

IN PRAISE OF DELETING YOUR PICTURES

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If You Delete Your Pictures, Are You Deleting Your Memories, and if You Delete Your Memories, Do You Delete Yourself?

The other day, I ran out of space on my RICOH GR II, and ran out of space on my 128GB SD card. I figured, the best thing to do was to reformat it and wipe it clean, so I can have space to make new pictures, and perhaps this liberating idea of starting from scratch.

But, I paused. I hesitated. I was scared to clean it.

But why?

I was not sure. I had to think about it.

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First of all, I had to worry, “Did I have all my pictures backed up?” I was stressing out... I didn’t have that many external hard drives. Would my images be safe on “the cloud”? Should I use Dropbox or Google Drive?

Then I thought,

“Why am I so obsessed with backing up my pictures?”

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The thought: I felt that by erasing my pictures, or not having the pictures backed up... that if I lost my pictures, I would somehow lose a part of “myself.”

In other words, **my pictures are my personal memories. And without memories, I don’t exist.**

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I think 2,000 years into the future, we will still make pictures. We will make paintings (digital or paint based), we will make photographs (not only video). Why?

We have been making cave paintings for millennia. Why?

My theory:

To Be Human is to have memory.

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For example, if we have memory of the past...we have a storage of past experiences, to better act in the future. Also, we “predict” the future by drawing upon our memory.

The film maker Akira Kurosawa once elegantly said, “To create, you must draw from your memories.”

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We are all an amalgamation of our memories. Of our experiences, of the pictures, culture, and things we experienced as a child or in the past.

We are who we are based on the friends we had, our memories of our victories and low points, and the memories is what gives us a coherent sense of “self”.

For example, if you think about the molecules and atoms in your body today compared to your 5 year old self, it is 100% different. Yet, you would still call your 5 year old self as “you”. Why? We have a sense of CONTINUITY of memories, that links us to our past self.

Therefore, **no memories, no self.**

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Daniel Kahneman poses an interesting question in his book, THINKING FAST, THINKING SLOW:

If you could go on a fancy vacation or trip, but had to take a pill at the end of the trip, erasing all your memories, would you still go?

Most people say no.

But... you still experienced the experiences. But, if you cannot REMEMBER or recollect those memories, are those experiences of any use or value?

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When we travel, we take pictures. Why? We want to remember our trip. If we cannot remember our trip, it did not happen. And today, **we put more faith in images and pictures than in words and our “faulty memory”**.

However, some interesting science suggests that when we take picture of something...we are actually LESS LIKELY to remember it! Which is a paradox to me.

For example, when we take a picture of a nice event or experience we are subconsciously telling our brain:

Don't worry brain, you don't need to remember or catalogue or add this to your memory. We are going to outsource this memory to the camera and picture. If you want to remember it, just go back and look at the picture.

For myself, for really really important life events with friends, family, I DON'T TAKE pictures of it. Why? By not taking a picture or selfie, it forces me to actually commit the experience, feeling, to memory....not to outsource the memory consolidation to a digital camera, where the pixels will eventually evaporate into the digital ether.

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Law of conservation of energy

It's getting fun, let's talk physics.

Apparently, Matter cannot be created or destroyed. There is a "law of conservation of energy." Who knows, maybe one day we will disprove this "law".

Anyways, imagine if you only had one memory card for your digital camera, and that space cannot be exceeded or made smaller.

For example, let's say you just had a 1 Terabyte hard drive. You could never add or buy more storage. If you run out of space, you gotta DELETE old stuff, to make room for the new.

Now to me, DELETING is probably the best invention for computers. Why? It's like our brain and memories...we must delete to make room for the new. This is why death is important. If we never died, we would never make room for new people.

Imagine if we were all immortals. All the tenured professors would never die, this new graduate students could never gain their coveted positions. And unfortunately, academia is a zero sum game... there are only so many tenured professor jobs that exist. Only so many universities in the world.

If Elvis Presley never died, rock and roll couldn't have moved on. Same with the Beatles, Michael Jackson. If Michael Jordan never got old, and retired from basketball, Kobe Bryant couldn't have risen. And if Kobe didn't rise, other new comers couldn't take the limelight.

Anyways, death is the clearing agent for all of life (Nassim Taleb). We must delete the past, and delete our past memories.. to move forward in life.

My theory is that is how the human brain and memory works.

We must clear old memories and delete old memories, to have NEW experiences, to LIVE MORE, and to not get trapped in the past.

Life is about NEWNESS. Life is about NEW GROWTH. We must shed our old skin, or else we would die.

Why do we get stuck in the past?

“Snake must shed its skin, or it will die.” - Nietzsche (Dawn of Day)

Nostalgia, it is a bitter sweet sense of recollection of the past.

For example, I often feel nostalgic when I think of my childhood. Counter strike, Starcraft, playing Texas Holdem with my friends, Tekken, boxing, playing football and tennis, riding bicycles around town, etc.

But... why do I feel this sense of longing for the past?

My theory; We always look at the past as a SAFE space, where things never change. We hate change. It's in our DNA... we have a complacency bias, or a bias against change. We want things to stay certain, and safe. Because we're afraid of danger.

We hate to make new routines. We love the status quo.

For me, I know I'm pretty set in my ways. I hate learning new software, workflows, etc. to change my camera equipment, operating system, or life philosophy is exhausting, hard, and stressful. We prefer life easy, smooth, and not random or open to change.

But a life without change... is death.

Therefore my theory is this:

We feel nostalgia and a longing for the past, because of FEAR OF CHANGE.

Why do we fear change? Our primal instincts tell us that change and randomness, and uncertainty can cause death.

Fortunately, we live in a society that we will not die from the weather, we won't die of starvation or from thirst, from the cold or the heat. We live in a very stable and safe time... yet, we cannot change our human biases. After all, our human

psychology is what helped us survive for millenia.

But unfortunately, we have outgrown and evolved FAR TOO QUICKLY. Our technology has outstripped our human minds.

Therefore, I believe that we must evolve BEYOND our human and cognitive biases, to become a MORE EVOLVED species of humankind.

Let's not be a slave to the past, our irrational fears, and our irrational cognitive biases... or else, how do we know how far we can fly? How can we take risks? How can we achieve glory and valor in our lives?

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To sum up, here are my main points:

1. Delete the past, to make new memories.
2. To have a sense of "self" is to have memories.
3. When we take pictures, we actually are less likely to remember the event.
4. Therefore, should we NOT photograph our valuable personal experiences (in order to actually remember them), and should we reserve photography as making pictures as art?
5. Don't be a slave to the past., live for TODAY and THE FUTURE!

BE STRONG, ERIC

And if you're curious, yes I did reformat my SD card. Like a fresh breath of air... to create something new...