Reflections+Progress. Week 2

Type	Progress
Date	September 25, 2026
Purpose	Progression. Notes + Prototypes

Shaheer's feedback on obstructed physicality of the image helped me in redirecting and actually narrowing down the enquiry. It feels like this insight pinpointed what I was trying to articulate in my earlier experimentations.

The questions of

"What does that do to us?" and
"**Why is it meaningful?**"

led to other unresolved questions in my enquiry:

1. If physicality of the image is obstructed → then in what ways its obstructed and how to deal with this?
2. Why do I feel that it's important to physicalise the image? What is the underlying reason? Is that even an effective method?
3. What this revelation will do to us? Impact?

That's why I decided to go back to the beginning to redefine some of the aspects of the previous enquiry. Helpful resource in these was the book Beyond the image that attempts at revaluation of visual culture in the modern age.

Book 'Beyond the image'

> The image is reversed into its negative. It is no longer the mirror of reality. It is not the sign of that which has been, as Roland Barthes's photography, **but that which has not been; it is not the image of the past but the re-imagination of the present.** Nothing is able to overcome the digital medium except the digital medium itself.

Research and Reflections: 1. OBSTRUCTED PHYSICALITY

I came back to both texts of Hito Steyerl and Alessandro Sbordoni. Hito Steyerl claims that internet undead and its everywhere, where visual artefacts became so excessively reproducible that they started loosing any(original?) meaning, which is manifested through calling the image a 'poor' bastard of an original image. Sbordoni expands on these ideas, saying that "representation is a principle that no longer explains the image and it technology away", nowadays the value of the image is proportional to its reproducibility. The image starts being produced beyond its own end. The book hinted that our perception of reality shifts as we switched from analog to digital technology. Now as image and data became indistinguishable in our capitalistic society people strive to make the **gaze quantifiable and measurable** to make the image-production more appealing to customer.

> The **stare** is centred on the device. It is endless, habitual and quantified, like scrolling.
> An image that is finite and disappearing asks for something closer to the **gaze**. You can't stare at something that won't be there when you look back.

And, personally, I feel like that's an important observation that wasn't articulated by me before. Gaze got swapped by the stare. Gaze involves intellectual engagement and invites dialogue, while stare requires only passive consumption. The **stare** is centred on the device. It is endless, habitual and quantified, like scrolling. So, therefore, obstructed physicality can be understood as the current condition of media consumption rather than infrastructural and technological change which I was trying to unveil in my work before.

> Obstructed physicality can be understood as the current condition of media consumption rather than infrastructural and technological change

Research and Reflections: 2. PHYSICALISING THE IMAGE

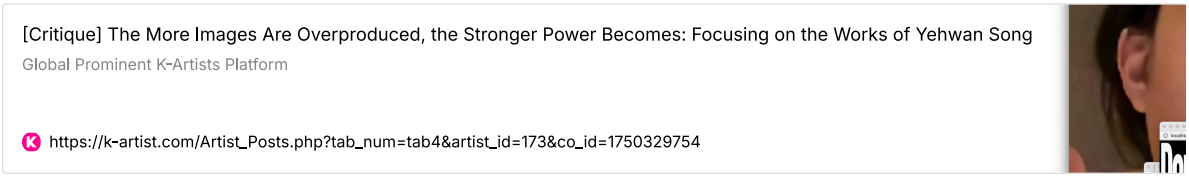
> **Objects are important "precisely because we do not 'see' them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. (A material history of bits, Approach)**

Through defining the meaning of obstructed physicality (so, in my case, level of engagement) it became easier for me to explain the urge to physicalise the image comes from the desire for more intentional consumption, yearning for gaze instead of stare. Mode of engagement with imagery has changed the context to passive consumption, uninvolved and bored staring. My research, attempts in giving the image a physical properties and tangibility were explained by limiting the boundless and infinite, attempt to assign roots to the image could be explained by giving it the context. By taming it's size, its reproducibility, I wanted to ground the image to the reality and preserve the link between the real-life moment and a piece of reproduction, which can be explained by the genuine wish to return the appreciation to the image format that became key to consumption economy.
It really came down to the question of how nowadays we engage with the information and how do we make it more purposeful? **How can we become more honest and human in this era?** So the expected impact would be seeing more deliberate approach toward the image and visual culture.

