

NKARC Letter: Winter 2013

Sub: NONKILLER APPS / BLOG

A fascinating cutting-edge piece by John Pawley on Nonkilling and IT: the Nonkiller Apps.

For complete article, click on: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-pawley/nonkiller-apps_b_4453660.html?1387228030

See below John 's conversation with Prof. Glenn D. Paige.

----- Original Message -----

From: John Pavley [mailto:pav@huffingtonpost.com]

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2013 11:35 AM

To: Glenn Paige

Cc: Joám Evans Pim; Adrião Morão

Subject: Re: NONKILLER APPS / BLOG

the blog post is live: http://-www.huffingtonpost.com/john-pawley/nonkiller-apps_b_4453660.html?1387228030

On Mon, Dec 16, 2013 at 3:30 PM, Glenn Paige <cgnv@hawaii.rr.com> wrote:

Hi John,

Your essay perfectly expresses the nonkilling thesis. It is potentially the most the most constructive piece yet written affect nonkilling global transformation because (1) it addresses the 21st century world's leading IT innovators, (2) does not only raise consciousness of their contributions to killing, but (3) credits them with nonkilling change potential. If your message reaches some of the most creative among them, it will produce extraordinary benefits in the years ahead.

Your essay reminds me of awakening when I read the chapter on "Nonkilling Mathematics" in Joám's ed. *Towards a Nonkilling Paradigm* (2009). This is repeated with two other chapters on "Nonkilling Mathematics" in Joám's ed. *Engineering Nonkilling: Scientific Responsibility for a Killing-Free World* (2011).

Four small edit suggestions; (1) par. 4. change "pre-eminent social scientist" to political scientist, (2) par. 4 I prefer first reference Prof. to "Dr." [am teacher and can't do surgery], (3) All further references in par. 4 & 5, simply Paige OK, (4) par. 9, add "s" to technologist.

Congratulations for truly seminal IT essay!

Aloha,

Glenn

P.S. Have you seen the very important related *Variety* special report on *Violence & Entertainment* (2013) (variety.com/violence)? It rightly laments the violence but lacks the transformational nonkilling precision of your call for change from "killer apps" to "nonkiller apps". /gdp.

Glenn D. Paige
Chair, Governing Council

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"Everyone can be A Center for Global Nonkilling"
"No More Killing!"

From: John Pavley [mailto:pav@huffingtonpost.com]
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2013 6:44 AM
To: Glenn Paige; Joám Evans Pim; Adrião Morão
Subject: Fwd: NONKILLER APPS / BLOG

Hi Glenn, Joám, Adrião,

I wrote a blog post about the idea of "nonkiller apps" as an alternative to "killer apps". I'd like to get your feedback on the the blog post and the idea. And I want to make sure I properly explain what nonkilling is and your mission.

We'd like to publish this soon but not without your advice and consent.

It's still going through the copy editing process but I wanted you to see if early.

It's also missing all the links. For example I would link to your site and to the wikipedia page on nonkilling.

Thanks for your review and the great work that you are doing!

----- Forwarded message -----

I first heard the term killer app in 1992. A fellow Apple engineer explained to me that every computer needed a killer app. Without a killer app the computer would never cross the chasm between being a toy for a small audience of enthusiasts and a becoming must-have tool for a mass audience of consumers. VisiCalc, one of the first popular spreadsheets, was the killer app for the Apple II personal computer. For many people Microsoft Office was the killer app for Windows computers. Email was the killer app for Blackberry smart phones. Consumers didn't buy computers-they bought killer app machines. Much of my professional career as a technologist has centered on building killer apps.

The killer app concept is alive and well today. Clearly the killer app for the modern computer is the web browser. Few of us would buy a desktop, laptop, tablet or phone that could not connect to the World Wide Web. New computing devices, like smart TVs and Google Glass, are still waiting for their killer apps. Without a killer app or two, these

technological marvels will fade away like the Apple Newton did more than a decade ago.

