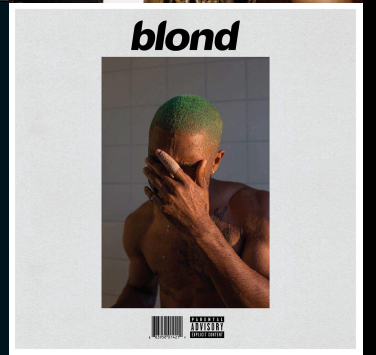
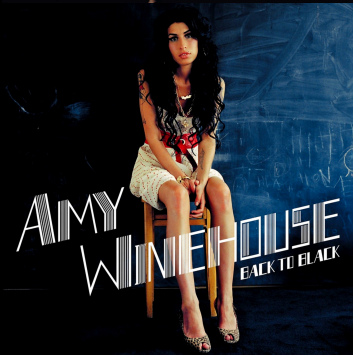
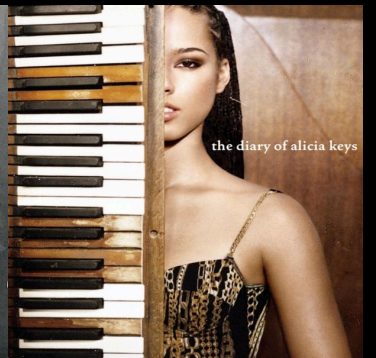
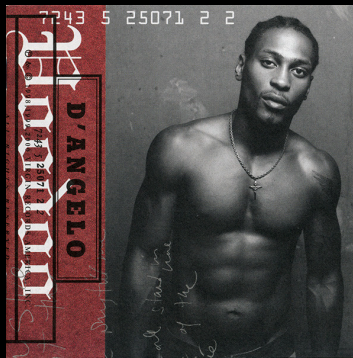
To the **artist-researchers** inspiring my vision

Jess Allen • Cameron Askin • Neta Bomani • Stephanie
Dinkins • Allison Janae Hamilton • Sasha Huber • Vladen
Joler • Saiko Kanda & Mayuka Hayashi • Mónica de
Miranda Kameelah Janan Rasheed • Alisha B. Wormsley





2



2004

- My Documents
- My Computer
- Firefox
- Excel
- PowerPoint
- Word
- Skype
- Messenger
- Sam 2003
- DivX
- VideoStudio
- Roxio
- iTunes
- QuickTime
- Media Player
- Dreamweaver
- Fireworks
- Flash
- ImageReady
- Photoshop
- Acrobat



Recycle Bin

start





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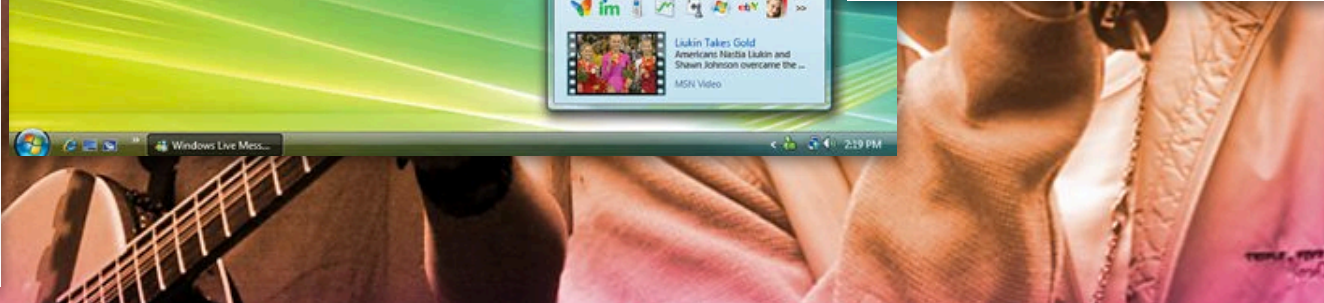
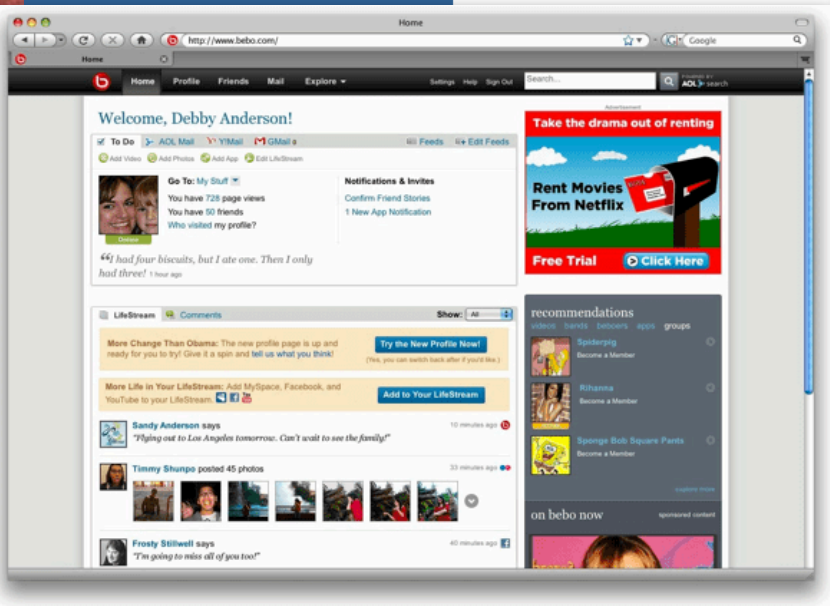
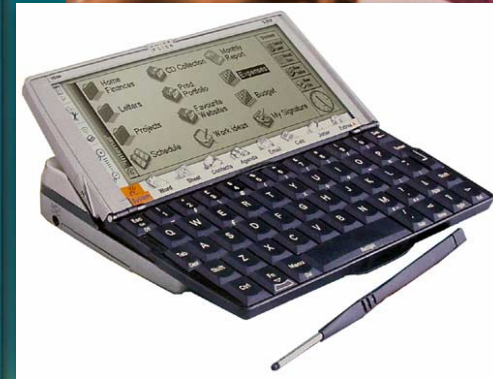
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[Problems Signing In?](#)

