

First Response

The first article I read from the Switch Archives was a movie review written by Collette Sweeney of the film *12 Monkeys*, directed by Terry Gilliam. I had to research this movie on IMDB as I had never heard of it before, in spite of it being relaunched in 2005, a decade later from the film in the form of a popular TV Series. The tagline for the film reads, “In a future world devastated by disease, a convict is sent back in time to gather information about the man-made virus that wiped out most of the human population on the planet.” Despite casting Bruce Willis as the protagonist- Sweeney felt it was this film was a fresh choice that didn't recycle the old action trope- reminiscent of a Western capping off with a huge battle between, “the Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” yet still left her hanging.

Sweeney points out that this movie left her unsatisfied in spite of its pseudo techno babble because it seems to open up a philosophical discussion that warns society about technology. Sweeney mentions a lot of interesting points in her review. She points out that oftentimes sci fi movies will have a silent villain that is “at arms length” away from our modern day societies. What grabbed Sweeney the most about this film was that the director seems to be saying his worst fear of “that the greatest fear is uncertainty and uselessness.” In a day and age where we can concoct anything through science it is not such a leap to create a bomb or virus that could harm an a startling number of individuals in a quick breath. Much of the time, we

cannot even get our electronic devices to sync up and coordinate with one another anymore. Plugging a computer into a projector can become a bit of a puzzle at times. It seems like as technology changes, we are beginning to be expected to learn more and more about how these things work on a deeper level. “No no, this operates at this level and will not work with that.” Sweeney also points out that machines make these electronics- will the human role be completely replaced?

We see that a lot in this day and age. Just at my own work which is a simple coffee shop- the customer uses an app to check in, pay, reload money onto their loyalty cards and we just stand there awkwardly. Eventually they will tighten it up to the point that they can replace our registers with something like what can be found at Whole Foods 365 or most chain restaurant tables- a kiosk. Our society is taking power from individuals and empowering technology with it. We have to get in front of the machines to keep up. Both main characters played by Bruce Willis and Brad Pitt are anxiety ridden and are experiencing a loss of oneself because technology and science has overtaken their societies. Video games and VR can help individuals overcome anxiety right? What about those that end up alone in a room with them day after day? Something that helps on a surface level- problem solves, forms friendships, etc now is actually proven to make things much worse in the long run and is expected to be used with moderation.

Following my last point, I also read, “An Introduction to Virtual Reality” by Leda Kanellakos. In this essay Kanellakos explores and reflects on the book *“Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality”*, edited by Frank Biocca and Mark R. Levy. Kanellakos compares Virtual Reality to the beginning of TV estimating that it will be in 60% of households by the time the technology evolves. According to an article found on *The Motley Fool* “28 million people could

be paying for VR hardware and content by 2018, according to KZero. That's up from the just 4.8 million estimated early adopters this year.” According to Forbes Magazine, CCS Insight has released a report that VR reality device sales have increased from 2.4 million to 24 million in just the last year! Even if one cannot afford the \$1600 Oculus Rift setup- Virtual Reality is still becoming commonplace with Google’s *Cardboard* and through Youtube's 360 Channels. Virtual Reality has unlocked an amazing world that is surely here to stay. It is being used to not only entertain via gameplay but as a threshold for helping people get through the first date, a source of therapy for prisoners and even a stand in lover through VR porn. The world has become VRs oyster.

I found Kanellakos piece to be interesting because it kind of serves as an air crit for a time we are living in right now. Kanellakos writes, “ The feeling of being in another environment is at first likely to trigger a broad range of involuntary emotional reactions similar to those evoked by a frightening scene on television. Until we adapt to VR's ability to make the fake seem much more real than television, the reactions could be damaging. But studies suggest that people will become accustomed to VR, with responses that grow less intense. Although VR plans to bring a new "reality" into our worlds, I am not convinced it will satisfy or deceive our senses. Our innate biological needs cannot be replaced by a computerized fantasy. With all the required gear to wear, I doubt we will feel the soft warmth of a blanket, the comfort of a hug, the cool grass between our toes, or the rain on our faces.” Having had the privilege to see the undersea water demo in one of the highest operating systems I was surprised by the fear I felt in an environment I knew was fake. Many times you see a demo of something and it's very bright and one can pick out the occasional pixel even with the best graphics. However this visual leaves

you in complete darkness and you can just see something barely moving in the distance. It turns out to be an extremely large whale. While you understand its not there, it also feels overwhelming and claustrophobic. While I was using a headset, my friends were also messing with me and brushing a feather duster against me when I would encounter stray seaweed or something further messing with my senses. The VR world has become and continues to become more immersive than we could have ever imagined.