[Videotex Technology Reflective Essay]

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TWC 452/552 Information in the Digital World

Submitted to Dr. La Verne Abe Harris

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DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT

What value do you see in unadopted information technology like videotex playing in our digital information world? What can be learned from technologies that are not adopted in our society?

INTERPRETATION

Perhaps the greatest flaw of our society's forward march into technological proliferation is a derisive attitude towards what is viewed as an "archaic" period in the chronology of consumer technology. The novelist Cormac McCarthy, commenting on the succession of events that make up the fabric of our daily reality, once said "Everything you do closes a door somewhere ahead of you." Now, it might be a tad farflung to employ this insight when talking about consumer technology as we know it, but, in the context of studying unfulfilled technological innovations like Videotex, we can shed light on the role that these developments play in how we conceptualize and implement new findings discovered on the road of progress.

A quick study of Videotex showed me that it was, by its design, a more intimate system for communication than the world wide web as we know it today. While ARPANET, the precursor to today's internet architecture, was created to serve the defense industry, Videotex was designed for use by the general population. In many ways, Videotex is like closed circuit/public access television, while the modern internet is like a major cable television provider: the small versus the big. Videotex has the quality of a niche industry while the modern internet is a towering tree possessed of countless branches. Put simply, Videotex is singular, while the world wide web is plural.

One of the more significant takeaways from learning about Videotex is just how much our conception of privacy has changed over the past several decades. Whatever reservations we might have had about our privacy in the digital realm have been discarded and trivialized as the internet grows ever larger and more multifarious in its applications.

Though Videotex might seem like a relic of a bygone era, the general spirit and aim of the invention, I believe, can be used by modern consumers for similar purposes. In fact, and this is

my own opinion, the basic concept, stripped of its locality, lives on in the existence of web browsers like Tor. Though Tor itself has developed a negative mystique through its use by, and association with, the "darkweb"-a grossly oversimplified and fundamentally false concept, I might add-its strength is in its anonymity and its condensed scope. In fact, one could almost consider Tor to be the low-tech sibling of the modern internet, as, like ARPANET, Tor's history is connected to the combined forces of United States military intelligence. The use of services of this variety, intentional or otherwise, is almost a facsimile of Videotex.

OUTCOME

Having learned of Videotex through this week's readings, I can't say that I'm surprised at its obsolescence. However, don't mistake this observation for cynicism, as it is more an expression of my philosophy when it comes to ideas: every idea has value until proven otherwise.

Even what is regarded as a failure or a let-down has a kernel of pragmatic knowledge to gain from it. When the future seems bereft of solutions to ongoing problems, we always have the option of surveying the past, discerning the useful from the useless, and proceeding ahead with a refined maturity and a greater sense of what history can impart to us.

Even though I hold beliefs like this, I nevertheless realize that I have fallen short of my expectations in the past. For the longest time I counted myself as a holdout when it came to embracing certain technologies, especially smartphones. But, in order to keep up with the pace of modernization, I begrudgingly purchased one and began appreciating it for its utility. A wholesale embrace of trend-setting technologies, for all its perks, can blind us to what is most useful in the realm of technology considered "outdated."

Ideas, as a resource, are not infinite. The current landscape of consumer technology is infused with a kind of vigor, an obsession with youth and energy; and while the general spirit of innovation and improvement should not be traduced or minimized, it, on occasion, needs to pivot on its heels and take a sobering glance at the past. I have found that this tendency arises from a fear of unwittingly importing old, prejudiced ideas about our society; but, with our current knowledge and the gift of foresight, we can avoid making such a blunder. With these

observations, I feel that I can develop a mature appreciation for the developments that laid the groundwork for today's consumer technologies.

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