

The analytical parsing and crisis of data loss of eyewitness accounting for future social scientists.

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A short discussion on the value of recording observational eyewitness account data and opinions from elderly humans to ensure both event-driven subjective data for future analysis as well as aggregate meta-data.

*"Time, time, time,  
See what's become of me  
While I looked around for my possibilities."  
-- Paul Simon – lyrics from A Hazy Shade of Winter*

*"I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain."  
-- Replicant android Roy Batty – Blade Runner*

*"In a hundred years, sand dunes will bury the ruins. In five hundred years, Audoghast will survive only as a few dozen lines of narrative in the travel books of Arab scholars. ...Such is the truth, regrettable as it may be. You, and all you love, will leave no trace in this world, except a few lines in the writing of strangers. ...But delightful Audoghast, said the poet, weeping. All our loveliness, lost to the sands."  
-- Bruce Sterling -- Dinner in Audoghast*

The modern era is one of atomized segments of visual data. YouTube videos and near real-time recordings of events via satellite, camera, and broadcast technologies. But, while the trend of sensory and visual data recording, storage, and analysis progresses at exponential rates with present and future observations, our society is catastrophically ignoring a source of priceless data regarding "the past." That data, albeit subjective, is the data contained in the personal experiences and visual memories of all the elderly humans still alive on our planet.

Consider the large scale data stores and online data repositories of Google Maps, Project Gutenberg, Wikipedia, YouTube, or even the MOOCs. As historians and data analysis moves into the future, every day we lose vast amounts of data akin to the cosmological horizon of starlight that expands beyond our experience forever via Dark Energy expansion. That data is an invaluable archive that can be "mined" and utilized like any other data except that it cannot be easily downloaded. In short, from a commercial point of view (especially at scale), we are under-estimating the value of visual nuggets of eye-witness accounting data. If one hundred people saw the Titanic leave harbor and a film director wanted accuracy (as a random theoretical example) and ten people say the ceremonial sash was blue but seventy say it was red, then you have likely and probable "value" from the aggregation of the visual reports from human memories. It is unimaginable that we have educated and experienced human beings whose lessons, observations, and opinions are not being recorded and stored as data to assist future generations and future scientists and historians.

One can imagine legions of students on summer jobs going to nursing homes or to their grandparents with cellphones and video cameras being paid a small wage to collect such valuable accounting and observational data. It is the "eye-witness accounts" and "subjective experience" that is being lost to time that exists in the minds of the elderly (all of them) that will be priceless for the future especially for those events without any visual or already documented witnesses which have yet to be determined as critical. I am sure

aspects of senility, false memory, and bias come into play but, at a large scale, we can test for this and eliminate its influence on any analysis.

Imagine not only the impact of the added social worth and value being attributed to our elderly citizens and the benefit of dialogs being established between the busy young and the lonely old, but also the benefit of a data repository that could be amassed from a simple battery of questions. An example set of questions could be something as simple as this list of ten questions below. It is obvious how a final database of responses from millions or even billions of interviewees would lead to a much broader understanding of unknown and even widely known events and phenomena.

*Please describe visually, emotionally, and/or technically:*

- 1) *a historical or political event or disaster that impacted them or that they saw in person?*
- 2) *a sporting event or concert that they saw in person?*
- 3) *a book or story that had a major impact on their life and why?*
- 4) *a technology or "paradigm change" like a law or war that had an impact on their lives or their community?*
- 5) *social changes that they never imagined would happen?*
- 6) *where they have traveled to in their life and what was the most interesting thing they ever saw or did?*
- 7) *anything they wished they could have said to someone or regretted not saying to someone?*
- 8) *something perhaps terrible they witnessed that they wished others would know about or that we should prevent in the future?*
- 9) *what they wish is the one thing that the world should change or have in the future?*
- 10) *who was their hero when they were young and why?*

Each day, year, and decade that goes by, quite literally, petabytes of data are lost to eternity but also lost is the contextual value of experience and opinion and the possible "lessons learned" aspects of actual participants and eyewitnesses. Consider, finally, "of what value is a championship game, if there are no fans?" May we record and learn from every fan and player in our world's history.