Twitter Thread by Smallest VioLinJinYue



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My generation is going to be the last in the West to remember life before the internet. I don't think anyone yet appreciates the scale of this psychological rift, or how jarring it really is.

Virtually everyone I have met in the last decade has an online presence. I can follow a lot of what they do in life, and could reach out and speak to them instantly, if I chose.

By contrast, if I think of someone I remember from my childhood - my early teachers, the dinner ladies, the friendly old man at the post office - and look them up, there will be simply no trace of them online. The same even goes for places I visited, which no longer exist.

I came to maturity with the internet, so am unfamiliar with most of the old archival ways of finding information, parish records, birth certificates, and so on. I would struggle to produce evidence that many of the people I knew as a child ever existed at all.

This is true, despite the fact that a fair number of them will obviously still be alive. But now it feels, sometimes, as if they only ever existed in my head, because they never existed on the internet. This is genuinely psychologically distressing to me at times.

Increasingly, all these people, places and events seem to drift into a ghostly pre-internet world, wholly disconnected from the present, where there weren't many photographs taken, and where anything recorded was done so on paper.

I lived in that world, and yet it already feels impossibly distant. It feels as if I lived the first dozen years of my life in an alternate dimension, where the world was smaller, where the only connection with the world beyond your physical surroundings was television or books.

Talk of hyperreality is overdone these days, but there has been a shift in the average person's epistemology, of how we know what we know. I still have enough libertarian in me to resent the way everything we do now is recorded somewhere, and yet...

... when I think back to a world where relatively little was recorded, I'm filled with a huge sense of loss for all the little things and people that will go unremembered, and, strangely, even a kind of faint horror.

This is because, despite knowing better, and despite having absorbed Kaczynski and @0x49fa98 on the horrors of modernity, I still now have the eerie and nagging sense that if something isn't on the internet, it didn't really happen.

I'm equally fascinated and disturbed by the cut-off going the other way. We're mostly already too lazy to go back and find and read anything in historical archives that aren't digitised. The internet has been a kind of cultural Year Zero.

https://t.co/dDDvoQpFAJ

> there's going to be a cut off in historical archives and memory where there are no letters written by anyone to anyone any more.
>
> — Sol Invictus aka Billy (@SolarJones3000) January 27, 2022

This is important, of course. Just because your facebook photos might still be easily available in 200 years, it doesn't mean anyone is ever going to look at them - and yet, to our monke brains, any evidence that you ever existed is a kind of immortality.

https://t.co/gIaAyB5kpV

> That\u2019s the trick of all this. The potential for self aggrandizement online is so vast, but after all, we will join those who might never have been.
>
> — strictlysnoozn (@strictlysnoozn) January 28, 2022