Research and Reflections: 3. REVELATION AND IMPACT

▼ **Research:**

▼ **Yeohwan Song**

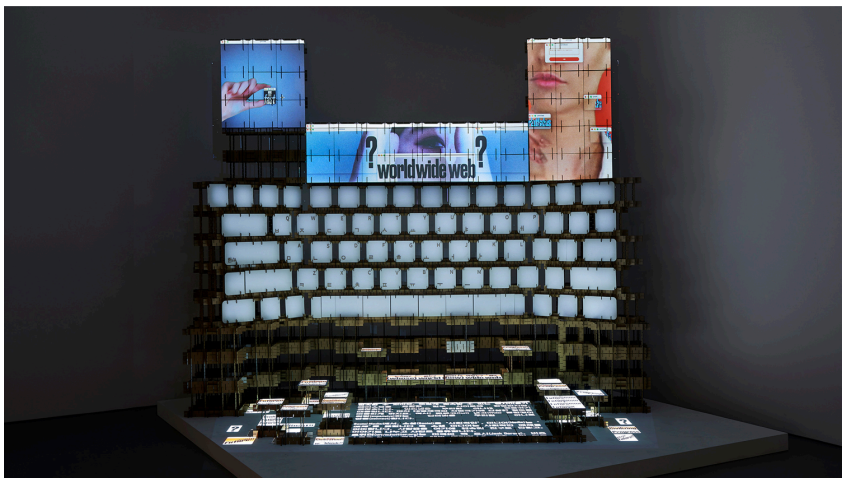


[Critique] The More Images Are Overproduced, the Stronger Power Becomes: Focusing on the Works of Yehwan Song

But in fact, what we actually perceive is not the web itself, but the images produced by the web's giant network.

Let's take a closer look at your immediate environment as you read this. You likely encountered this critique as text displayed on a screen; you visited a site to read the article and clicked a link with the title. Throughout this entire process, what you perceived can be listed as images: characters formed by consonants and vowels, a website composed of such characters, and the black-and-white arrangement of text in this critique. The web indeed serves as the medium connecting all these steps, but what we sense ultimately returns to images. Even Berners-Lee's choice to add two slashes after "http:" purely for aesthetic reasons reflects how important visual perception is. **In this sense, the previously mentioned "era of the web" can be regarded as synonymous with the "era of images." When the web is reduced to images, it becomes an attractive visual experience, which is particularly emphasized in the works of Yehwan Song.**

Within Song's works, the web deviates from its conventional form. It is no longer a means for information retrieval or online connectivity, but rather serves as a space for private engagement between the web and the user, producing visual imagery through their interaction. Her independently designed web pieces function as media that deliver a message, invoking Marshall McLuhan's (1911–1980) famous phrase "the medium is the message." This proposition draws attention to how media itself alters the world rather than merely serving as a vehicle for information transmission. **Applied to Song's web interfaces, her reactive web dismantles the standardized, regulated framework of conventional web design, promoting an alternative, active Internet environment that diffuses through diverse forms**



(Whose) World (How) Wide Web is a piece that critiques Korea's digital environment, which has been modeled after American and European laws. Once again, Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web comes into question. Every domain we use begins with "www." To write this domain, we must switch to the English keyboard. Even though Korean is our native language, we still use English when registering email addresses or creating Instagram account names, yet we rarely recognize this contradiction. Song confronts this complacency—or ignorance—by staging the work as a theater. The theater structure, modeled after a Hanmun keyboard, suggests that we are immersed in the fiction created by massive capital and authority, blind to reality. A prompter screen scrolls from bottom to top, gently pointing out the problems of social media and internet environments. The phrase "The internet connects us" repeats, and although the wording sounds positive, it contains a hidden irony—suggesting that the internet connects us through enforced frameworks, not through genuine freedom. **As seen in Song's work, digital power stems from our inability to recognize what we are missing, blinded by years of standardized web usage.**



