Yasmine Roy – CART 351 Reading Reflections

- READ: Vannevar Bush, As We May Think, July 1945

The article "As we may Think" is one of many that discusses the notion of progress, and its inevitability. Intellectuals such as Vannevar Bush would insist that the future of humans is in technology; specifically, computers. He uses examples of cameras, televisions, telephones, each one useful in their own way, eventually functioning in much greater efficiency and quality as the years pass. The notion of a technologically involved world "at an age of cheap complex devices of great reliability" (Bush, Part I) became more prevalent as years passed after World War II. In the 1950's and 1960's, large enterprises such as IBM, Apple, and Microsoft sought to bring these computers into the common world, where everyday people could freely use their own devices without restrictions. Indeed, at his time, Bush presented this fantasy of a world flooded with technology, integrated within even the smallest aspects of civilian's daily lives. In his mind, humans have already discovered everything, discovery creating a correlation between humans and machines, eventually merging them into one. Bush hoped to see computers function similarly to human brains.

Today, few men and women can imagine a world without computers, devices, or the Internet. Digital media has become a norm and developed to a point where it is so extensive that communication is a commodity, rather than a challenge. As technology advanced, however, humans and machines became less and less distinguishable. Previously, verbal conversation depended not only on language, but on intonation, gesture, and expression. Now, with technology, communication has become greatly more efficient, but less extensive, as all these traits cannot be translated over a few words in a text bubble, or over a few lines over the phone,

"a typed strip which records in a phonetically simplified language a record of what the speaker is supposed to have said." (Bush, Part III) This puts into question whether humans truly need all these traits to articulate at all. Machines interact with one another simply through a series of binary digits that passes through wires and magnetic waves. How are humans any different? What makes humans different? Digital media is merely an inevitable means of communication that humans have created in order to approach, purposefully or not, the ideal vision of the cold machine. As technology continues to progress, humans delve into intensive research on the concept of virtual reality and cyber-prosthetics. Humans and machines only merge closer together as time passes, and it is only a matter of time before the two become one.

- EXPLORE: Mouchette

Mouchette is an interactive, online-based art piece that seeks to make to user feel disconcerted and uncomfortable. The site's design is not particularly aesthetic to the modern eye; however, it is reminiscent of a certain web-style that emerged in the 90s. The work relies on the element of surprise, leaving the user feeling unsure of what they will find next.

The original concept of this website stemmed from a film by Robert Bresson called "Mouchette". The film, originally adapted from the novel from Georges Bernanos, tells the story of a girl named Mouchette, which means "little fly" in French. The film demonstrates a series of events that occur in her miserable daily life, where she incurs abuse from her alcoholic father, her classmates, and even the townspeople, finishing with the girl wrapping herself in a shroud and rolling herself into a lake.

The creator of this art piece, however, claims to be from Amsterdam, and is 13 years old. The piece presents obvious references to the girl's difficult life, hence leaving the user to occasionally hear sounds of subtle weeping on certain pages. There are also various images of flies throughout the piece, referring to the notion of the "little fly" within the girl's image. The website covers aspects from suicide, to sensual images, to loneliness, and even to death, enraptured in a child-like innocence. It is constantly being updated, and prompts for user input, even the user's email address. When an email address given, Mouchette personally sends emails to the user, providing "special pages" that only the user can see. Once clicked, the links disappear, and become unavailable.

This piece is representative of the use of data over a long period, where a site that constantly breaks the fourth wall seems to exist in an ethereal space. Its appeal lies in its mystery and cryptic meaning.

- READ: Alexander R.Galloway, Protocol in Theory, Culture & Society,May 2006.

In his text "Protocol", Alexander Galloway discusses the notion of protocol, defining it as "an intellectual terrain on which one may contemplate a number of overlapping, sometimes contradictory and often interrelated theoretical problems at play today" (Galloway, 317). With data becoming increasingly pervasive, one must understand how it flows and where it gathers. He visualizes the phenomenon as a distributed network, a series of "bi-directional links" with "a general lack of internal hierarchy" (Galloway, 317). He points out that there is a trend concerning the mentality towards these networks, claiming that they serve to work against

authority and fortified power centers. Galloway, however, refutes these ideas, claiming that the distributed network is “the new citadel, the new army, the new power” (Galloway, 318). Since these networks do not remove organization but, rather, reorganize to create new structures, they cannot be a threat. To Galloway, this is how he demonstrates the compatibility between these networks and protocol; the networks of “human interaction” are the combination of the protocological system of organization and control and the institutions of modern life, such as work, school, familial, relational, and all that apply. He assesses that informatic networks may be applicable not only within the computational domain, but also within the biological, “life science” domain. However, when comparing human protocols with computer protocols, Galloway believes that the two diverge. In terms of interpretation, interactivity, surface coding, and political algorithms and models, computers carry a few burdens. To Galloway, there is much to be done to increase the growing potentials of computational protocols within a networked space.

- EXPLAIN & COMPARE & CONTRAST: Instagram, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube, Flickr, Tinder, Tumblr, WordPress, Wikipedia …

Social networking platforms are an expansion of our everyday lives, our current reality. Not only do these platforms spread our communities, they also extend our knowledge, marketing, business, humor, culture, friendship, making information generally more accessible. What all these social media networks have in common is their data access facilitation. A user can now instantly access any database within these platforms to retrieve specific information that may serve them useful. In fact, the amount of data available may be too much. Companies such as

Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple carry petabytes worth of information within their data centers, with much room for more. What makes the Web 2.0 so revolutionary is the way these platforms handle data. Social media is the data carrier, and users have become the data seekers.

A difference emerges in how social media platforms have also found other ways to generate revenue, such as using advertising to their advantage. Because these methods might badger the user with useless information, some sites seek to distance themselves from publishing ads altogether, Wikipedia being a notable example. However, in return, Wikipedia must find other sources of income, even going as far as to ask their users to donate money. Essentially, because of this new Web 2.0 system that generates revenue, social media platforms must find a source of income to survive, as the Internet has turned into one of the biggest markets in existence.

In most cases, social media is another reality. In some areas, they serve as a social space, like Facebook and Twitter, in others, as an entertainment space, like Youtube or Vimeo, and in others, a knowledge-based space, like Wikipedia. It is the harmony built by the co-existence of these spaces that forms the Internet.