I assume the term killer app came from the phrase "to make a killing." I didn't really think much about the metaphor. The use of the word "killing" as a synonym for "succeeding" or "winning" is as unremarkable as it is commonplace. But it's a little creepy when I really think about what the word killer really means. After all a "murder app" or "homicidal app" doesn't sound appealing and yet all these words are interchangeable synonyms.

Back in the 1970s a pre-eminent social scientist was struck by an idea that changed his life, made him reevaluate his research, and caused him to coin the word "nonkilling". His name was Dr. Glenn Paige and his revelation came when he recognized the true cost of all the killing that humanity was doing in the name of security. Dr. Paige went on to write some really important papers and found the Center for Nonkilling. Dr. Paige now works with world leaders to realize a world where killing is not an acceptable means to an end.

One thing that has changed since Dr. Paige started on his mission is the rapid adoption of computer technology. In the 1970s computers were just starting to become consumer appliances that a non-technologist might own. Now our phones and automobiles have become computers. Very shortly we'll be living in the "Internet of things" where computers are ubiquitous and killer apps are running our lives.

I have this sense that most killer apps are developed and implemented without regard to their impact on human quality of life and life expectancy. When we engineers sit down at the whiteboard and start dreaming and coding we generally don't think about killing or nonkilling. We think about solving a very specific set of problems and we don't try to "boil the ocean." That means unintended effects, both side and longterm, are usually left unaddressed.

When the engineers at Google created the world's most powerful search engine I'm sure they had no idea that they also created the ability for a troubled user to search for bomb building recipes. When the engineers at Facebook created the world's most richly connected graph of human relations I'm sure they had no idea it could contribute to teenage suicide. When the engineers at Microsoft created the Xbox I'm sure they really didn't think about the impact of highly realistic first person shooters on those for whom the line between reality and fantasy is not very clear.

As our world becomes more computerized, or rather, as the world becomes more automated with software, the unintended consequences become more devastating. The line between online and offline is about to be erased. It's long past time that we technologists take our blinders off and think about how our killer apps impact the messy, complicated, dangerous world where everything has a chip and network access.

Specifically, we technologist can start to design with nonkilling in mind. We can focus on nonkiller apps that take into account the impact of software on its user's environment and longterm prospects.

While I'm not sure Google would say it in this way, they are making great progress on several nonkiller apps:

- * Google's "safe search" mode and search algorithm improvements are starting to put up obstacles between users and risky content. This is not censorship. It's just a means to put the harmful stuff out of immediate reach.

- * Google's self-driving car is a nonkiller app that could save thousands of lives every year. Already we can buy cars that are programmed to recognize and avoid dangers.

- * Google Glass is a nonkiller app because its built-in video camera and microphone will be a boon to user generated news content and social media-based activism. It gets harder and harder every year for governments to mistreat their citizens because the ability to create and communicate reliable evidence is in the hands of every consumer.

Facebook is also working on some nonkiller apps. While many of my friends worry about privacy, I'm more worried about the psychological effects of isolation. Facebook is headed in the right direction with their recent improvements in privacy controls and how news is posted on user's timelines and profile.

Apple's Touch ID has the potential to be a great nonkiller app. It makes the phone less desirable to steal and less vulnerable to hacking. It's not perfect but if Apple can perfect Touch ID I'd love to see it on all sorts of devices including rifles and handguns.

Even the Microsoft Xbox can be a nonkilling app with games that promote exercise, like Dance Dance Revolution, and fill idle hours with organized activity. There are moms who buy their teens Xboxes to keep them off the streets. We just need more games like Minecraft and less games like Warcraft.

As the world becomes the "Internet of Things" we technologists can take our killer apps and convert them into nonkilling apps. The virtual swords can be reprogrammed into Internet plowshares that dramatically reduce violence both accidental and intentional.

We just need to get organized behind the idea of nonkilling as an end in itself and not a low priority problem. We live in a dangerous world, but much of it is dangerous because of how we have manufactured the world with our killer apps. The next time we are sitting in the garage, dreaming up the next "big thing" let's keep nonkilling in mind.

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John Pavley

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