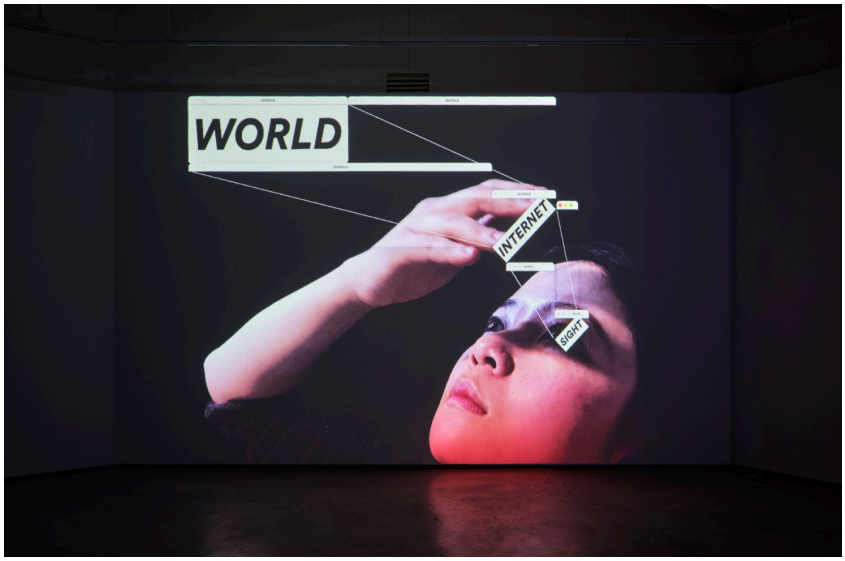
Furthermore, in *woldeu waideu* (2022), Yehwan Song exposes how restricted web environments impose generalized modes of interaction and visual perspectives, overlooking individual contexts and cultural differences. The projected images on multiple foam boards are composed of videos that, after being uploaded to and downloaded from various online platforms, have each been altered into different compression formats. These differently sized images suggest

that, while users may be accessing the same web environment through the World Wide Web, they are in fact situated in distinct and varied realities.

Another key element in this work is the movement of the mouse, which circles endlessly within a fixed boundary around the images. The internet has long been perceived as a space of transnational connection—free from physical constraints and capable of infinite expansion and mobility.

However, through this repetitive, circular mouse movement, **Song metaphorically reveals the reality that, despite the illusion of boundless navigation through the web, users are in fact confined within limited zones and exposed only to filtered information—trapped by algorithms engineered by powerful corporations.**

Yehwan Song, *The Surfers' Suspicion,* 2025, Single-channel video, sound, Dimension variable ©G Gallery



https://www.designboom.com/technology/code-contemporary-craft-yehwan-song-digital-art-innovation-through-making/

media-saturated present

Public Parking Publication | Manitoba | Public Parking
You have previously said that your work adopts an "anti-user-friendly aesthetic." Could you tell me more about what this means and share some examples?
https://thisispublicparking.com/posts/glitching-the-user-friendly-interface-in-conversation-with-artist-yehwan-song

Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism* (2020) considers error and disruption as acts of resistance, Song mobilizes these ideas in the everyday mechanics of the internet. As Dawn Chan observes in her writing on Asian Futurism, "When real Asian Americans—by which I mean people and not stereotypes—appear in media, we do so in the future, but not the present; in alternate realities, but not this one." Song's work, by contrast, insists on the immediacy and instantaneous feedback of the present internet. In opposition to techno-Orientalist tropes that situate the Asian female body as a speculative projection into distant futures, Song positions her own body as tethered to the present, caught in the banalities and absurdities of network culture. **Her work interrupts and confronts the sensory overload caused by data infiltration and bombardment.** In a digital world that promises freedom, Song contemplates how design interfaces shape perception and agency.

My "anti-user-friendly" projects ask users to think about the internet outside the "user-friendly" boundary**. In today's world, we're conditioned to follow narrow design strategies that train users to repeat the same gestures**: scrolling and swiping, consuming content we don't necessarily seek. Content refreshes automatically, and users rely on habitual, repeating actions without really thinking about what we're seeing. I found this deeply problematic when I worked as a UX/UI designer before becoming an artist. My experience made me want to break these patterns and

ask: what are we missing in this fast-developing technological environment? **How can we become more honest and human in this era?**

Being an artist allows me to reflect on my own habits and constraints. One of my ongoing projects involves a fountain that sprays water onto touchscreens. **Since water conducts electricity, the devices register the droplets as human touch, revealing how naïve technology is—equating conductivity with humanity.** I find it funny because we're usually told to protect devices from water, but here, the devices are intentionally immersed. I've ruined a lot of devices while working on this project, but it's part of the point.

Speaking of water, in your recent solo exhibition at Pioneer Works, *Are We Still (Surfing)?* (2025), you've used metaphors like "surf," "port," and "stream" to explore internet mythologies. What draws you to these metaphors, and how do they inform your approach?

I find these metaphors fascinating because the internet is hard to define—it has no fixed shape or tangible form. Water's unpredictability mirrors technology's uncontrollable nature. Water is powerful but also dangerous, and I use it to explore both the utopian and hazardous aspects of the internet.