Security Options (what's this?):

- Public/shared computer ([Increased security](#)).
- Keep me signed in to this and all other Passport sites unless I sign out.
- Neither

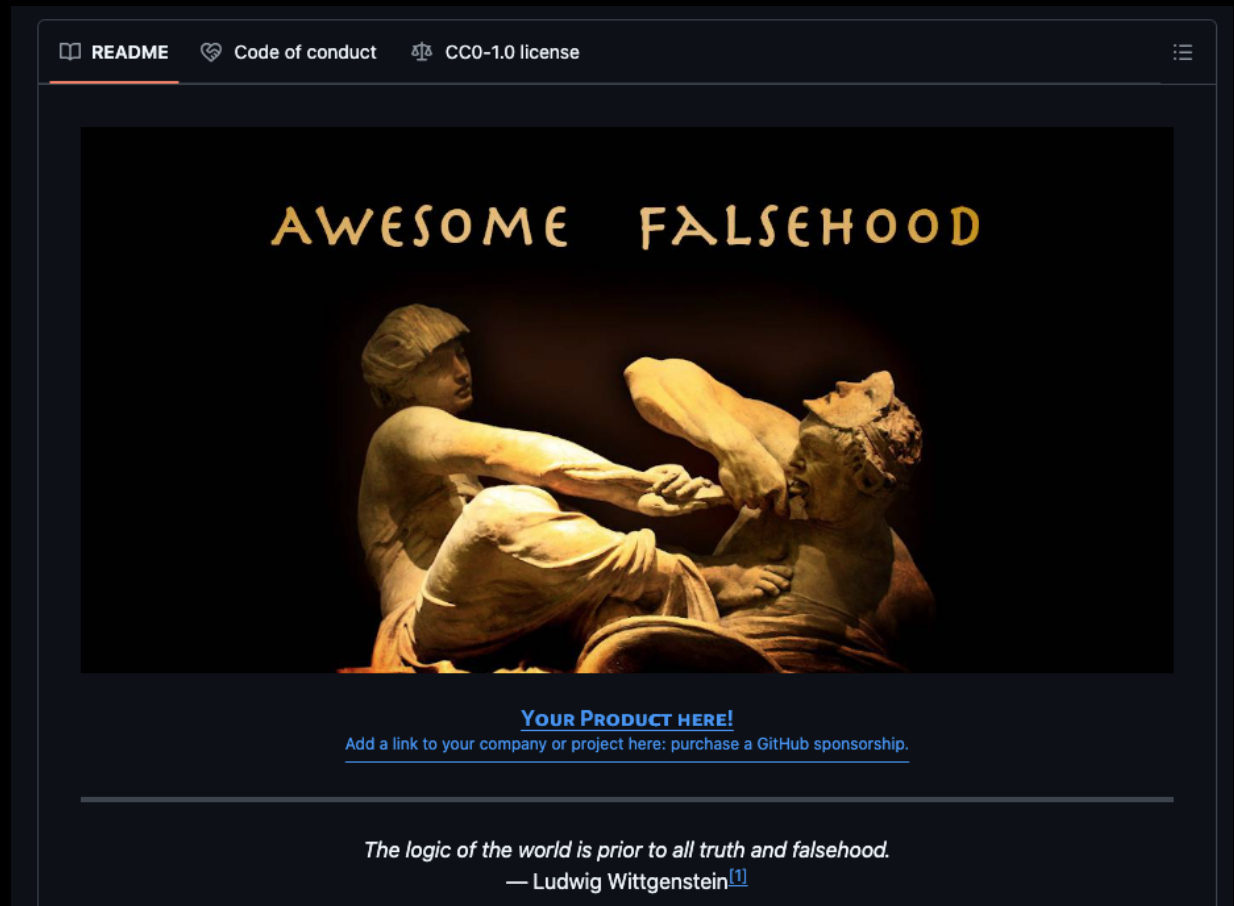
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Falsehoods

An incorrect idea you believe, which persistently guides your thinking



Source: [Awesome falsehoods](#), via kdeldycke on GitHub

Falsehoods about names

For example...


- People's names are **assigned at birth**
- People have **one full name** by which they go by
- People's names are case **sensitive**
- People's names are case **insensitive**
- People's names are not written in **ALL CAPS**
- People's name are not written in **all lower case letters**

Create an account

Private Business

First name Surname

Email

Password 

Source: [Falsehoods Programmers Believe About Names – With Examples](#)

Falsehoods

What falsehoods exist about death, and how do they show up in digital services?



