

Please forgive a slight digression and meandering interjection before I make my point.

My career started before there was any digital audio/video media, and at that time, I was very interested in digitizing analog signals, storing them and playing them back through a DAC. I was also interested in speech recognition, optical character recognition and machine learning, especially in the field of robotics. I liked the applications of that in cars with internal combustion engines too, mostly for high-performance applications. The first half of my career was in that time.

So it is ironic to me - now that all that has come to pass - I don't really want to use any of those technologies. In some part, I am being nostalgic, using technologies of my youth. In another part, it might be that the novelty has worn off. It's not cool future tech anymore. But those things wouldn't prevent me from embracing these technologies for the benefits they bring.

I think the biggest reason I shun some of the smart devices is because I know how easy it is for bad actors to hack them. Or for that matter, "good actors" that I feel a little uncomfortable with being in my cyberspace. I feel like Uncle Sam and Aunt Google would be living with me - in my living room, in my car, even in my bedroom - if I were to invite them in by using most smart devices. They're like a creepy neighbor or a stalking butler.

So I'm definitely of two minds about smart devices. On one hand, they're very convenient and useful. They do great things that aren't possible to do manually, like gather data on engine performance every millisecond and adjust air/fuel and timing accordingly. But on the other hand, that data can be used against you in court, in insurance rates and in a variety of other ways.

And then on the third other hand (think Zaphod Beeblebrox), that data can be used for good purposes too, data mining for trends and predictions. There is a certain class of metadata (or maybe I should say megadata) that can find the most interesting and useful facts by combing through large amounts of seemingly unrelated data. Like predicting the outcome of elections simply by knowing how many people bought chocolate on a Tuesday. That's a silly exaggeration, but it is amazing what kinds of things can be discovered and predicted using large data samples.

To me, that's probably the biggest innovation. It's weird - and even kind of creepy - but it's real.