TEC 154 2014S, Class 29: Bush, Hypertext, and the Web

Overview

- Preliminaries.
  - Upcoming work.
  - Admin.
  - Extra credit.
  - Project Teams.
- Context and beyond.
- Textual questions.
- Key ideas.
- Additional questions.

Preliminaries

Admin

- Note takers: AF, ZS
- Note takers Friday: SA, DB
- Friday's reading: Read "The Prize is right" and "Big Prize" in the ebook.
- Next week's reading: Forthcoming.

Extra Credit

- http://www.strikingly.com/pioneerweekend
- Any Spring into the Humanities (or vice versa) event.
- CS extra Thursday at 4:30 here: Software to enhance wellness.

The Paper

- We'll check in on project teams.
- AF and FC: Anti-Immigration Technology
- CC and ?: Audio
- TD, EL, and DS: Voting/Polling machines
- JV, DP, and SA: ?
- EG and MK: Film

Notes from ZS

1. "As We May Think" is from 1945, which is a very different context from the current eraâthings like rationing and fear of the atom bomb were commonplace in America.
2. Vannevar Bush was FDR's scientific advisor and a proponent of pure science, believing that science had the power to make the world a better place.
3. "As We May Think" resembles an early example of futuring.
4. "As We May Think" provides insight into how early proponents of modern technology felt about technology, back when the opinion on the subject was much more positive as a whole.
5. Bush's hypothetical Memex can be viewed as a precursor to the World Wide Web and hyperlinks.

Context

This paper is important in the history of computer technology for a few main reasons.

- The paper provides the modern grounding for the approach to information that is the World Wide Web. (Yes, there's a pretty clear trail.)
- THe paper inspired Doug Englebart, the inventor of the mouse and other important modern computer technologies, to invent those technologies.

A few background questions, some of which you asked, not all of which you will be able to answer.

- When did this article appear? 1945, right after WW II.
- What do we know about the social and political context of the time?
  - Recovering from wartime rationing
  - WWII provided some recovery from the great depression
  - "The bomb" - Terrifying technology
  - The start of the model of America (nuclear family et al.) that lasted until, oh, now.
  - Moving into cold war era.
  - Transformation of the country in many ways: Soldiers went to school instead of the factory, immigrants went to the factory
  - Excitement for technology, but also some worries with the bomb
  - America is awesome
- Who is the audience for this article?
  - Datum: Place of publication. Atlantic Monthly - Magazine, articles about current events and issues of importance. "Educated people".
  - Datum: Your reading of the article. "The public" (or the educated public).
  - Inform the public about science.
  - Provide motivation for scientists to do new things.
  - Inspire politicians to support science.
- Who was Vannevar Bush?
  - Roosevelt's scientific advisor
  - Built one of the first machines for solving differential equations
  - Helped create the NSF - Give scientists money to work on questiosn of interest and it will make

the world a better place.
- ○ Author of this article.
- Why are there numbers scattered throughout the article?
  - ○ Could be page numbers from the original article
  - ○ Potentially different topics ; "I'm moving on to a new idea."

How does this article help with the goals of this course?

- Insight into perspectives on technology of 70 years ago; a time of more enthusiasm, but the start of suspicion.
- Enthusiasm about knowing more about technology; trails of technological improvements
- Reinforcement that technologies do not exist in a vacuum; you need a technological infrastructure
- An experience in Futuring
  - ○ How can we be aware of technologies?
  - ○ How can we see them being used in new ways?
- A different perspective on technology: Technology for *knowledge* rather than for *activity*
- How would these technologies be seen in modern society? Compare societies. What is progress?
- "It's cool." An interesting perspective; thinks about how people might want to use technology.
- Not an academic article, more a popular article
- Some problems/issues/technologies are the same
- Blinders: Why doesn't he use computers in his memex?
- Modern blinders: Why doesn't the Web have all the features of the memex?
- Should technology adapt to humans or should humans adapt to technology?

What do you see as Bush's primary thesis?

Textual Questions

What did the author mean at the end of the article when he said "terminate the process"?

- "the process" is probably "scientific and technological progress".
  Bush clearly is a technological determinist.

What does Bush mean by "grow in the wisdom of race experience"?

- Probably "the human race". More pro technology. (Maybe: We need to learn from "our" experience and we do that by giving access to the knowledge of experience.)

What is the author saying at the bottom of page 7 regarding Abacus and calculators?

- Abacus is an aid to simple calculations, but still do it by hand
- Calculators do automatic calculation; don't need to know how to do it
- "Real" scientific work is much more complex than simple arithmetic calculation; we need automatic tools for that work

Why does Bush think that modern technologies like cars could not have succeeded during ancient times? (p. 3)

Highlights

What, to you, were the highlights of the article? (Yes, I"m okay if you say "none".)

Other Interesting Questions

On page 5 Bush discusses the importance of compressing material in relation to costs and ability to distribute information on a large scale very cheaply. Does compression of material lead to greater risk of loss of information or perhaps distribution of inaccurate information? Are there other risks associated with technologies that compress vast amounts of information into single entities?

To what extent do you agree with the statement that "For years inventions have extended man's physical powers rather than the powers of his mind?" Can you think of inventions which have indeed extended man's mind?

On the first page Bush describes the lasting benefits of science and research, saying they have increased control of the material environment, improved food, improved clothing, improved shelter, increase lifespan, and a number of other things. But are these still the goals of science and research today? How much more must we improve these mentioned living conditions? Surely, parts of the world still need these benefits, but what about developed/wealthy nations? Should the goals of science and research now undertake different goals for a society that already has such a good standard of living in these terms?

Bush talks a lot about recording information, and how it will become more streamlined, yet that it will remain physical. On page 3, he mentions photography, and how photographers will walk with "walnuts" next to their heads and finger-activated shutters. Why does Bush think that the light, shutter, and glass will remain, but other parts of the camera will be eliminated? Can a camera become fully integrated into our bodies?

What might Bush suggest are the advantages and disadvantages of technologies that increase manâs control of his material environment vs. technologies that increase manâs control of intellectual property?