Tracing the origins of these metaphors, early researchers and writers likened the internet to water in order to suggest its possibilities as a fluid, massive, and flexible space**. This language continues today in terms like "streaming," "cloud storage," or "data flowing." It reflects a sense of hope embedded in early internet culture that, like interconnected water bodies, we could connect people globally in ways previously impossible. This optimism is part of why water resonates so strongly with me.**

Your practice first began with net performances and later expanded into video installation and immersive environments. How did this shift in medium influence the way you think about technology, space, and audience interaction?

In my early work, I focused on performances where I used my body to interact with devices and websites in exaggerated or repetitive ways, presenting myself as a user. Over time, this expanded into immersive environments combining video installation and performance, allowing me to explore user behaviour in a more cinematic and interactive way.

The body is central to my work. At Pioneer Works, for example, I use my hands, face, and presence to reveal the repetitive behaviours users unconsciously perform, exposing how digital environments train, restrict, and sometimes possess us. My body becomes a tool to make these subtle constraints visible. Hybridity emerges not just in the blending of form and media, but in how technology and the human condition continually reshape one another.

> *"Glitching connects to the imperfection of the internet, which feels humane to me. When I encounter a glitch in technology, it's like finding a friend, a human presence within all this digital sophistication."*

▼ **A material history of bits**

Digital information can be accessed, used, or reproduced without the noise, corruption, and degradation that necessarily results from the handling of material carriers of information. **Immateriality, then, is fundamental to the ability of the digital to upend the analog world, the reason why any media that can be digitized or produced digitally will eventually succumb to the logics of digital information and its circulation through electronic networks**—an argument powerfully encapsulated by Negroponte's (1995) slogan, "from atom to bits."

Furthermore, a focus on materiality highlights that computation is a mechanical process based on the limited resources of processing power, storage, and connectivity.

Indeed, a focus on materiality suggests a profound disconnect between such political work and the self-portrayal of computing science as primarily concerned with the design of efficient abstractions (e.g., Wing's [2006] "computational thinking").

The trope of immateriality is not a new phenomenon by any measure. While William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) precipitated the term "cyberspace" into public consciousness, it also reiterated for a new set of technologies long-standing themes in the history of electronic communications, dating back at least to the telegraph: "the promise of telegraphy is metaphysical: by annihilating space and time, it allows humankind to escape physical limitations. The power and ubiquity of electricity are metaphorically attached to a newly disembodied consciousness" (Rosenheim, 1997, p. 93)

It is central, for example, to Viktor Mayer-Schönberger's recent and widely discussed essay on the value of forgetting, *Delete* (2009). He argues the negligible cost of preserving and accessing information threatens to usher in an era of "perfect remembering," with dire consequences for the fundamental human cognitive process of forgetting. The argument is predicated on an analysis of digital information as superior to all previous media "because it lacks the noise problem" (p. 57). This purported ability to escape the decay wrought by use, reproduction, or time strongly shapes Mayer-Schönberger's subsequent analysis of potential remedies to the end of forgetting (Blanchette, 2011).

Knoespel and Zhu (2008) suggest the popular characterization of cyberspace as "an ethereal escape from the filthy, hopeless 'meat' world" is inherited from a Cartesian dualism that posits a strict dichotomy between language (spirit) and the material world. Moving beyond such "romantic notions of immateriality," they suggest computing systems are characterized by a "continuous materiality,"

> "... a wide spectrum of materiality activated by a hierarchy of codes that moves from 'lower' machine code to 'higher' readable computer languages and to codes in general (structural, legislative, social, cultural, etc.). Each level of code engages natural language and the physical world in different ways, varying from the shifting voltage of computer circuits to our everyday activity. Altogether, the hierarchy of codes constructs a field of diverse materiality that is continuous and interconnected" (p. 236).

Kirschenbaum (2008) has offered the most original and sustained investigation of the physical constraints that obtain on digital media, through his extensive analysis of the mundane, the ubiquitous, and yet opaque and mysterious hard drive, the inscription workhorse of the computing age, and yet, until Kirschenbaum, a device bereft of sustained analysis.

His first line of attack concerns the curious discrepancy existing between the literary critics' view of electronic writing as ephemeral, fundamentally unstable, forever malleable and that of computer forensics experts, whose livelihood is predicated on the recovery of the numerous traces digital objects leave behind, even after their presumed deletion. The confrontation rapidly exposes the influence of a certain "media ideology of electronic text ... the notion that in place of inscription, mechanism, sweat of the brow (or its mechanical equivalent, steam), and cramp of the hand, there is light, reason, and energy unleashed in the electrical empyrean" (p. 39). Kirschenbaum's project then is to define "an approach capable of accounting for the ways in which electronic data was simultaneously perceived as evanescent and ephemeral in some quarters, and remarkably, stubbornly, perniciously stable and persistent in others" (p. 27). His answer rests on the distinction between two types of digital materiality, "forensic" and "formal."

