

New Data Manifesto.

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[...]

Billions of years ago, stardust collided, dispersed, and settled. It eventually solidified into the world that surrounds us. It became the sky, the mountains, the waves, the clouds. It is contained within you. And me. And all of us. You are made up of an unimaginable wealth of data...

[Standing opposite you is your reflection.] A testimony to your material presence, an indication of your biometric existence. Within you is a cloud of valuable data-points.

Over time, we have conceived and deployed machines, devices, and sensors to capture these unbridled streams of data. Our biometrics have become monetised and categorised, our body a key, a representation, a decision, a currency of exchange.

Our data has been channelled into datasets, the lifeblood of artificial intelligence. Most of them have been collected by a handful of individuals. Their visual preference is being circulated and consumed worldwide as we speak. These visual flows impact social norms and inform our implicit beliefs - they affect the opportunities we offer others or choices we make for ourselves, without us even knowing it.

The datasets enable artificial intelligence to power on tirelessly, and tread through the infinite noise of latent space, from which new artefacts are generated, and classified against the master dataset. If matched, they flow into our lives. If subpar, they are dissolved back into the depths of latent space.

While still in its infancy, the presence of artificial intelligence has been steadily gaining its footing. It has become embedded into our social fabric in numerous ways, proportional to the exponentially growing volume of big data. AI has taken on Herculean tasks, processing information magnitudes too complex for the human mind to command. Its autonomy has reached a palpable high, from which it can propose, generate, and govern infrastructures that delineate the world around us. Increasingly, it is being granted control over our decision-making and financial processes, juridical functions, and much more...

On the other, more passive end of the equation, has been you, the source. Your data is being channelled to numerous parties without your consent. You have been mapped out to granular detail by the myriad of convenient services that your data feeds. Who was once a data subject, is now a data object.

[...]

It is time to confront these rampant systems, and re-evaluate the power structures at the very source of our data streams. Monetisation should not, and cannot be the answer. It is time to guide the flow back onto our own ground. If we work together, we can establish a better foundation both for ourselves, as for our successors.

Despite all odds, we do have the agency to extricate ourselves from this abusive relationship, and regain custody of our own biometrics. The process will be long and taxing. As a start, we can decide to donate them only of our own accord, and audit the requests of existing systems. Ultimately, it is you, and you alone, who can actively choose for this.

The damage done cannot be undone, but we can cast a different glance forward [Before you is the seedling of a new dataset. It consists of individual metrics, like yours and mine.]

[...]