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Hi Tech Rec: Are We Losing the Real Pleasures of Life?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the impact of advanced technology on the future and basic philosophy of leisure is analyzed from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. The marriage of science, technology, and leisure is examined in its present state and the implied conditions of the future. The inferences of newly emerging man-machine systems in the leisure industry are explored.

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INTRODUCTION

In his book A Whack on the Side of the Head, Roger von Oech explained that creative thinking can be developed by looking at the relationship of two seemingly unrelated things.(43) By crossbreeding two ideas, a hybrid idea is created. In this paper the idea of advanced technology and the concept of leisure is crossbred. The impact of advanced technology on leisure time use is analyzed both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view. In addition, the following questions are posed: What are the effects of advanced technology on work? What are the trends and predictions on the future of work and leisure in regards to advanced technology? Does hi-tech remove the real pleasures of life? Does advanced technology make our pleasures more real or more artificial?

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

What is science? What is technology? What is leisure? As a school subject, science offers a systematic study of knowledge about nature, while technology is a systematic study of how people alter nature to make it of more use or value. Technology is simply a different way to do work. The history of technology is the evolution of how the same work is

done. Science is a study of what is. Technology is a study of what might be and of how to bring it about. Sometimes science leads technology and sometimes the roles are reversed (but they are separate studies). New technology grows out of old technology, not out of science.

A noted technologist once said "Technology is neither a potential for good or for evil. It is a potential to be harnessed by man to do his bidding."(28) In analyzing the history of technology and machines, it appears each new machine creates new needs, besides satisfying existing ones. The machine is a tool by which we are deeply influenced. According to Lewis Mumford, technology is controlled by an organization of experts called the "megamachine."(34) The computer is the ultimate instrument to the megamachine. The computer exercises control over everything--our birth records, medical records, incomes, loans, sperm bank accounts, taxes, social security payments, and on and on and on.

Technology does not have to be explained in grandiose terms, like massive computers invading the workplace, but just in simple terms like the technological revolution going on right under our noses in our homes. Look at what washing machines have done to our society--no more Blue Monday!

Professionals involved in the delivery of leisure services are familiar with two basic definitions of leisure--as a block of discretionary time and as an attitude or state of mind which invokes a feeling or sensation of pleasure.

To understand the concept of time, it is interesting to look at different cultural views. Each society or culture has a different sense of time known as "social time". Example: Brazilian students define LATENESS for lunch as 33 1/2 minutes; Freso students, as 19 minutes.

Time also has a social meaning. One example is the meaning we attach to October, 1929, which is socially and historically important as the month of the Wall Street Crash.

Cross-cultural studies have been done on daily time use. Researchers have posed the question, "Do people arrange their daily lives in such a way as to spend a maximum amount of time on activities that bring them greatest satisfaction?"

Time can be examined from an economic point of view. By saving time in one activity with a hi-tech convenience, we gain time for another and increase the possibilities for pleasure. Studies, however, show having too much discretionary time can decrease life satisfaction. If we don't use it pleasurably (or productively?), then technological progress has done us a disservice.

We also have to consider the number of hours we need to work to buy the hi-tech toys to have greater leisure quality. Example: How many hours does it take to work to buy a VCR? Is it worth the work hour input?

There are those who firmly believe that yuppies are under much

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greater stress than others because they are obsessed with buying and collecting hi-tech toys--thus, they work harder. In a book by Bruce Feirstein called Nice Guys Sleep Alone, Chapter 27 entitled "Why You Should Never Date a Yuppie" address this issue. The author tells the story of a yuppie named David who realizes he is lonely because he has spent all his energy on collecting hi-tech toys. "I just can't keep up anymore," he groaned. "Every time I think I'm ahead--every time I think I'm on the cutting edge--they catch up."

"I just don't know what I'm going to do," he said, leaning against his collection of herbal vinegars (1981-1984). "The way I see it, it's just impossible to maintain your individuality in today's society."

Glancing around the room at his microwave (1976), convection oven (1977), Cuisinart (1978), pasta machine (1979), gelato maker (1980), sushi roller (1982), espresso steamer (1983), Braun coffee grinder (1984), and Cajun cookbook (1985), I decided more drastic action was required. I chose my words carefully.

"David," I said quietly, "have you ever considered that you need more people in your life instead of more gizmos? Like a wife? Or friends? Or a family?"

"You're right!" he said, reminding me of the way he's suddenly "gotten it" at EST (1974). "I'm lonely! I hurt!" He paused, narrowing his eyes. "And I know just the thing I can buy to solve it!"(12)

According to Wall Street Journal article in the spring of 1986, predications are--

Disagreeable jobs will be turned over to computerized machines; thus, the workplace will become much more humanized.