The second dimension of formal materiality points to file formats and the structuration they impose on digital data as powerful constraints on mutability of bits—for example, in the case of JPEG images, different levels of compression result in images perceptually indistinguishable, but from which some information has been irretrievably lost. Similarly, the encoding of data in a file format enables or disables specific kinds of computational manipulation—e.g., a TIFF image of a document does not support search in same way a text file will. Thus, despite the flexibility and mutability of digital information, "the play of code is *not* always infinitely fungible and arbitrary—transformations are not always reversible, nor are all transformations always possible and achievable" (p. 149).

In contrast to the electronic components that make up the processor, the media leveraged over the years to store and access data—punch cards, magnetic tapes, hard drives, flash memory—profusely signify their materiality, through mechanical noise, slow speed, poor reliability, and sensitivity to wear. The abstractions that make up the storage stack must thus provide consistent services to applications in the context of wide discrepancies in the performance characteristics of storage technologies. The defining characteristic of these devices is their reliance on mechanical motion. From punched card to magnetic tape to disk drives, large-scale external storage has been realized by the physical movement of data, spread over one-dimensional (tape), two-dimensional (floppies), or three-dimensional surfaces (hard drives).

The File System Interface

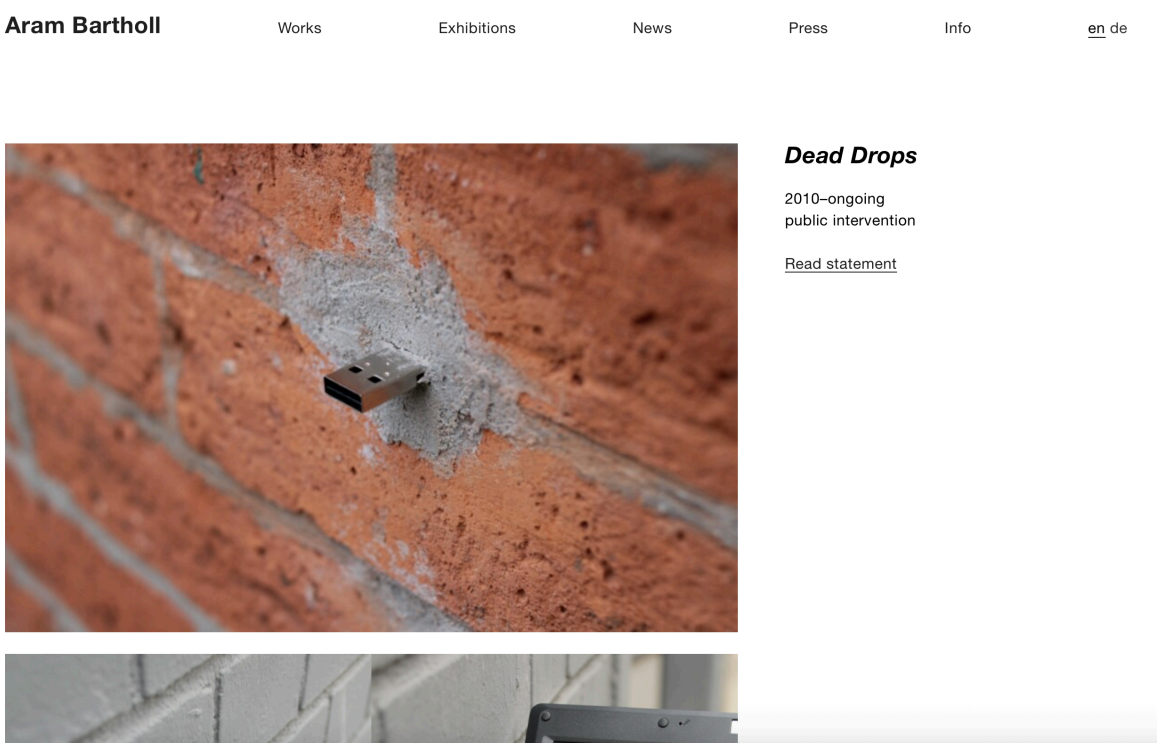
The primary abstraction that governs the relationship between applications and storage device is the file. The story of this abstraction must begin with the prominent role played by punch-card equipment in data processing until the late 1950s, a role now recognized in several studies (e.g., Campbell-Kelly, 1990; Yates, 2005). Punch cards served as input and output media, as well as long-term storage to the tabulating system. One punch card and its various data "fields" constituted a "record," while a collection of cards constituted a "file" (Haigh, 2009).

