Berners

Berners1

Tim Berners-Lee is a legendary figure, and his article Long Live the Web draws our attention to very contemporary issues regarding politics, science, society, privacy, capital, and many more. It’s really shocking that we as people or, more broadly, as governments, don’t immediately contact him in any matters relating to the future of the internet. And yet, he himself argues against that idea. To Berners-Lee, if he were to have that much power of the future of the internet, then the internet would cease to function how he idealizes it. The very nature of him being the de facto leader of the internet would create too much centralization. Still, in our current internet era where we are all being constantly data-mined, tracked, and analyzed, it feels necessary (now more than ever) to have some benevolent internet dictator to ensure the guidance of the internet into the hands of the people and into the hands of science.

Berners2

Interestingly, Berners-Lee does not necessarily seem to take issue with datamining, just how the data is collected, stored, and protected. While he, like any reasonable person, is against corporations like Facebook and Google selling data to advertisers for a profit, as I understand it he seems to be fine with datamining as long as it is independent, open-source, anonymous, and serving the interest of science. There is so much data out there that if it could only be accessed could lead to so many fascinating and important discoveries. Berners-Lee is really promoting the spiritual successor to the ideas proposed by Vannevar Bush- the necessity of taking all of our tiny and seemingly unimportant pieces of data and science and research and making it accessible, sortable, and relevant.

Bush1

As I began reading Vannevar Bush’s article As We May Think, I felt something was very off. I didn’t notice anything strange about the writing, or even necessarily the content, but something was different. I realized the strange feeling I was noticing was the fact that this article was written in 1945, and yet the issues discussed are still relevant today! With the huge number of academics out there and every one of them making huge predictions about the future, monkey-typewriter theory confirms that at least one of them is going to be right sometime, but Bush’s prediction seems almost too uncanny. To have come up with his ideas in the time when Alan Turing was just creating the first rudimentary computers is astonishing.

Vannevar Bush predicted the internet with a quaint 1940s twist in the form of the Memex. While he imagined the memex to be essentially a miniature library where you can only access content you own, I imagine he would be blown away by our ability to access huge quantities of high quality data for free. He imagines that the memex would be largely for scientific and academic purposes, and I’d say that there’s a strong parallel to be drawn between the memex and Wikipedia, both of which contain vast amounts of knowledge which are compressed down to fit into your pocket (All of Wikipedia only takes up 9GB). His prediction included the necessity of sharing files easily with friends, and the idea of a file path for easily organizing and retrieving data.