

How will Covid-19 be remembered?

Making Use of Arts & Technology to make the past more accessible

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The Covid-19 pandemic is far from being over, but memory institutions are already reflecting on how the outbreak will be remembered, as they make choices about what and how to document. However, records that illustrate past pandemics are often presented in a way that is often not engaging for the audience.

For this reason, I use [my work with war survivors](#) and the records that remain [from pre-war Hiroshima](#) to argue for the importance of using arts and technology in preservation and dissemination efforts. These will be key in ensuring that the memory of the Covid-19 pandemic remains powerful and long-lasting.

According to [Aleida Assmann](#), there are four types of memory: individual, social, political and cultural. Individual and social memory are embodied in the form of material objects, such as written documents or photographs, and built on “*inter-generational* communication”. In contrast, political and cultural memory need to be re-embodied from short-term to long-term inheritance because they are mediated and built on “*trans-generational* communication”.

Political and cultural memory could be transformed in public spaces such as libraries, museums and monuments. Such public spaces play an essential role in trans-generational communication. When people are exposed to a particular historical event in a memory institution, the memory of that event appears to become their own, even if it has its origin in a previous generation. In turn, this could generate the shift from vague bottom-up memory to distinct and systematized memory.

Individual and social memory are formed through the relationships and experiences of a given individual. As such, future generations risk losing these memories, unless they can continually access them through memory institutions.

To prevent such loss, modern technology can be innovatively used to enhance the memory of what the society at the time had deemed important – recorded via news and other media as well as cultural institutions.

There are examples to illustrate such innovative use of technology to enables us to store individual and social memory as a “*canon*” on online platforms. Not only experts, but also the general public can thus access precious records more easily. When it comes to the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, the [Milwaukee Coronavirus Digital Archive](#) in the USA and [Corona Archive @Kansai University](#) in Japan are the perfect examples. Both are documenting the pandemic in ways that are easily accessible and allow for engagement with the public. These archives will be relevant to both academic research and public education in the future.

Beyond using online tools, simple artistic techniques, such as [colouring](#), can be useful to bring to life records of past events of historical significance, including pandemics. Colouring gives a more realistic look to black and white photographs and thereby arouses more sympathy in viewers. It enables the materials to be better imprinted in their minds. This can in turn help people to imagine similar disasters happening again and possibly seek to prevent them in the future.

That is why, based on my exchange with Hiroshima war survivors, I coloured pre-war black and white photographs of the city, thus reviving their memories.

With respect to the Covid-19 pandemic, I have colored [the photographs of one of the past disastrous pandemics, the Spanish flu of 1918 in Camp Funston at Fort Riley, Kansas.](#) I based my project on [Watanave's work](#). About 100 years have passed since the Spanish flu first spread; however, most people do not know much about it.

In conclusion, I encourage not only memory institutions and documentary heritage professionals but also the public to explore using [arts and technology](#) to ensure that past memories remain easily accessible, engaging and relevant to all eras.