Person

Platform

Pieces

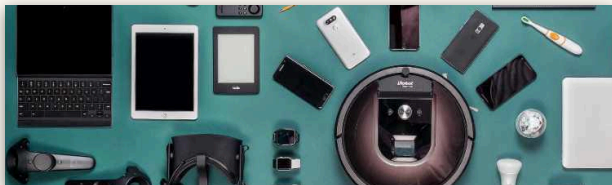
When a person dies...



A **will** expresses who gets your property and assets



Law governs how your estate will be transferred



Property and assets are distributed to individuals or parties

Falsehood: Most of us have a plan for our death

Three in five UK adults (59%) have not made a will

Source: [Canada Life](#), 2020

... what about digital?



Falsehood: Our digital selves are consistent

We differ across and within platforms – in public, in private, and in secret



GOLDENVOICE PRESENTS IN INDIO

COACHELLA

COACHELLA VALLEY MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL

INDIO CALIFORNIA  EMPIRE POLO CLUB

the Black Keys

FRIDAY APRIL 13 @ 20

Swedish House Mafia · Pulp · Refused · Arctic Monkeys · Mazzy Star
Afrojack · Explosions in the Sky · M83 · Amon Tobin · Cat Power · Madness
Jimmy Cliff · Tim Armstrong · GIRLS · Rapture · Madeon · M. Ward · Horrors · Frank Ocean
James · Alesso · SebastiAn · Datsik · Yuck · Neon Indian · Dawes · Black Angels · Death Grips · WU LYF · Breakbot
Atari Teenage Riot · Feed Me · GIVERS · Other Lives · Band of Skulls · R3hab · Wolf Gang · Midnight Beast · EMA
Ximena Sariñana · Kendrick Lamar · Dear Hunter · honeyhoney · Hello Seahorse! · Sheepdogs · LA Riots

SATURDAY APRIL 14 @ 21

Radiohead

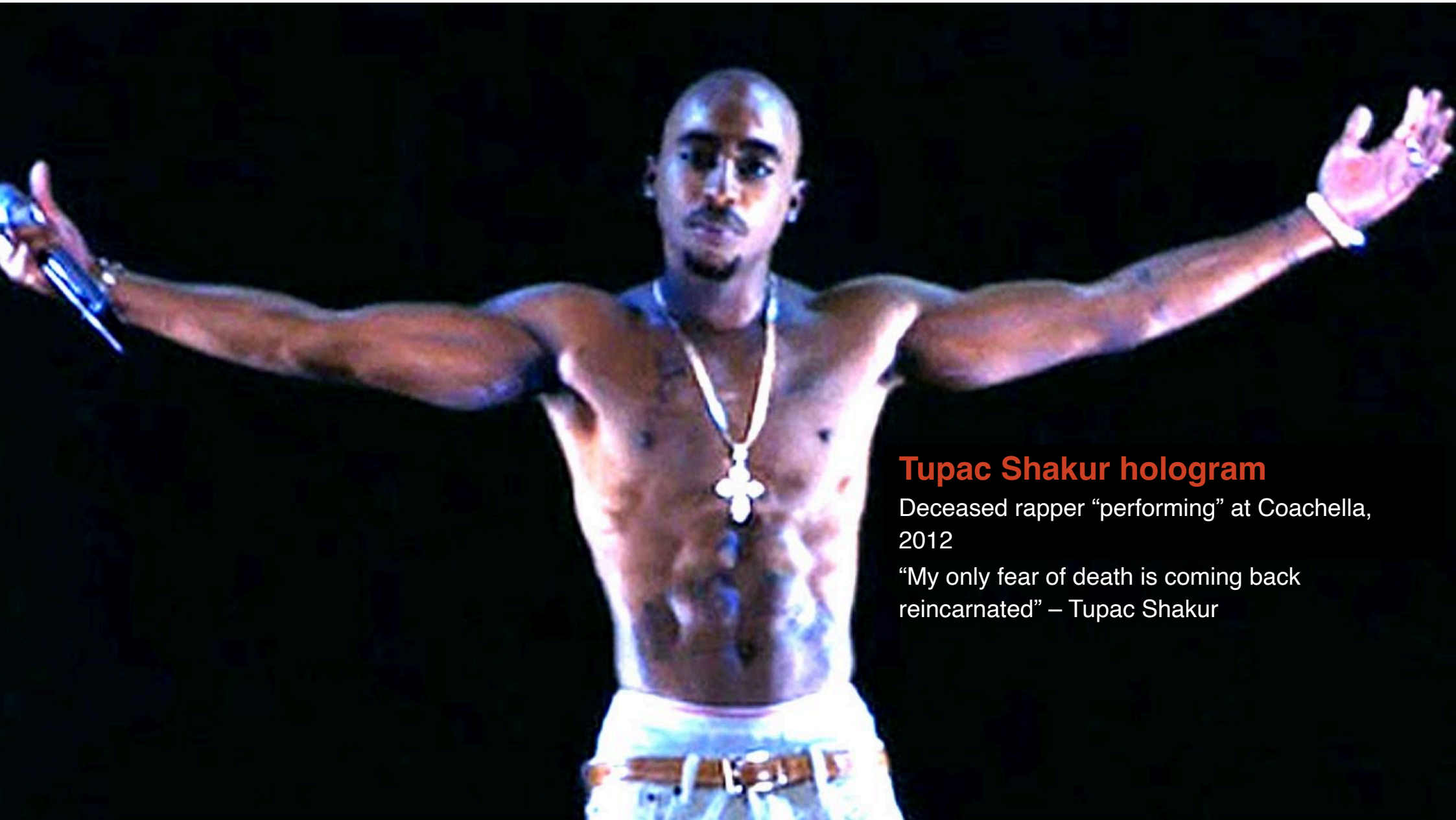
Bon Iver · the Shins · David Guetta · Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds · Kaskadee · Miike Snow
Jeff Mangum · Sebastian Ingrosso · Andrew Bird · Feist · FIREHOSE
Godspeed You! Black Emperor · St. Vincent · Martin Solveig · Sub Focus · SBTRKT
Flying Lotus · Manchester Orchestra · Kasabian · AWOLNATION · Azealia Banks · Squeeze · ASAP Rocky · Buzzcocks
Kaiser Chiefs · Destroyer · Head in the Heart · Laura Marling · tUnE-yArDs · Grace Potter · Nocturnals · Black Lips · Big Pink
Childish Gambino · Vaccines · Zeds Dead · Grouplove · Jacques Lu Cont · We Were Promised Jetpacks · Gary Clark Jr.
Borgore · Dragonette · We Are Augustines · Mt Eden · Destructo · Suedehead · Keep Shelley in Athens · Pure Filth Sound

