Technology Developments Essay, Research Paper

Scientific and technological developments have real and direct effects on every

person’s life. Some effects are desirable; others are not. Some of the desirable

effects may have undesirable side effects. In essence, there seems to be a

trade-off principle working in which gains are accompanied by losses.

Example:

As our society continues to increase its demands on energy consumption and

consumer goods, we are likely to attain a higher standard of living while

allowing further deterioration of the environment to occur.

Today, we are often told, we live not simply in an age of information, but in an

age of excessive information. The amount and availability of information seem to

be increasing at an exponential rate. We feel that our entire world is moving,

changing, mutating, at an accelerated pace. Our interactions with this world of

information seem plagued by an increasing sense that we cannot keep up, can’t

take it all in, that we are being overwhelmed by information, deluged by data:

the sense of an information overload.

One of the first attempts to represent this kind of information overload appears

in Ted Mooney’s 1981 novel, Easy Travel to Other Planets. There, Mooney

describes A Case of Information Sickness in the following terms:

If information was once considered the solid ground, the factual basis, on which

to make decisions and take actions, it no longer seems to be so. Indeed,

information no longer seems to be solid at all. Not only does it not provide a

grounding, a foundation, from which to see, know, or act, it comes to be seen as

obscuring our vision, our attempts at knowledge, our ability to control the

forces of the world. Information, it might be argued, has become precisely what

all that is solid melts into. Information flows; it spreads; it dissolves all

boundaries, all attempts to contain it. Thus, it is hardly surprising that we

increasingly feel ourselves enveloped by a rising tide of information, immersed

within it, feeling at once exhilarated and overwhelmed. Whether we figure it as

gaseous or liquid–an atmosphere or an ocean, smog or muck, a cloud of charged

plasma or an electromagnetic wave–we seem, almost invariably, to represent

information as fluid.

Colonizing the Internet

It is perhaps in reaction to this sense of being overwhelmed, lost in the vast

data of the Internet, that many Web-related corporations have relied on

metaphors of navigation and mapping as the figures par excellence of

interaction. Thus, interaction becomes precisely a matter of charting a course

through the abundant fluidity of the Net. It is no accident that browsing the

Web is figured as becoming a Navigator or Explorer–names that cannot help but

remind us of the European mariners of the fifteenth century and their voyages of

so-called discovery. Like their predecessors, today’s Web-explorers must also

navigate the unknown and at times tempestuous seas of the Internet. Like these

earlier explorers, too, they often seek to chart and to claim this new world, to

make themselves the masters of various sites within it, exploiting its resources

and enriching themselves in the process. In short, they seek not simply to

explore the exciting–perhaps even exotic–new world of cyberspace, but also to

br ing it under control, to tame its wild currents and flows–that is, to

colonize it.

Consider, for example, how efforts to improve the Web have been described: the

world of the Web, it is said, must be made more easily navigable, its

information–its secrets–must be made more accessible; to this end, various

sites must be established: beachheads, outposts, trade routes and portals, and

in some cases even cities; efforts must be made to contain the chaotic nature of

the Internet, to tame its wildness, to make its sometimes exotic appeal more

marketable, more decent, safer, more civilized, not to mention commercially

viable. In short, its energies must be harnessed, its movements channeled, its

resources exploited. The metaphors involved here are extremely similar to those

used by colonialism; they presume a need to survey and subdue, to catalogue and

contain, and, ultimately, to turn to profitable use, those areas that are seen

as wild, chaotic, and other. Commercializing the Internet, then, is precisely a

matter of trying to know and control, to colonize and master, that whi ch is

seen as culturally other.

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