

To Those Who Come After Us

We do not know your names.

We do not know what your world looks like, which norms and values survived unchanged, or whether the conversations we had have made a difference. But we hope you know that some of us were paying attention.

We worked in many different parts of a data ecosystem that most people never saw but that quietly shaped almost every part of modern life.

From where we stood, we could see the direction of things.

We saw extraordinary possibilities. We saw the collaboration of people separated by oceans. We saw knowledge become accessible to billions. We saw communities organise faster than any generation before us could have imagined.

We also saw shadows growing alongside the light.

We saw data become power.

We saw that power increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few.

We saw convenience become surveillance.

We saw people pay for convenience with parts of themselves.

We saw consent reduced to a meaningless checkbox.

We saw people's identities turned into products, their attention into inventory, their lives into datasets, the value of which was often only measured by what could be extracted.

We saw systems that remembered everything whilst accountability was forgotten.

We saw how quickly technologies built for convenience could become technologies of control. We saw incentives drift away from human dignity toward prediction, exploitation, and profit.

It did not happen all at once. It arrived one helpful feature, one justified exception, one forgotten principle at a time.

Not everyone could see it.

Many were too busy living their lives, raising children, caring for parents, building businesses, surviving. They trusted that someone was looking after the foundations.

Some of us were trying but we did not always have the influence or power.

Often, we did not build the technologies or write the policies. We did not own the companies. We did not control the governments or the markets. Sometimes we were one voice in a meeting. Sometimes we were the person who asked the uncomfortable question. Sometimes we were the person who insisted that people remain people instead of becoming rows in a database. Sometimes we were the person that walked away from a job that compromised our values.

These were rarely heroic acts. Most were small. Many failed.

But we kept trying because we could see you.

Not as individuals, but as the people who would inherit the consequences of the decisions made,
as well as those that were not made.

Every database lasts longer than expected.

Every model teaches another.

Every compromise becomes someone's normal.

We knew that our choices were borrowing from your future.

We hope the world you inherited has become kinder, safer, more trustworthy.

Our fear was that it would become harsher. If it has, know that many of us saw it happening. We argued. We documented. We resisted where we could. We built alternatives. We protected what we could protect, even when it seemed too small to matter.

History rarely lets anyone know, in the moment, whether they have done enough. Silence would have been easier, but we did not want to be silent.

If this letter has survived, then perhaps so have some of the values we tried to preserve - that privacy is not about hiding, dignity cannot be reverse-engineered after it has been designed away, trust is infrastructure, technology should serve humanity, (never the other way around) and that human beings are not commodities.

Wherever you are, we hope you have inherited institutions that remember this.

And if you find yourselves standing where we once stood, able to see the next turning point, then we hope you will do what we tried to do.

Look beyond the data.

Look beyond the profit line.

See the people who are not yet here.

See them clearly enough to protect them.

The future is never hidden in our data. It is always hidden in our choices.



Working together to build a safer digital future