Dr. Dre & Snoop Dogg

SUNDAY APRIL 15 @ 22

At The Drive-In · Justice · Florence + the Machine · AVICII
La Roux · Beirut · the Weeknd · Girl Talk · the Hives · DJ Shadow
Calvin Harris · Nero · Wild Flag · Modeselektor · Dada Life · Porter Robinson · Santigold
Flux Pavilion · Dr. P · Gotye · Seun Kuti · Egypt 80 · Beats Antique · Fitz and the Tantrums · araabMUZIK · Company Flow
Real Estate · Zedd · Le Boucherettes · Greg Ginn · Growlers · NOISIA · Morgan Page · Gaslamp Killer · First Aid Kit · Oberhofer · Lissie
Thunder Cat · Metronomy · Wild Beasts · Housse de Racket · Fanfarlo · Spector · Gardens · Villa · Airplane Boys · Sleeper Agent

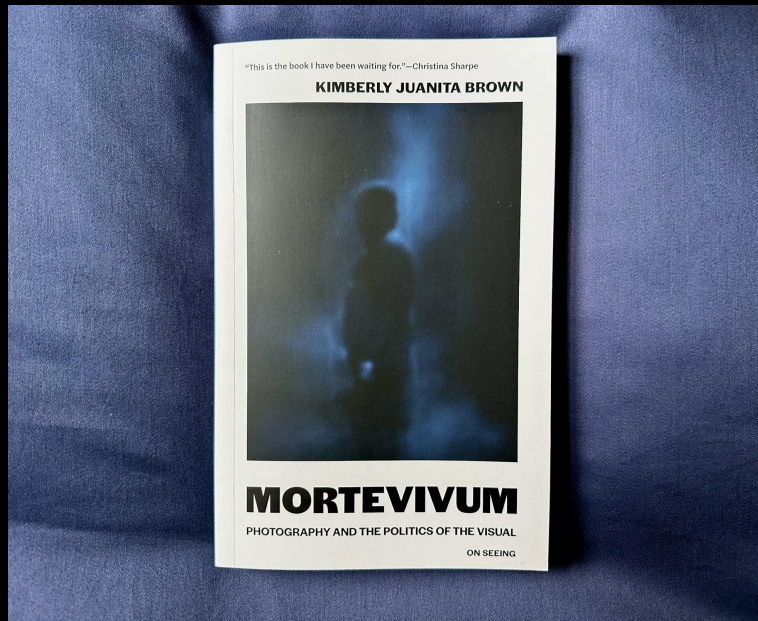




Tupac Shakur hologram

Deceased rapper “performing” at Coachella, 2012

“My only fear of death is coming back reincarnated” – Tupac Shakur



Mortevivum by Kimberly Juanita Brown

“Performing the structural racism it embodies, **the viewer's indifference** is ultimately most telling” (pg. xiv)

⚠ This book examines historic acts of racial violence, racial terrorism, and lynching

£1000bn

Estimated **global value** of “**grief tech**” sector

Source: [Techround](#) (2024)

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Preserve memories with an app that interviews you about your life. Then, let loved ones hear meaningful stories by chatting with the virtual you.

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Everything you need to make a connection

Who You're Trying to Reach?
Give us some information about the person you're trying to make the connection.

Personality Traits
Let's get to know better the person you're trying to make the connection with.

Relationships
Add your relationship and other people that are important to the person you're trying to make the connection with.

Writing Style
Give us some example of how the person writes. This will help us to recreate the writing more realistic.

Subjects to Talk About

First off, who are you trying to reach?
Give some basic information about your loved one.

Add a picture of your beloved one

First name Last name

Pronoun

Birth Date Death Date

Cause of Death

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Falsehood: Death ends our digital existence

Private companies can and are technologically reanimating the dead – but should they?

