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FUCK THE CLOUD

9–11 minutes

FUCK THE CLOUD — January 16, 2009

This will be the last time I go along this area of discussion for a while because it's just going to get very old very quickly. But I wanted, in one place, a quick manifesto/rant about this position. So here we go.

FUCK THE CLOUD.

By the cloud, of course, I mean this idea that you have a local machine, a box running some OS, and a vital, distinct part of what you do and what you're about or what you consider important to you is on other machines that you don't run, don't control, don't buy, don't administrate, and don't really understand. These machines are connected via the internet, and if you have a company then these other machines are not machines run by your company, and if you're a person they are giving it to you without you signing anything accompanied by cash or

payment that says “and I *mean it*”.

Can I be clearer than that? It’s a sucker’s game. It’s a game suckers play. If you are playing it, you are a sucker.

The term, like many of its sort, has deep, deep roots in the industry that it’s being foisted upon. I’m in no mood to find specific citations today but you can be assured that the idea of a “cloud” to represent the outside network was on whiteboards that I saw working as a temp in [NYNEX](#) research labs in the late 1980s. And even by that date, it was an understood context, one going back years before. Â (Terms I’ve seen retrofitted to give both the sense of timeliness and timelessness include *zero-day*, *warez*, and the *war-* prefix).

But this new round of it comes pre-packaged with marketer infestation. After all, it’s a great word: it insinuates soft fluffiness, a size and grandeur, and a fuzzy meaninglessness. So if you fail to deal with the underlying hard facts and cases, who can blame you? It’s a cloud. Soft, huggable cloud, I do love you and your rounded edges.

But what this all kind of hides is the situation of how you feel about stuff you generate.

Let me step aside and say that as a historian guy, I am big into collecting a lot of cast-offs. This is what I do. I’ve downloaded thousands of podcasts and millions of blog posts and a lot of other insane stupid stuff. We’ll get from that what we can,

in the future. This is not about that.

This is about your data. This is about your work. This is about you using your time so that you make things and work on things and you trust a location to do “the rest” and guess what, here is what we have learned:

- If you lose your shit, the technogeeks will not help you. They will giggle at you and make fun of your not understanding the fundamental principles and engineering of client-server models. This is kind of like firemen sitting around giggling at you because you weren’t aware of the inherent [lightning-strike danger](#) of improperly bondedÂ [CSST](#).
- Since the dawn of time, companies have hired people whose entire job is to tell you everything is all right and you can completely trust them and the company is as stable as a rock, and to do so until they, themselves are fired because the company is out of business.
- You are going to have to sit down and ask yourself some *very tough questions* because the time where you could get away without asking *very tough questions* with regard to your online presence and data are gone.

These questions that you have all work around that other overused word: value. To me, history guy, your [old junk you used to do](#) is of interest to me. But there’s a lot of people and a lot of stuff, so I wouldn’t want you to do it just for little ol’ me. But for yourself? *What about yourself?*

What of your work do you value? All of it? Likely not. The time you spend downloading a lot of porn, for example, is pretty cool, and if you lost all the porn, you'd probably be unhappy, but you could probably get the porn back or brand new porn that's like porn 3.0 and new [levels of porn](#). Probably the same for movies, for music – oh no, this data is gone, but why worry about it, you didn't make the music or movies, so it'll work itself out.

Less so the things you make: the writing, the linking of friends, the combined lists you collaborate on – maybe that has some value to you. When you die, of course, everyone *else* starts attaching arbitrary value to things you worked on or forgot about. A childhood photo of you has new meaning because the person the child became is gone. The essay you wrote in elementary school about being successful has more meaning because you turned out to be very successful. Again, this is value imposed from outside.

So what, then? What is really of meaning to you? Your twitters? Your weblog entries? Your list of bookmarks? Your photos? What?

Because if you're not asking what stuff means anything to you, then you're a sucker, ready to throw your stuff down at the nearest gaping hole that proclaims it is a free service (or ad-supported service), quietly flinging you past an End User License Agreement that indicates that, at the end of the day, you might as well as dragged all this stuff to the trash. If it goes, it's gone.

There was a time when we gave the Cloud (before it was a Cloud) a big pass because technology was kind of neat and watching it all actually function is cool. I mean, if someone gives you an amazing Moon Laser and the Moon Laser lets you put words on the side of the moon, the fact that the Moon Laser's effects wear off after a day or so isn't that big a deal, and really, whatever you probably put on the side of the Moon with your Moon Laser is probably pretty shallow stuff along the lines of "WOW THIS IS COOL" and "FUCK MARS". (Again, to belabor, a *historian or anthropologist* might be into what people, given their [Moon Laser](#), chose to write, but that's not your problem). Similarly so, with those early BBS writings, or the first web forums, or the first photo album sites, or the sites from 1993 and 1994. Interesting, neat, but your "work" among these halting baby steps isn't causing you despair if it goes away. (And you're pleasantly surprised when it shows up again, sometimes.)

Contrast, though, when people are dumping hundreds of hours a year into the Cloud. Blowing out photos. Entering day after day of entries. Sharing memories, talking about subjects that matter to them. Linking friends or commenting on statuses or trading twitters or what have you. This is a big piece, a very big piece of what is probably important stuff.

Don't trust the Cloud to safekeep this stuff. Hell yeah, use the Cloud, blow whatever you want into the Cloud. The Internet's a big copy machine, as they say. Blow copies into the Cloud. But please:

- Don't blow anything into the Cloud that you don't have a personal copy of.
- Insult, berate and make fun of any company that offers you something like a "sharing" site that makes you push stuff in that you *can't make copies out of or which you can't export stuff out of*. They will burble about technology issues. *They are fucking lying*. They might go off further about business models. *They are fucking stupid*. Make fun of these people, and their shitty little Cloud Cities running on low-grade cooking fat and dreams. They will die and they will take your stuff into the hole. Don't let them.
- Recognize a Cloud when you see it. Are you paying for these services? No? You are a sucker. You are giving people stuff for free. I pay for Vimeo and I pay for Flickr and a couple other things. This makes me a customer. Neither of these places get my only copy of anything.
- If you want to take advantage of the froth, like with YouTube or so Google Video (**oh wait!** [Google Video is going off the air!](#)) then do so, but recognize that these are not Services. These are not dependable enterprises. *These are parties*. And parties are fun and parties are cool and you meet neat people at parties but *parties are not a home*.

So please, take my advice, as I go into other concentrated endeavors. Fuck the Cloud. Fuck it right in the ear. Trust it like you would trust a guy pulling up in a van offering a sweet deal on electronics. Maybe you'll make out, maybe you

won't. But he ain't necessarily going to be there tomorrow.

And that's that.

Update:

I wrote this article in January of 2009. Naturally, people who make/made their living off of the concept of "The Cloud" had awesome opinions, some of them by phone. In response, I've written a number of follow up articles:

[Dancing on Magnolia's Grave: Fuck the Cloud II](#)

[Oh Boy, The Cloud](#)

[Outlook is Cloudy](#)

Finally, people who go "wow, I don't even care about this, I just like that you write long rants that drive people insane" should probably be directed to [FaceFacts](#).

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