Computers and robots will do the dull work allowing humans to be free to be scientists, actors, artists; in other words, to do things they really enjoy and which allow them creativity.(45)

EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON LEISURE PREDICTIONS

Social researchers say employees' leisure may increase as much as 50 percent because of advanced technology, flex-time, and other social phenomena.

However, other studies (Wall Street Journal) show that discretionary time is decreasing for managers and professionals.

Predictions are that people will value leisure more than work and will give up income for increased leisure.

Despite shorter workdays and hi-tech and timesaving devices, twice as many Americans claim to have less leisure than those who claim to have more (according to a 1986 Wall Street Journal/NBC News survey).

Professional workers in the USA have less free time than any other professional counterparts except Japan.

TRUE LEISURE

When Americans engage in leisure their leisure seems to reflect a new form of work--they chart personal records in jogging, and pumping iron just like they chart profits and sales at the office.

As mentioned before, there are a number of ways we can perceive leisure.

We can look at time as an economic resource; time spent doing one thing is time taken from another potential leisure choice.

Time spent washing clothes all day Monday decades ago is now used for something else--shopping, working, getting your nails done, watching soaps. But one wonders if Parkinson's Law applies as a result: Do household tasks expand to fill the time allowed?

One can study time as an input or an output. For example: Is TV watching or time spent in a spectator activity an output reflecting consumption of leisure time or is it an input used to educate and entertain the viewer?

One also has to look at the work time it takes to earn the financial resources to buy the leisure experience.

Does hi-tech really improve the quality of our lives? or does hi-tech remove the real pleasures of our lives? Does hi-tech make our pleasures real or unreal?

The following scenarios may bring this point to life:

1) Consider the career woman who arrives home from work to cook an evening meal. One task from which she really derives pleasure is chopping vegetables for salads, chinese dishes, etc. Cutting vegetables is cathartic for her; she releases the day's tensions, anxieties and thus spends the time in a very therapeutic manner. Now, what if she were to use a food processor (a hi-tech item) to do the chore. Certainly it would save her time--time she could employ some other way--watching TV, reading the paper, on the telephone. However would the time be used as pleasurably? She may, in fact, be bored with the added free time. And she may not receive the therapeutic benefits by using the food processor.

2) Consider the second shift worker who derives great pleasure from viewing prime time evening sit-coms, but misses them because of his work schedule. He buys a VCR and begins taping his shows on a regular weekly basis, thus artificially programming his amusement. His entertainment need is satisfied--through his own choice of leisure hours.

3) Consider the elderly man who looks forward to his monthly trips to the bank to deposit his Social Security check. During a stay in the

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hospital his daughter arranges for automatic direct deposit of his monthly check. Much to her surprise, he is not at all happy with this time-saving hi-tech convenience. An integral part of his socialization has been taken away from him. He becomes a little more isolated and withdrawn as a result.

Taking a look at Census Bureau data gathered on hi-tech toy/convenience ownership over the decades reveals the dramatic changes technology has made in our lives. In 1869 the Census Bureau categorized our possessions which include the following:

        toys, games, and sporting goods
        household furniture
        heating and cooking apparatus
        house furnishings
        musical instruments
        china and household utensils
        jewelry, silverware, clocks, and watches
        printing and publishing books
        luggage

By 1937 more complex categories were added:

        tires and tubes
        electrical and household appliances and supplies
        radios
        passenger vehicles, motor
        motor vehicle accessories
        motorcycles and bicycles
        pleasurecraft
        ophthalmic products and artificial limbs
        industrial machinery and equipment
        tractors
        electrical equipment, industrial and commercial
        farm equipment
        office and store machinery and equipment
        office and store furniture and fixtures
        locomotive and railroad cars

In the 1960's, domestic ownership counting of television sets, cars, washers and dryers, refrigerators, dishwashers, and air conditioners became important.

By the 1980's, complexity of modern conveniences and hi-tech item ownership took the shape of video products (black and white TV, color TV, videocassette recorders, video cameras, videodisc players), telephone equipment (cellular telephones, corded telephones, cordless telephones, telephone answering devices), computers and videogames (personal computers, videogames), software (blank audiotape, blank videotape, Beta, VHS, pre-recorded videotape, videodiscs, blank floppy discs, videogame cartridges).

The increase in complexity in our personal possessions runs parallel with the increase in complexity of daily living. This complexity is nearly unavoidable and it appears that simple pleasures are not easily

derived.

Here are some predictions, trends, examples of hi-tech effects on recreation in the future:

1) By the year 2000, tourism will be the largest industry.

2) Long-haul tourist flights will be replaced by shorter ones.

3) Business trips will be replaced by communication via satellite.

4) Unprofitable domestic flights will be replaced by hi-speed trains.