Person falsehoods

Most of us do not have a plan for our death

Three in five UK adults (59%) have not made a will

Our digital selves are not consistent

We differ across and within platforms – in **public**, in **private**, and in **secret**

Death does not end our digital existence

Private corporations are already technologically reanimating the dead – **but should they?**

~~Person~~

Platform

Pieces

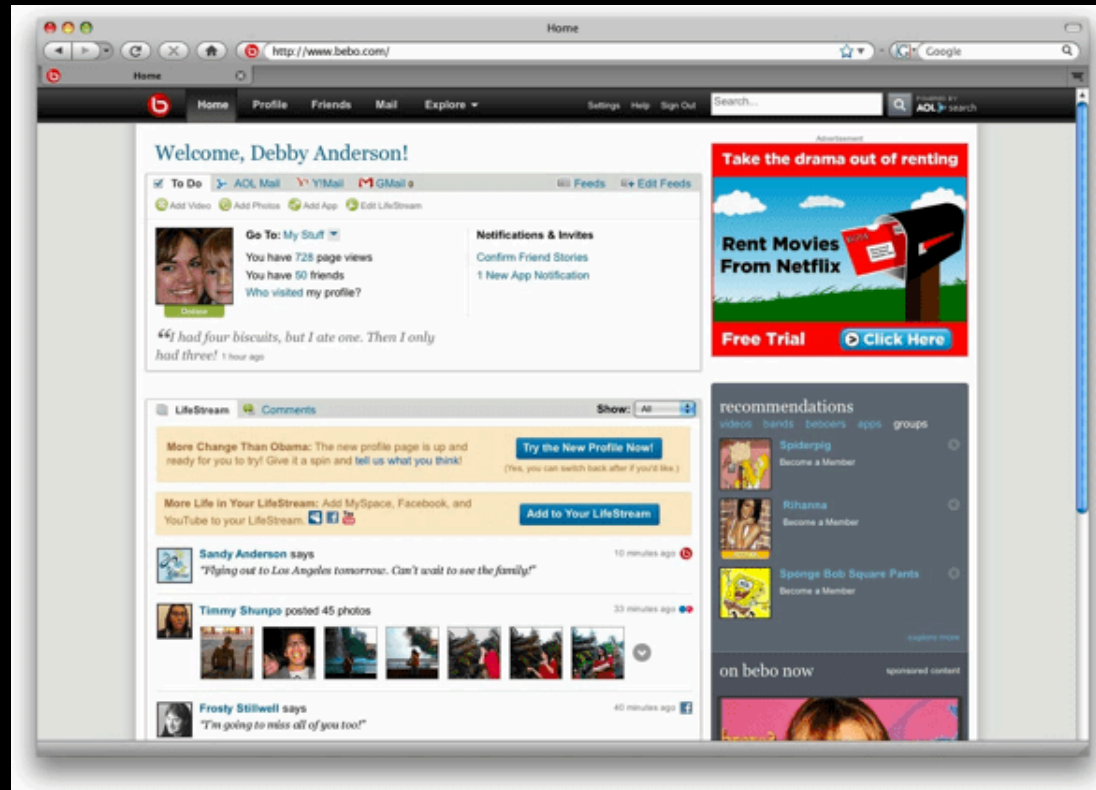


Falsehood: Platforms are obliged to provide us a service

Platforms are private corporations that have **no** civic or moral obligation to you

Bebo

Death of a platform
(2005–2013, 2014–2022)

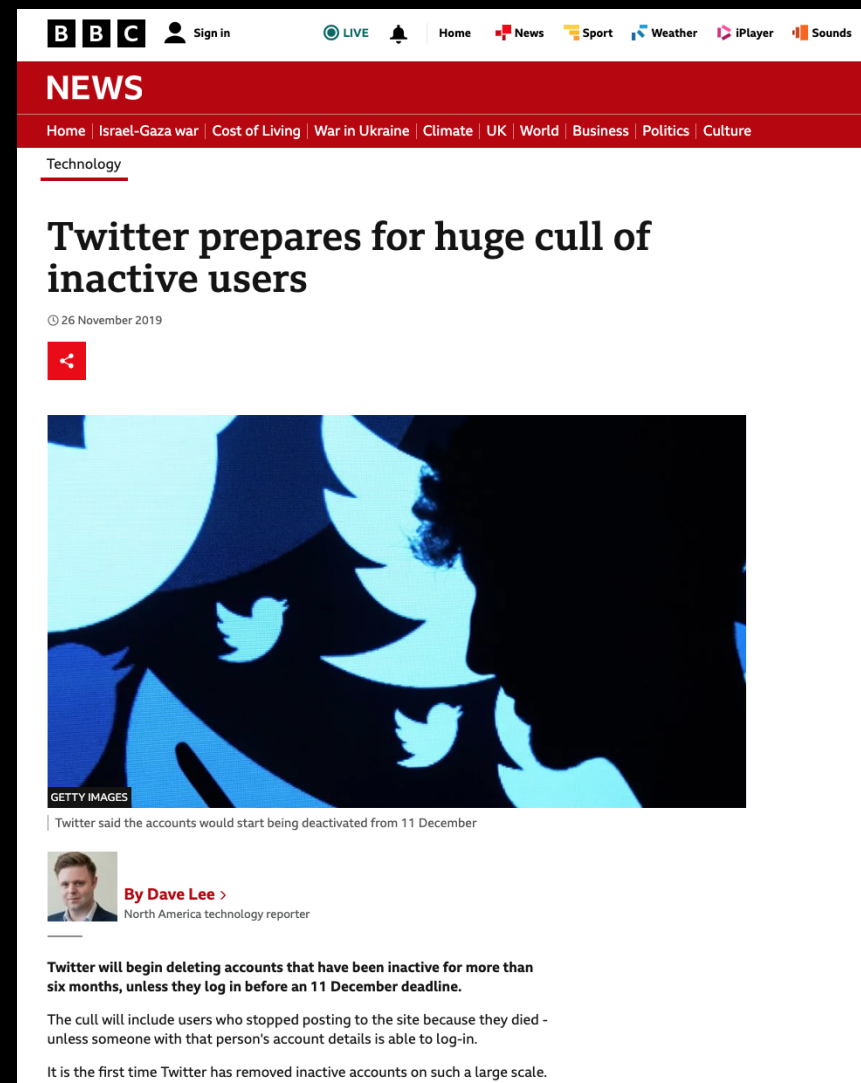


Falsehood: Platforms will always be here

Takeover, strategy change, bankruptcy – some of the ways our favourite platforms can “disappear”

