

BIT ENGINEER'S REPORT

SUICIDE BOX [SBX.3] filed Jan 23. 1997

BUREAU OF INVERSE TECHNOLOGY San Francisco office, has recently generated significant results in the test deployment of the SUICIDE BOX [Sb 03]. The following review is an annotated excerpt from the engineer's report, commissioned by the bureau after initial public release of the data on video. The bureau plans further research and development of this information product that will be funded by the sale of the data generated.

The 100 test days of the second deployment period captured 17 events, averaging a rate of 0.17 suicides/day. This compares to the 0.13 rate calculated using Port Authority data averaged over the last two years. Assuming that the weather has neither positive nor negative effect on likelihood of jumping; that in San Francisco conditions of poor visibility can be more than 60% of total time; and that likelihood of jumping is equal from all parts of the bridge; this brings the suicide rate closer to 0.68 suicides/day and suggests that the estimated rate of this phenomenon in the previous accounts is too small by a factor of 4.

Using this projected figure and a mid-range value of life estimate (that is, the National Highway and Transport Safety Authority figure used in the cost-benefit analysis of the 55 mile per hour limit legislation of \$500,000 dollars per life) we can recalibrate the rate of loss in economic terms as \$182- \$238 per day. This is less than 1% of the revenue generated at the toll gates.

However, there are a number of ways to interpret the data. To provide an evaluate of the Bureau's method we need to compare to other data sources. While there are other databases that provide correlates to the suicide rate, such as those used in life insurance calculations, there is none known that has the capacity to store video images of their source statistical data. Why this is the case is an open question but can probably be attributed to data storage convenience and expediency of calculation. The Bureau has not only produced a method for the consistent collection of video enhanced comprehensive data and the proprietary algorithms to capture and store the information, but has done pioneering work to index this data to market indicators. This provides the possibility for this information to be integrated into the daily economic concerns, incorporating it into the micro attention that market indicators receive.

The first application of this data, is the opportunity to characterize the value of suicide. Legislators using cost-benefit analysis to decide between policy options on death averting and public safety measures, are currently divided between the 'willingness to pay' and the 'human capital' (or foregone earnings) approaches. The willingness-to-pay measure is derived from estimates of how much individuals are willing to pay to reduce their probability of death by small amounts, while the 'human capital' measure is based on estimates of the present value of foregone earnings due to premature death. Surveys used to capture willingness-to-pay typically yield values of life from \$50 thousand to \$8million. Although a narrower range of \$300K- \$3.5million is produced by labor market surveys, 'willingness-to-pay' is favored over 'human capital'.

Using the BIT SUICIDE BOX data, a robust and market responsive value of life can be calculated, using essentially an inverse correspondence of the value of suicide. The rate of suicide can be taken to represent the general 'willingness-to-die' as an averaged phenomenon. This value, quantified by the amount of money spent on the prevention measures (that is, the sum total spent on suicide crisis lines, crisis services and subsidies to mental health services) provides a base line measure for the inverse of the value of life.

An important baseline adjustment, this data captures the value of life at the rare moment when the choice is reduced to its uncomplicated binary decision. It does not follow that paying nothing is equivalent to not wanting to reduce the risk of death.

The value of suicide has previously been extremely hard to quantify and represent. It has unlike many other aspects of health care, life, death etc., resisted commodification. That is, it is not subject to a service sector, package tours, instructional kits or market predictability. The failure to commodify suicide and its images and enter it into the systems of exchange and value has meant that it has been undervalued, worse, has not had an explicit value at all. The work of the SUICIDE BOX, in its imaging of suicide, recovers this statistical representation as visual rendering, and quantifies what it is to render suicide, and everything else, in the logic of information.

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