"Ideally, we would cause a minuscule perturbation in the space-time continuum: create a change historically significant enough that it would rapidly propagate into our records, but which would not materially affect the underlying foundation of our current timeline."

Notes

This story does not contain any explicit rape or non-con but does allude to a current event in which someone is alleged to have been (possibly coercively) put into an embarrassing sexual situation.

See the end of the work for more notes.

"Geordi, I believe I have found --" Data paused. "-- a loophole in the security parameters. The time membrane permits recording of and even interference with past beings whom it does not consider sentient. However, the entity that created the automated criteria for sentience evidently did not make the same assessments that we would make today. In particular, most Federation member species, for most of their existence, would not meet the standard encoded in the membrane's ruleset."

Geordi's astonishment had lifted his eyebrows as high as Data had ever seen them travel. "Data, this is really wild. If this is true ... look, before we take this to the Captain, we've got to check. Make sure this is rock solid. What can we do to test this?"

"Ideally, we would cause a minuscule perturbation in the space-time continuum: create a change historically significant enough that it would rapidly propagate into our records, but which would not materially affect the underlying foundation of our current timeline."
"Okay. So how can we do that? We could change something tiny in art or literature -- change a line in a Shakespeare play. No, that feels too dangerous. Too many things named after stuff like that. Hmmm. And creating a new artifact to deposit is gonna cause all kinds of forensic headaches. Ooooh, how about this? Tractor beam a comet in, maneuver it so it sails into Earth's orbit and hits the ocean. Something like that, maybe twenty-second century, the grid would catch it, it wouldn't hurt anybody, and we'd definitely see it pop up in our records right away."

"While I see the reasoning in your approach, I believe it will not work. I estimate that the type of automated threat assessment and response Earth displayed in that time period would meet the time membrane's criteria as an aspect of sentience."

"Damn. All right, so we'd have to go earlier."

"If I may, I have in mind a test that would pose a smaller risk."

"Sure, go ahead."

"What we aim to effect is a change that will make nearly no difference in the course of history while ensuring maximum certainty that the historical record will record the change. During humanity's transition period between hierarchical and peer-to-peer mass media communication, Earth saw innumerable fads and scandals, most of which had no effect on any substantive timescale."

"I get it! So we set up something, a catchphrase, have it take over their comms for a couple of days, long enough to get into the archives, but ... hold on, Data. How do we make sure we aren't accidentally creating something that gets a life of its own?"

"If my analysis is correct, additional scandal pertaining to a political leader who is already in disrepute has a negligible chance of fomenting new opposition. Sexual or otherwise vulgar conduct especially attracts journalistic coverage and popular commentary during this period, without changing the outcomes of elections."

"We're in the home stretch now. I can feel it. Now. We go make sure there's a record of some early twenty-first century statesman in a media-saturated country, someone who's already basically despised, doing something that the voting population thinks is taboo -- hell, probably we just find the evidence in our archives, replicate it, and beam it onto the desk of someone who wants to publish it. I guess you should search --"

"There is a very high probability that I have arrived at the optimal target," said Data, whose mind now rested at the index for United Kingdom: Heads of government: David Cameron: Controversies: Pig."

End Notes

Apologies to the dead pig, to the writers of the Star Trek: The Next Generation episode "Time's Arrow", and to everyone who actually lives in the United Kingdom. And to the young David Cameron, in the case that he was coerced into the act, in which case, that's not okay and I'm sorry they did that to you.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!