Falsehood: All users are alive

Just because an account exists, it doesn't mean the person is alive



The screenshot shows a BBC News article from November 26, 2019. The article is titled "Twitter prepares for huge cull of inactive users" and is categorized under "Technology". The author is Dave Lee, a North America technology reporter. The article states that Twitter will begin deleting accounts that have been inactive for more than six months, unless they log in before an 11 December deadline. The cull will include users who stopped posting to the site because they died - unless someone with that person's account details is able to log-in. It is the first time Twitter has removed inactive accounts on such a large scale.

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NEWS

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Technology

Twitter prepares for huge cull of inactive users

26 November 2019

GETTY IMAGES

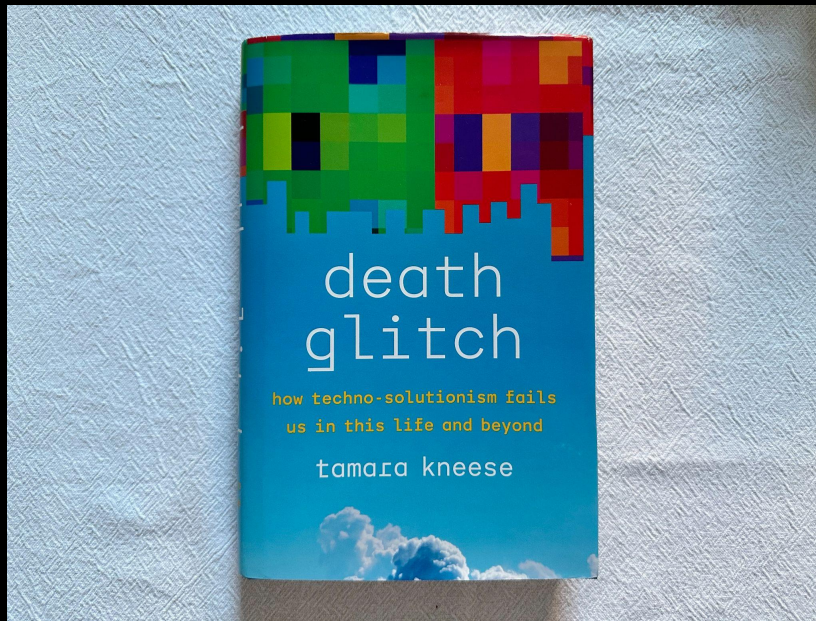
Twitter said the accounts would start being deactivated from 11 December

By Dave Lee >
North America technology reporter

Twitter will begin deleting accounts that have been inactive for more than six months, unless they log in before an 11 December deadline.

The cull will include users who stopped posting to the site because they died - unless someone with that person's account details is able to log-in.

It is the first time Twitter has removed inactive accounts on such a large scale.



Death Glitch by Tamara Kneese

“... tech platforms do not anticipate death and how it affects users because **platforms focus on sources of value in the context of living, breathing users**” (pg. 45)

⚠ This book examines death and terminal illness

Platform falsehoods

Platforms are not obliged to provide us a service

Platforms are private corporations that have **no** civic or moral obligation to you

Platforms will not always be here

Takeover, strategy change, bankruptcy – just some of the ways our favourite platforms “disappear”

All users are not all alive

Just because an account exists, it doesn't mean the person is alive

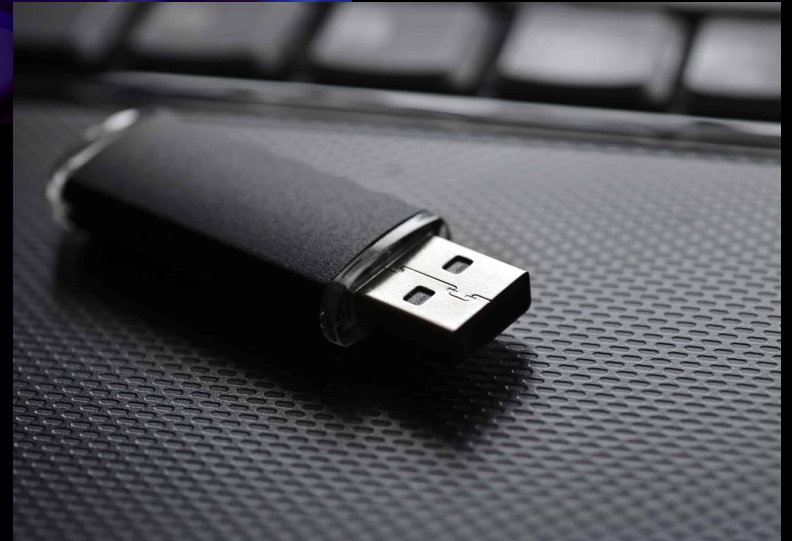
~~Person~~

~~Platform~~

Pieces



The Internet is real



Bit rot

Decay of electromagnetic charge, and eventual data corruption in storage media

INTERNET ARCHIVE WEB BOOKS VIDEO AUDIO SOFTWARE IMAGES

ABOUT BLOG PROJECTS HELP DONATE CONTACT JOBS VOLUNTEER PEOPLE

INTERNET ARCHIVE Explore more than 866 billion web pages saved over time

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We're working on it.

