Our Moment Apart

People and our Sand Art

I'm Nick Doiron, a web developer, mapmaker, traveler, and now (maybe?) author. As a digital nomad I embrace new technology, snapping up plane tickets and passport stamps, using Airbnb to live in a hundred strangers' homes, apartments, spare rooms, and boats. Most of my work is open source code, which is shared freely with the world.

This book is about something else, though. It's about our collective co-existence with AI and other new technologies. When we think back fifteen years, or to our childhood, we will talk about how reliant we've become on new technology, and how ever-present devices and internet networks are now. In the future, rather than seeing our current moment as an information revolution, I believe that we will remember it as an awkward transition phase, our moment of separation before fully merging with technology. We have computers, but only as rudimentary tools, terminals, and pocketweights. We have the internet, but key information and agreements are still limited to paper. An immeasurable amount of technical work - in Silicon Valley, in Washington DC, and in global health and education - remains invested in porting information around gaps.

Here are some realities which will seem bizarre in the future:

- There are languages whose words and names cannot be written on a computer.
- Few people, even in selective computer science degree programs or coding bootcamps, are studying *software development* as a practice.
- Leading startup businesses used by millions (including Airbnb and Uber) continue to profit from a legal limbo and a patchwork of agreements with more proactive governments.
- Public officials, including those in the US, cannot list, account, or locate their own resources, especially in emergency situations when these need to be immediately shared with first responders.
- Our health, banking, education, housing, and voting systems are too centralized, antiquated, and flush with payouts for us to discuss reforming them to fit our reality.

- A mark on paper is often given equal or superior value when compared to digital and cryptographic signatures.
- Fax machines and checks still exist.

Most of the dozen short fiction stories that I've chosen for this book are personal, or revolve around an idea of adapting to a new technology. These situations also come with institutional horror - the defense, destruction, and restructuring of systems to fit a new reality.

- Other Backward Classes
- Playing Pachinko
- The Younger Sally Jacobs
- Datalirium
- The Annotationist
- P.A.
- Rita Wan
- Cloud Atlas Bug
- Idealist House
- Morozov and Me
- Battlestar *Erratica*
- The *Zalos* Interpretation

If you like these stories, please let me know in some way. I have another ten ideas forming in my notebook.

Copyright statement
These stories are free. Do not pay someone to read them.
If you do want to support me, find @mapmeld on Venmo or Patreon, or send a pull request (code change) to me on GitHub. I haven't accepted payments like this before so it's an experiment - expect me to have only a small presence on the site.
You may share and distribute this essay and stories under the latest Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-Alike license.
If you are interested in developing these further (perhaps mixing it with my Medium posts about quantum computing, learning to code, or Dubai) or have plans to use this commercially *in any format*, contact me in 2018.