

On the Record

While listening to Dizzy Gillespie's rendition of his own song, *A Night in Tunisia*, in the live recording of his concert at Chester, Pennsylvania, on June 14th 1957, * it suddenly dawned on me that I was participating in an event which occurred in a space/time reference-frame very distant from that "here-and-now" experience of my listening to it –probably on December 17th 2022, Montreal, Canada. Thus, through the wonder of 20th century recording technology, and of my 21st century telecom's broadcasting technology, I had the privilege of *almost* being in that audience, grooving on Dizzy's crazy be-bop sound, while simultaneously feeling awed at the realization that Gillespie, his band and most of the people there, ...are no longer alive.

Taking it one step further, I began to explore the evolution of records since the earliest attempts at documenting space/time reference-framed (R-F) events considered important in human history; and then I realized that **History is in effect Recording**.

One of the earliest documents purportedly recording an important event is the so-called Narmer Palette, which commemorates the victories of Egyptian King Narmer, who came from southern Egypt to invade the northern Delta in about 3200-3000 BCE. It is a 2.07 foot-tall, shield-shaped, ceremonial palette, carved from a single piece of siltstone. The scene on the front shows the king, clobbering a helpless foe from the North. The upper section of the back side shows Narmer again, and depicts the corpses of ten beheaded men. Of course, there are no witnesses alive today who can assure us that Narmer did smite and/or decapitate all those men single-handedly; but his scribes and chisellers were so ordered to record his ghastly deeds for all successors and pretenders to shudder and beware. **

Curiously enough, as I happen to be now reading Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, I can see how easy it is for personal bias to distort a historian's record of events. *De vita Caesarum* is a set of twelve biographies of Julius Caesar –who died in 44 BCE– as well as those of the next eleven emperors of the Roman Empire –the last one being Domitian, who died in 96 A.D. Since at the time of writing (121 A.D.) Suetonius was emperor Hadrian's personal secretary, there can be no certainty as to the accuracy of his portrayals. ***

The assassination of Julius Caesar has been portrayed in countless plays, films and paintings over the centuries; but none of them can accurately record the actual space/time R-F of March 15th 44 BCE, nor those of each of the senators who participated from their varying S/T R-F points of view, nor of those of any of the witnesses of said event. Only a time machine could presumably help a future historian to travel back to that day and record the exact moments of the assassination –thereby creating a new space/time R-F to reproduce, so it can be downloaded to each future spectator on their smartphones at hundreds of space/time R-Fs of their own choosing –each one from a unique and different personal perspective.

It is really in the last century, with the growing sophistication of both advertising and propaganda, aided by ever-improving technologies, that recording of space/time reference-frames (i.e., History) has grown exponentially both in quantity and in quality.

However, no one today can really be sure of the truth or authenticity of what is broadcast by our news agencies and social media. In other words, our perception of what is really happening is illusory. (I shudder to think that at this very moment hundreds of thousands of digital recordings of newlyweds kissing are being uploaded to the Cloud for eternity!)

George Orwell wrote in his dystopic novel *1984*: “Those who control the present, control the past, and those who control the past, control the future.” Published in 1948, it reflected the fact that Orwell, as a war correspondent, was keenly aware of the mind-warping effectiveness of Joseph Goebbels’ Nazi propaganda, as well as Stalin’s constant revision of Soviet history –which eliminated all records of his rivals’ activities prior to and during the Russian revolution.

The ancient Greek philosophers understood that what we think of as “facts” are just appearances or phenomena –from the Greek *phainomenon* (“a thing that appears or is perceived, an occurrence...”) to be distinguished from a *noumenon*, which they defined as “an intangible object of perfect knowledge.” *****

Although dealing with the behavior of atomic quanta, Werner Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, first introduced in 1927, illustrates the difficulty of empirical science to accurately define space/time phenomena. It asserts a fundamental limit to the accuracy with which the values for certain pairs of physical characteristics of a particle, such as position, x , and momentum, p , can be expressed simultaneously.

Heisenberg unwittingly reiterates what Plato already stated in *Republic* (514–520 BCE), that we are only prisoners seeing shadows projected on a cave wall and thinking they are real.

* *Dizzy Gillespie and his Orchestra “Live” Chester, Pennsylvania, June 14, 1957. Jazz Unlimited.*

** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narmer_Palette

*** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Caesars

**** <https://www.etymonline.com/word/phenomenon>

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