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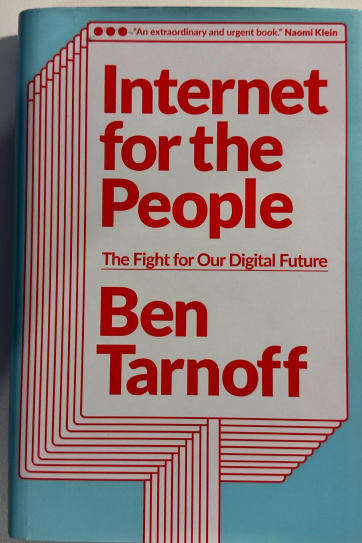


Astronaut Sally Ride on the Flight Deck from NASA on the Commons

Flickr has grown into one of the biggest photo collections on Earth. It contains tens of billions of images from people all over the world, and keeps growing every day. That's why we've created the Flickr Foundation—an independent, community-focused organization. We're committed to stewarding this cultural treasure for future generations, and fostering a visual commons we can all enjoy.

Falsehood: If data is saved, it's safe

Hardware failure, obsolescence, and bit rot – each threaten the integrity of our saved data



Internet for the People by Ben Tarnoff

“Data is made collectively, and made valuable collectively. It follows that **governance should also be collective...** crucially the **ownership of data** would be **separated from its processing**” (pg. 165)



The Internet is dying



Photos by [Jesper Berg](#) for [The Conference](#), Malmö

“Texting became a critical part of how I created and nurtured a relationship”

Anonymous submission

A People's History of Tech

A collectively built, living artefact about the mobile phone



[A People's History of Tech: The Mobile Phone](#) (2024)
Presented by [Emily Best](#) and [Sara M. Watson](#), at [The Conference](#) Malmö

Pieces falsehood

Saved data is not safe

Hardware failure, obsolescence, and bit rot – each threaten the integrity of our saved data

Make it practical

Question: Person

What is our service's role when a user dies?

Digital services and experience are often designed assuming users are only ever alive

Question: Platform

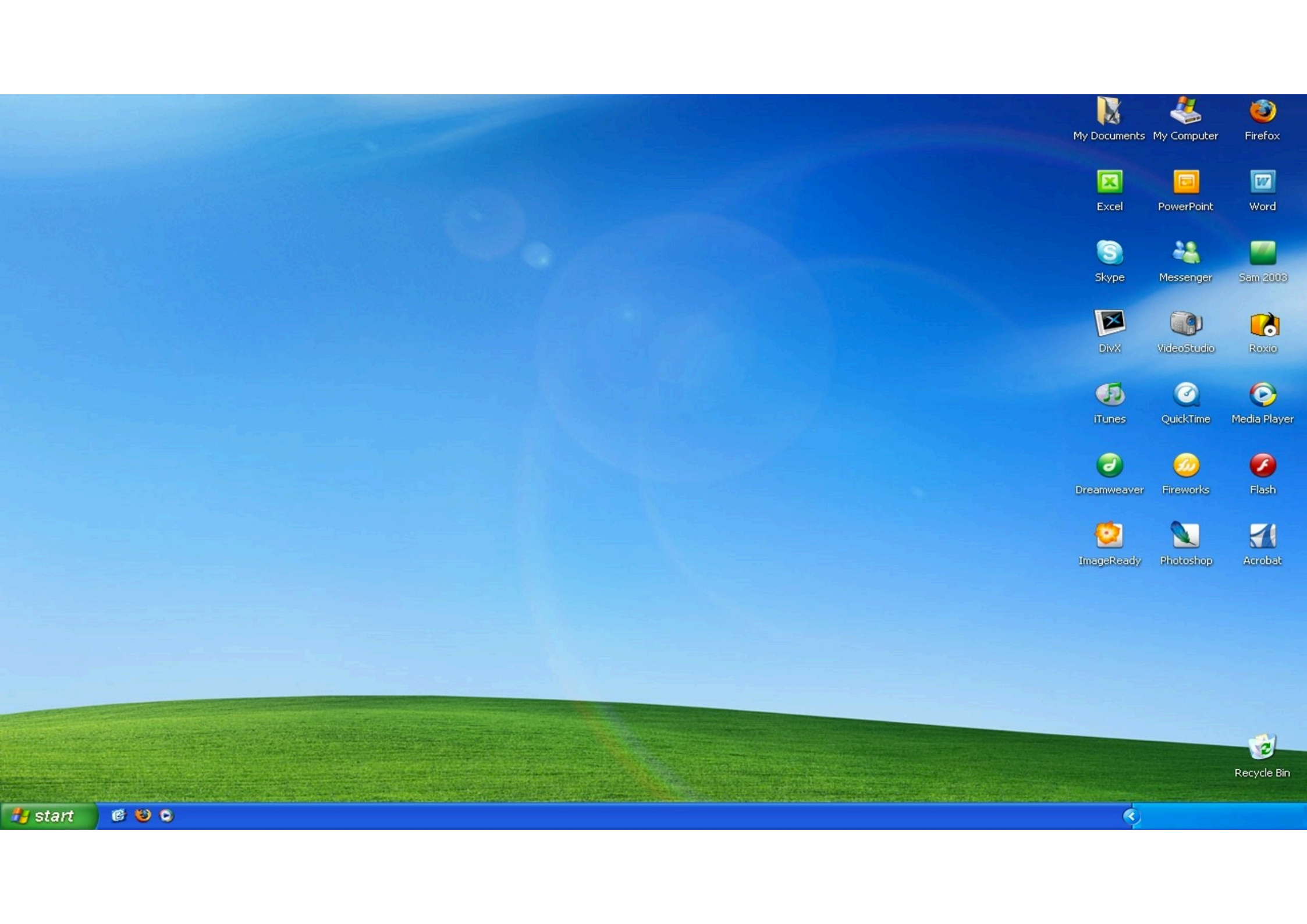
How will users get their data if our service ends?

