

Part 2 Writings

1. Johnny Neumonic

It's always strange reading old, established science fiction like this for the first time, simply because its themes, like storing information in a human brain or physically dividing the rich and poor between higher and lower levels, have been so well adopted and established that it's all so recognizable. One of my favorite moments in the book is the reveal of the Lo Teks through Dog. Though Johnny comments on it in the book, I still really like the statement that something as advanced to us as replacing parts of the body with animal substitutes has become common enough to be taken for granted.

2. Hypertext and Critical Theory

This essay gives a brief history of hypertext, the computer code that gave way to many new programming languages as well as the internet, and explains how the concept is the fulfillment of a need carried for decades, if not longer. I actually found it comparable to the first essay in the book, about the Memex in how it details lists of old needs carried for years which would go on to be filled by the Internet and other computer systems. Bakhtin's line of a text "...constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness [...] but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses..." makes me think of how collaborative the majority of our media is today, and now reliant on interaction between the artist and viewer the internet's model of media has become.

3. Computers as Theater

In comparing a human's interaction with a computer system to the relationship between the audience of a theater show and the actors on stage, Laurel tries to get the reader to understand that the job of a programmer or designer is less to present something to a viewer, but to create an environment for himself and the viewer to work together to fill the viewer's need. In this way, the designer almost works as some sort of contractor to each person who uses their software, working together with a client to meet a goal.

4. The Information War

Much of this article is a criticism for a new mysticism revolving around technology that the author seems to be seeing in many aspects of his life. However, I think this is merely the same sort of obsession that's come with every sort of new, revolutionary advance of any given type of science. For every person the author writes about claiming to be a better writer for owning a computer, there was a factory floorman forecasting the death of the working man because of the machines of the industrial revolution or a housewife drinking radioactive water advertised to help invigorate the body and restore health and youth. Though the new generation may manifest their obsessions in a somewhat insufferable manner, it is simply the same song and dance that mankind's been engaging in for centuries.

Discussion Questions:

1. What future advances will be taken for granted as they age?
2. How would many classical authors or philosophers be influenced by the resources provided by the internet and computing in general?
3. Is the failure of a user to understand a software system the fault of the user or the creator? When is the reverse true?
4. What things that you're capable of now do you believe you would not be without a computer?