

Was there Really a Quantified Self?

The past decade has seen the rise and the decline of what has been labeled as the Quantified Self movement. The movement aimed to gather up those practitioners using and tweaking technology to track their lives and learn from it. Started in California amidst the new technology giants, the movement quickly spread out into many cities around the world. The almost monthly gathering that saw a lot of enthusiasts not only participate and present their "inventions" but also academics and journalists capitalizing on the issue, all the enthusiasm has disappeared to such extent that the co-founder of the movement Gary Wolf has announced the renaming of the movement.

While still focusing on the knowledge generated by people doing their empirical experiments the Quantified Self 2.0 is still providing a large umbrella for all those who self-track. Clearly however, and we understand this from the majority of examples that are provided, the focus is now completely shifted and the movement is completely dedicated to allow folk to figure personal ways to self-diagnose their diseases or disturbs. Now I believe that this is a most important move in order to survive, being the medical and pharmaceutical industry so wealthy yet to me it seems too much of a post-enlightenment approach.

To me this new reconfiguration of the movement seems rather in line with the experiments conducted by rich and at times noble individuals throughout the 18th century, attempting in their own set up to make new scientific discoveries with the only difference that these discoveries have been already made. Now I do not want to make too strong of a point pursuing this path but I do want to make a point that such a specialization of the movement comes to emancipate those who have in fact attempt to know themselves in a more humanistic fashion.

As I have been writing in many of my other essays it is definitively so that the humanist quantifiers have in fact by far anticipated and made meaning of a phase in history in which technology is becoming very specific to the point of being able to register life at large. Beside financial issues, is it because Gary is afraid of the privacy implications particularly in puritan Europe that the move to simply host medical kind of self-tracking has been actuated?

To some extent here I would like to point out a distinction between the humanist quantifier and the scientific quantifier. Beyond any fashionable conception of hoarding, if we agree that humanist quantifying is somewhat of Stoic practice as suggested by Michel Foucault in his essay "Technology of the Self" then we should also agree that the humanist quantifier should be rather cynic about scientific quantifying. So not only this

new stoic (the humanist quantifier) is cynic about all the fuss that scholars and journalists and politicians and artists have made around the issue of privacy as, Seneca speaking, by being virtuous there is truly nothing to hide, but the new stoic is most cynic about the new epicurean, the scientific quantifier who is so worry about simply the body and cannot use his or her own faculties to examine the issue nor he or she can drastically change his or her life to live more according to nature (meaning more frugal and less consumeristic) nor most importantly he or she can endure pain.

Let's remember that by cultivating our humanist self, our virtues, or at least even by attempting to cultivate them, we aim to be like god on earth with the only difference that every day we are dying. So while the new epicurean and the QS 2.0 (or whatever it will be called) along with all the industry representing them are aiming to make human viciously immortal, our aim is indeed to be mortal, to let newer generations to step in and live a simple life without many expectations, without any heavy footprint but simply in the name of letting a testimony onto others. Said this no movement or organization or even worst an empire is needed, just a few good listeners.