5) According to Stanford Research Institute that did nine American lifestyle studies, we are becoming more inner directed than outer directed. We want individualized programming rather than standardization. We want to "do it ourselves and have first-hand experiences." There will be increased sensitivity to quality of life.

6) Group tourism will give way to individual journeys and non-standard packages will be eliminated. Experience design firms will employ "experience brokers" who will develop individualized dream vacations.

7) Total television--Television screens will evolve from small tubes to large flat wall screens approaching the size of home movie screens. Eventually television screens may curve around entire rooms, with viewers in the center.

8) Holography--Instead of the viewer being surrounded by a video screen carrying changing images, the three-dimensional images will emerge at various points within the room. Holography may eventually permit projecting scenes in which the real person plays one of several characters, like Michael Jackson's Captain E.O.

9) Sensory wiring--A person will put on a wired helmet that contains a small TV for the eyes, small speakers for the ears, a scent producer for the nose, and a heater/cooler for the skin.

10) Experience pills--Eventually psychedelic drugs may reach a level of development where a person will be able to have any desired experience by simply taking the right experience pill. This would make "experiencing" painless and inexpensive. It might open a happy new world to the handicapped and terminally ill.

11) Compact Disc users will allow you to type the name Beethoven on a keyboard and hear a computer rendition of his Fifth Symphony. You will be able to diagnose your child's rash with pictures and a voice that describes the condition. You will be able to shop at Herrod's in London and take a complete tour of the city. You will be able to slip a compact disc in your car with a dashboard video monitor that displays a map of the U.S., punch in your destination, and it will print out a triptic for you.

12) A child will be born in outer space.

13) Drugs will be available to improve memory and attention span.

14) Personal ads will become obsolete. This year 3 couples met and married using Computer Service Inc.'s service to exchange messages via computer.

15) For $2 a month, you will be able to program your phone to reject certain calls (can eliminate obscene calls). It is being test marketed now.

16) Car VCR's will be available (now available for RV industry but impractical for passenger car).

17) One will be able to trace your roots with home video.

18) Body parts will be available for transplant 24 hours a day.

19) Interactive fiction on video will transform the reader into an active participant in a soap opera plot or book plot.

20) Gaming simulation arcades will allow us to dream of what can be and to learn how to solve problems.

21) The scalpel will be obsolete because of laser surgery. By peering into a scope and using a joystick, the surgeon never touches the patient. Computers, in the future, will automatically guide the laser while the surgeon sits back and watches. One surgeon's view, "When this happens, I think they had better have more delicate minds than hands."

22) Male pregnancy will be possible within 10-20 years. Test tube embryos will be implanted in the male large intestine (resulting in a major impact on the lifestyle of the gay community).

Scientific advancements have "artificially" improved the quality of life and have provided a plethora of modern conveniences at our fingertips. But, are we losing touch with real pleasures?

Look at our language and speech patterns which reflect hi-tech. We use such expressions as, "I'll be there in a second!" or "Come here this instant!"

Hi-tech has not only affected speed of communication but the quality of interpersonal communication. The deaf community use a phrase which means "Communication is Life." Phone calls replace face-to-face talking. What is the pleasure/leisure quotient of chit-chatting?

Is Technology Good or Bad? Does Technology Make Life More Real or More Artificial?

Some say that too often human progress is equated with growth and material wealth but has negative spillover effects.

- Can the Good Life be achieved through more growth?

Is technology out of control? Making our lives intolerable? Creating

Megatraumas?

Does technology force people to consume things they don't really desire?

- Are we being cut off from our natural habitat?

- Are we being fooled into thinking we are happy?

On the flip side--

Technology could be used to put people in very close touch with nature (through dream vacations, etc.).

Opponents of hi-tech fail to take into account the average person's feelings/sentiments toward the good life as defined by hi-tech. Hi-tech can be PLEASURE/LEISURE in and of itself--not just a vehicle for saving time.

CONCLUSIONS

In the article "Forget the Japanese, Let's Emulate the Italians" Donald Kaul poses the question, "What's so good about excellence?" He claims that in the relentless quest for excellence, we are actually in the pursuit of dissatisfaction because excellence is unattainable.

Technological growth is ubiquitous to the point that we are unaware of what is happening. We fail to take notice of certain technological advancements and their effects on our lives because we consider them "normal."

Technology and leisure are so very closely related. Technology can be leisure in and of itself. Technology creates leisure both in quantity of time and quality of enjoyment. Whether this quality is real or artificial is an individual matter and is a relative issue. Each indivdual has his or her threshold for real pleasure which is naturally conceived and real pleasure which is artificially conceived.

Tech people need Rec people. Creative thinkers in the technology world who think scientifically in developing ideas should team up with those in the leisure services delivery systems. Leisure practitioners and educators possess special knowledge of leisure behavior patterns. Application of this knowledge together with technological creativity can result in enhanced quality living.

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