"The concepts of records, files, fields, special codes to mark the beginning and end of files, and the merging information from one file to another (all ubiquitous in computer systems today) have their origins in electromechanical punched card machine methods dating back to the 1930s. Records using the same basic format were laid out sequentially along the strip of magnetic tape. Additional codes were introduced to provide checks against corrupted data" (Haigh, 2009, p. 7).

Yet these dilemmas, these compromises, these struggles will increasingly matter, as the software infrastructure comes to mediate a breathtaking proportion of social relations. As Miller (2005) notes, **objects are important "precisely because we do not 'see' them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge.** They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so" (p. 5). The inability for a technical field to retrace the historical path of its most important and durable contributions has important consequences for its ability to critically reflect on its own evolution and the political work inherent in infrastructural design.66

The need for such critical reflection is particularly timely at this juncture in the evolution of computing. The current move towards mobile and cloud computing will introduce fundamentally new economic mechanisms for the valuation of the material resources of computing. In turn, the allocation, distribution, and metering of these resources, and the **design of the infrastructure that mediates them will become an increasingly visible and contested phenomena. The analytical framework in this paper provides means to make the infrastructural work of computing more visible, so that it may be engaged with by a broader range of stakeholders.**

▼ Aram Barthholl



▼ Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age

In chapters 2 and 3, the author jumps right into the heart of his argument by pinpointing what might be a key inflection point in our current societal transition: in a digital world, **remembering information has become the default mode of human behaviour**. This is perhaps the most interesting assertion and greatest contribution of the book; indeed, this section alone makes it worthy of the adulation it receives on its back cover. Mayer-Schönberger persuasively illustrates how, since the dawn of time, the default mode of information management by humans and societies has necessarily been to forget as remembering comes with high inherent costs. Delete traces the history of remembering and forgetting, the role of language, and external storage devices (such as oral stories and the printing press and paper) and shows how they have had a profound role on the very nature of society. However, the price of storage has so drastically plummeted it is now more cost-effective to keep data in storage than to spend time deleting them. While at first blush this may seem innocuous enough, and even beneficial, for Mayer-Schönberger it is the basis for negative implications both small and large. These concerns are based on at least two fundamental observations. **First, in the current form of our digital age our capacity as individuals to control information is vastly reduced** (p. 90). Second, and more speculatively, it constitutes a radical transition overturning thousands of years of social evolution with unknown and potentially negative ramifications.

Having laid the first premise of the argument, chapter 4 sketches out the contours of the challenges we face (p. 97). There are two separate but interrelated challenges that are summarized by two words: **power and time**. The challenge of power is a question of who controls what information in our digital world. The central argument here is **that individuals, for a variety of reasons, are losing power relative to their personal information as it shifts to known and unknown others**. In a world where governments and corporations can gather, store, and mine individuals digital traces, this shift in control over information further entrenches existing power asymmetries. Furthermore, the relative durability of the information means that this shift in power happens through time. In particular, Mayer-Schönberger argues that these **digital traces can act much like a digital surveillance panopticon with subsequently chilling effects on human behaviour. In a nutshell, the author is describing the potentially anti-democratic tendencies** and threats to information privacy that occur with an expansion of information flows in a political economy without the adequate mechanisms in place (legal, technical, or cultural) to balance power asymmetries. While this challenge is not novel, with its roots in the information society, information privacy and surveillance society literatures, Mayer-Schönberger s original premise concerning the inability to forget makes these challenges even more concerning and relevant than they were just a decade ago.

The second challenge of time is more novel and focuses on potentially detrimental constraints on our ability to act wisely when we have so much digital memory,

... **comprehensive digital remembering collapses history, impairing our judgement and our capacity to act in time. It denies us humans the chance to evolve, develop, and learn, leaving us helplessly oscillating between two equally troubling options: a permanent past and an ignorant present** (p. 127).

This is a decidedly weaker and more speculative argument than the challenge of power. However, Mayer-Schönberger is correct, it is troubling.

While it is clear that the current context of digital memory is a novel social development, and presents a new set of challenges, it remains to be seen if it is a greater social impairment than our more forgetful past. Is a more complete historic