

Leanne Suen Fa
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Reading: As we may think by Vannevar Bush

In “As we may think” we see Vannevar Bush pondering on technological advances which has occurred with the support of WWII and he fantasizes on the further technological advances humanity could achieve in the future. He imagines the memex, a device akin to today’s computer. A device which “an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility” (Bush). According to Bush, the device even possesses transhumanist qualities as the memex allows human beings to transcend their own physical limitations as “an enlarged intimate supplement to his memory” (Bush).

In 2022, we can all be amazed by the visionary imagination Bush possessed back in 1945 when the early computers had neither the power nor the adaptability of today’s devices. Nowadays, the most basic of phones can do more than the memex he envisioned. Even smart watches possess more functionalities. Yet, is it really this amazing that a man living during the 40’s could imagine pieces of technology which could fit into our everyday life now in 2022 ? Or is it because a man could imagine those objects that we have such technologies in 2022? If there were no human beings in the 40’s who could have that vision, then we wouldn’t be where we are now in 2022? Our modern world is certainly the result of thousands of years of wild human imagination. A culmination of dreams and hopes and the desire to ever improve the human condition.

Those dreams certainly have the most optimistic undertones. I doubt in 1945 Bush would have imagined hackers, cyberwars, unmanned drones, online surveillance, ecologically disastrous crypto mining activities and so on... If he did, would he have cared? What would he have thought of our modern day issues ? What would he think of the memex empowering WWII ? Would he still keep an optimistic eye on technological development ? Would he be horrified by the amount of destruction made possible by a single mouse click ? Would he be in awe of the modern destructive power as a good war scientist ? Would he agonize over the fact that the U.S.A might no longer possess the leading edge in war technologies as other countries develop their own based on their existing weapons? These are so many questions which will never find answers.

References

Bush, Vannevar. "As We May Think." *The Atlantic*, 1 July 1945,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/>.