Andrew Zurn

Ethics – Herzfeld

8/29 Reaction

**Book:**

The rise of the web was a rare instance when we learned new, positive information about human potential. Who would have guessed (at least at first) that millions of people would put so much effort into a project without the presence of advertising, commercial motive, threat of punishment, charismatic figures, identity politics, exploitation of the fear of death, or any of the other classic motivators of mankind. In vast numbers, people did something cooperatively, solely because it was a good idea, and it was beautiful. – Page 14

I feel like many days of the early internet were filled with this “beautiful” motivation that Lanier describes. From the initial setting up of the academic networks to fuel scientific research, to the designing of the IP stack, all the way up to the creation of the world wide web. History is sprinkled with these moments, but I feel as if we still see these moments today, even though Lanier is very critical about where technology sits in its current state. I think Google, and other companies like Canonical, Red Hat, and a variety of other open source companies are pushing forward technology by allowing open access to their source code, all with the intent of allowing people to openly innovate without being pushed by any of the “classic motivators of mankind” that he describes.

Online culture is filled to the brim with rhetoric about what the true path to a better world ought to be, and these days it’s strongly biased toward an antihuman way of thinking. – Page 22

I again take opposition to Lanier’s comments above, and in particular, rather than the world moving towards and “antihuman way of thinking,” I believe it to be moving towards a more technologically supported school of thought. I believe that being in the age of ‘Big Data’ only means greater support for the human way of thinking. A more logical approach to this idea, kind of follows some of his arguments. We build the software, and as we are humans, human thinking goes into them, therefore they are tools that were built by human ingenuity in order to support the problems that we, as humans, face. In addition to this, we see companies, like IBM in particular, building platforms that are made to replicate the human thought process, which I believe is as far as “antihuman” thinking as it gets.

If a church or government were doing these things, it would feel authoritarian, but when technologists are the culprits, we seem hip, fresh, and inventive. People will accept ideas presented in technological form that would be abhorrent in any other form. – Page 48

When we ask people to live their lives through our models, we are potentially reducing life itself. How can we ever know what we might be losing? – Page 70

Someday I hope there will be a genuinely universal system along the lines proposed by Nelson. I believe most people would embrace a social contract in which bits have value instead of being free. Everyone would have easy access to everyone else’s creative bits at reasonable prices- and everyone would get paid for their bits. This arrangement would celebrate personhood in full, because personal expression would be valued. – Page 101

**Interview**:

Silicon Valley totally screwed up on this. We were doing a great job through the turn of the century. In the '80s and '90s, one of the things I liked about being in the Silicon Valley community was that we were growing the middle class. The personal computer revolution could have easily been mostly about enterprises. It could have been about just fighting IBM and getting computers on desks in big corporations or something, instead of this notion of the consumer, ordinary person having access to a computer, of a little mom and pop shop having a computer, and owning their own information. When you own information, you have power. Information is power. The personal computer gave people their own information, and it enabled a lot of lives.

If we enter into the kind of world that Google likes, the world that Google wants, it's a world where information is copied so much on the Internet that nobody knows where it came from anymore, so there can't be any rights of authorship. However, you need a big search engine to even figure out what it is or find it. They want a lot of chaos that they can have an ability to undo.

What we have to do to create liberty in the future is to monetize more and more instead of monetize less and less, and in particular we have to monetize more and more of what ordinary people do, unless we want to make them into wards of the state.

**NYT Article**:

HOW can we help workers ride the wave of technological change rather than be swamped by it? One common recommendation is that citizens should invest more in their education. Spurred by growing demand for workers performing abstract job tasks, the payoff for college and professional degrees has soared; despite its formidable price tag, higher education has perhaps never been a better investment. But it is far from a comprehensive solution to our labor market problems. Not all high school graduates — let alone displaced mid- and late-career workers — are academically or temperamentally prepared to pursue a four-year college degree. Only 40 percent of Americans enroll in a four-year college after graduating from high school, and more than 30 percent of those who enroll do not complete the degree within eight years.