

Part 3 Writings

1. Dilemmas of Transformation in the Age of the Smart Machine

This article was a refreshing take on the discussion of rapid progress. Rather than assigning a blanket statement of good or bad to it, the author made the argument that advancement will be driven by people, and not the other way around as terrified luddites or over-enthusiastic technophiles love to predict. What I found most interesting was the worker's initial attitude of not just acceptance, but a weird sort of reverence for the new technology. They didn't even really seem to consider that they might be the ones taking over and running the new stuff, they just assigned this strange sort of honor for the people who were about to come in and replace them.

2. The Theory of the Virtual Class

So much of this article reads to me as another person working so hard to make clever analogies between the internet and the history of development that they miss the point and lose what's unique about virtual space and the internet. So much of the second chapter of this essay has been proven wrong it's staggering. *"The virtual class seeks to exterminate the social possibilities of the internet."* This statement is baffling. The idea of a "ruling" class of the internet isn't an unreasonable one, and it could certainly be described as true, but the people put into power over the internet (at least so far, in the short time it's existed) are the people who've built it, the low-budget programmers and designers that became millionaires by fulfilling needs. Additionally, I can understand that this article was written over 10 years ago, but the idea that the internet was going to thrive as a social environment was forecast in it's early years with the thriving of BBSes and live text rooms that brought it's users together into the first global community.

3. Technology and the Future of Work

I'm getting pretty sick of people making statements like *"...humans have migrated to [...] a hybrid of machine and organism..."* and continue with somber death predictions with no explanation as to why such an idea is a bad thing. When properly used, any system that allows a man to extend it's reach by artificial means allows him to use his natural abilities more fully, and when improperly used we're left with a person that's essentially the same person they would be without the resources they're choosing to waste.

4. The Coming of Age of the Flesh Machine

I can't figure out if this is another satire piece, but even if it isn't, it's hilarious. The entire first chapter was him talking about what a shame it was that not enough people are dying in the streets anymore, since it builds collective character for humanity. It seems to me that he sees a stark difference in human advancement relative to technological advancement, which I'll grant is true, but it doesn't mean that there's any problem, and if there is, I can't imagine it will be solved by awkwardly trying to force humanity through self-selective evolution.

Discussion questions

- Imagine a world where all work is done through automation and humans are left to their own devices. What would they do?
- Is it possible to create some system to regulate content on the internet? If so, what? If not, why?
- Would you supplement your own abilities through artificial means?
- Has human interference with it's own environment stunted it's evolutionary path?