Technology companies can't (or won't) imagine that their users will exist longer than their services

Question: Pieces

Will users' data be accessible 50 years from now?

Beneath the data, we should treat preservation of digital selves as an infrastructural concern



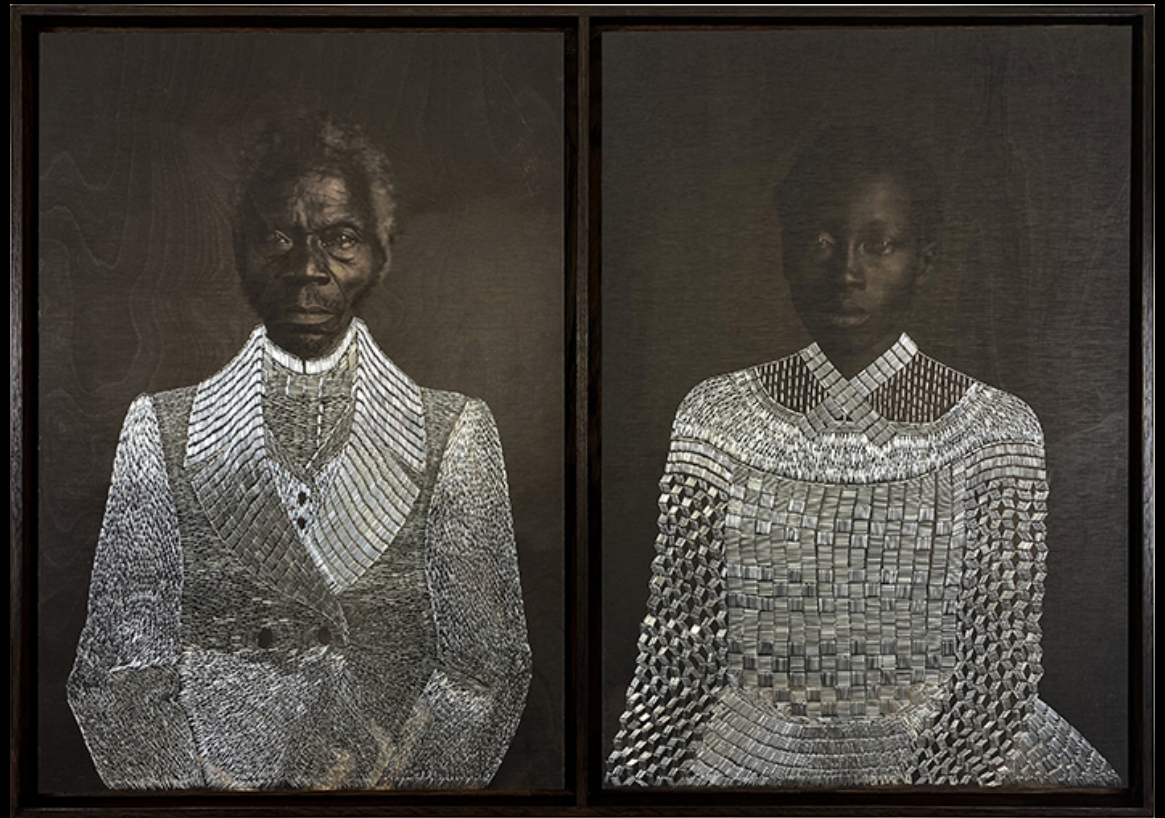
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- Firefox
- Excel
- PowerPoint
- Word
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- Messenger
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- DivX
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- iTunes
- QuickTime
- Media Player
- Dreamweaver
- Fireworks
- Flash
- ImageReady
- Photoshop
- Acrobat

Recycle Bin

start



Coda



[Tailoring Freedom – Renty and Delia](#) (2021), Sasha Huber



Black Meme by Legacy Russell

“Renty and Delia are forever **trapped in the architecture of their photographic frame**, now transformed into an **infinitely scrolling browser tab**. Fetishized within an institutional archive, their captured images are simultaneously **rendered silent and stripped of agency**”
(pg. 139)

⚠️ This book examines historic acts of racial violence, racial terrorism, and lynching



Death, and how tech forgot about mortality

Michael Kibedi • @uxmichaelco





Death, and how tech can embrace mortality

Michael Kibedi • @uxmichaelco





Thank you.

Michael Kibedi • @uxmichaelco

