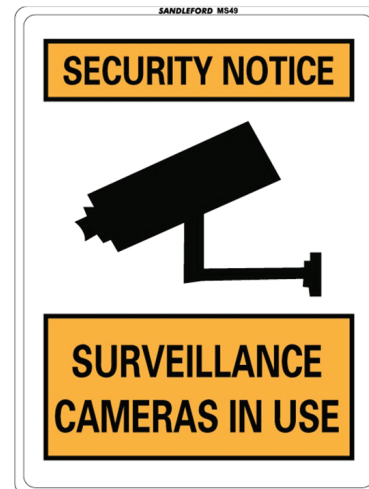


Anyone who works with computers learns to fear their capacity to forget. Like so many things with computers, memory is strictly binary. There is either perfect recall or total oblivion, with nothing in between. It doesn't matter how important or trivial the information is. The computer can forget anything in an instant. If it remembers, it remembers for keeps.

This doesn't map well onto human experience of memory, which is fuzzy. We don't remember anything with perfect fidelity, but we're also not



having forgotten our own to fade with time, and we are more salient events.

is firsthand experience of something important. Our memory is filled with stories of moments, inadvertently clobbered by information, undone by a single keystroke. We

live in a time when storage is so cheap we learn to save everything and keep it forever. You never know what will come in useful. Deleting is dangerous. There are no horror stories—yet—about keeping too much data for too long.

Unfortunately, we've let this detail of how computers work percolate up into the design of our online communities. It's as if we forced people to use only integers because computers have difficulty representing real numbers

Our lives have become split between two worlds with two very different norms around memory.

The offline world works like it always has. I saw many of you talking yesterday between sessions; I bet none of you has a verbatim transcript of those conversations. If you do, then I bet the people you were talking to would find that extremely creepy.

I saw people taking pictures, but there's a nice set of gestures and conventions in place for that. You lift your camera or phone when you want to record(1), and people around you can see that. All in all, it works pretty smoothly.

The online world is very different. Online, everything is recorded(2) by default, and you may not know where or by whom. If you've ever wondered why Facebook is such a joyless place, even though we've theoretically surrounded ourselves with friends and loved

“Real name” requirements by the cloud-based social networking platforms Facebook and Google+ expressly attack anonymity and pseudonymity online, affecting the fundamentals of political speech. Real name directives require users to register with a service using the name that is in their passport. The reasons given by cloud services for such real name requirements are vague—perhaps for fear of sounding too directly authoritarian. The preferred route, instead, is that of fatherly advice. Facebook claims that it has a real name policy “so that you always know who you’re connecting with,” while Google states that it requires real names so “that the people you want to connect with can find you.”³⁶ These explanations gesture towards a conception of normative social arrangements—requiring that your online name be the same name that you’d use in the real world for your friends, family, or colleagues. Alexis Madrigal points out in irony in the Google+ real name requirement: The kind of naming policy that Facebook and Google Plus have is actually a radical departure from the way identity and speech interact in the real world. They attach identity more strongly to every act of online speech than almost any real world situation does.³⁷ Cloud providers such as Amazon use real name registration as a mechanism for accountability. Though Amazon still allows users to use a “pen name,” the trademarked “real name” attribution is advertised as having the ability to “potentially increase your reputation in the community” as a retailer, seller, or reviewer.³⁸ Some see the real name badge as a step towards “fixing

I'm going to start right out by saying it: If it doesn't exist on the internet, it doesn't exist. I used to say this hyperbolically but as time has gone on, it's proved to be a truism, perhaps the paradigmatic truism of our times.

You might deny this until you realize that much of your self-worth is derived from Googling yourself; if you don't exist on the internet, you don't exist.

You get frustrated as I do when you are researching in front of your computer and what you're looking for doesn't show up on Google. Perhaps we are at the root of the problem.

It is our obligation as educators and intellectuals to make sure that the bulk of our production ends up there, preferably with free and unfettered access to all. This means not making materials available only for those affiliated with our institution, our students, or our colleagues, but giving free and unfettered access for all. Doing so means posting our works on the world wide web so that anyone, anywhere, at any time can have access to them. In this way, we will ensure that our work exists.