A Response to *As We May Think* (Vannevar Bush, 1945)

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I find myself immediately agree with Bush’s basic premise that as the sciences (and to generalise, societies) become increasingly specialized, the difficulty of disseminating knowledge outside of the academic disciplines in which the research was conducted likewise becomes greater. And therefore, as this specialization occurs methods and technology related to the efficient and effective storage, organization, and dissemination of this knowledge becomes increasingly vital to prevent wisdom from being lost forever within departments or with academic elites. I really believe in his solution aswell which is organizing not by index (nested symbols with no real pertinence to the contents of the associated texts), but instead by association for this takes into account the content and context of texts and relates them accordingly when you search. This reminds me of the difference of searching something via its url, verseus typing in keywords in a search engine and finding a countless number of related articles.

I find his specific fabricated technology which realizes his “association over indexing” belief especially interesting, not as much at face value as it works as a fascinating indirect primary account of the technological paradigms of the time. To know what seemed technological outlandish or downright unfanthomable at the time is fascinating and actually has a lot of similarities to the imagined technologies in classic sci fi novels I’ve read like DUNE (Frank Herbert) written around the same time. For instance his microfilm method of storing info non-digitally (for digital storage seemed unfathomable) could be found in DUNE’s texts as books were minarituized on thin film.

I also love his version of the internet “Memex” which can be searched via an index, but also uses crowd sourcing to more meaningfully relate materials in “trails”. I think this was incredibly insightful, as Memex seems both private, collaborative, and allowsfor both index based, and association based searches just like the internet.

Finally I do not agree that machines can only be useful in fields in which logic and repetition are used. I believe computers can be as creative as humans, and I think new breakthroughs in neural networks and machine learning show that technically deterministic entities can behave by all extent and purposes in very creative ways, and that this shows that there is no essential difference (to use the gendered language found in the article) man and machine.