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Unit 6

“Of the two mental worlds everyone inhabits, the inner and the outer, the latter increasingly rules. The more connected we are the more we depend on the world outside ourselves to tell us how to think and live. There’s always been a conflict between the exterior social self and the interior, private one. The struggle to reconcile them is central to the human experience...in our own lifetime the balance has tilted decisively in one direction. We hear the voices of others and are directed by those voices, rather than by our own.” (*Hamlet’s Blackberry*)

I would like to start with this sentiment: I hate technology. I think it undermines life’s most important aspects, and has become out of control. I think it will ruin families. I think it will deplete spousal relationships. It is increasing bullying, and making bad habits easier to access. It changes faster than people can keep up, overwhelming and stressing people to their max. It is expensive. It over-stimulates children, hindering creativity and originality. It creates people who are not only afraid to be alone, they don’t even know who they are anymore “Someone who cannot tolerate aloneness is someone who doesn’t know he’s grown up. It takes courage to let go of that fantasy of childhood safety. The world may never seem so certain again...when we take possession of our own separateness. Our own integrity! That is when our adult life really begins.” (*Hamlet’s Blackberry*)

I suppose saying I hate technology isn’t exactly accurate, it isn’t so much the technology in and of itself I am opposed to, it is the use, abuse, dependency, and addiction people have to it that I am more than frustrated with. We have created an instantaneous gratification society largely in part to technological advances, and for as much good that comes from it (and I do concede that there is good that comes from it) I believe more of it is harmful. William Powers is one of the first people whom I have heard 1) recognize it and 2) offer actual solutions.

The most desirable resources of Powers’ strategies are “old tools ease overload” and “distance”. I don’t believe in people’s abilities to self-regulate, and most of the others involve some sort of technology just being able to use it in a toned down or different capacity. Distance then is one way when people can get back to experiencing “real life.” They can’t have the option to “log on” or they will use it. People (as a general mass) have no willpower. My parents have a cottage in northern Michigan. There is no cell service, no TV, and no internet. There is something freeing about being there. We can not get on the internet to check facebook, or check text messages, or even make phone calls, and instead we spend the time we would have done doing that, disconnecting from one another, interacting as a family, playing games, talking, cooking, or reading in a weekend than we do in the entire month we are home were we have the access to all the other pulls of life.

I love the idea of using old tools to ease overload. One reason that I think this works is that it forces you to take time. Writing a letter, addressing it, getting a stamp and mailing it takes much more time than sending an e-mail. It forces you to slow down. Using a record, getting it out, putting it on, and putting the needle where you want it takes more time and precision than pushing a button on your i-pod. The time and effort that the “older” tasks take allows for the person to slow down, relax, and really pay attention.

Powers says to “think...deeply. Train the mind to tune out the chaos, through the art of concentration.” (*Hamlet’s Blackberry*)

The least desirable resource is positive rituals. Again, I have little faith in humans having self-discipline. For the most part I do not believe we live in a society where people can self-regulate, therefore they will never be able to create habits for themselves where they don’t do something that they are essentially addicted to. “The goal is no longer to be “in touch” but to erase the possibility of being out of touch.” (*Hamlet’s Blackberry*) I have tried multiple times to go without my cell phone, and even I, who am adamantly against technology have found myself convincing myself, like Powers discussed, that it is safer to have it. That I can not go without it largely in part to my 6 month old daughter...then I think well, people had babies for a long time without cell phones and for the most part survived, and yet I still carry it. It eats away at me a bit knowing it has me.

The most feasible is “technologies of inwardness” and using “old tools.” I think for most of the technological society asking them to give it up is going to be impossible (see the least feasible later on). Therefore adding old technologies, or creating ways to keep to yourself using new technologies seems like the way to go. For example the first thing I did in this course was download the books to my kindle. I had them with me and could read them whenever I had time, since it fit in my purse, and when my crazy schedule would allow for 15-20 I could break out whatever book I was working on and read through some of it, underlining bits I thought to be important so that later I could go back to the clippings feature and read about what I thought was interesting or pertained to the assignment. The easier we make things on people the more likely they are to use them, so things like e-readers which support “technologies of inwardness” without even realizing that they are not “connected” to anyone as they are doing it.

I also think that adding old tools to people’s lives is very feasible. While “old tools” may take up more time (i.e. writing a Christmas card and sending it rather than an e-card) I think people are more apt to add things (old technologies) rather than take things away (not using technologies). I also think there is a novelty to old tools. I have a set of encyclopedias in my classroom. For the first part of the year the students don’t even know what they are. It isn’t until part way through the year we when are doing research for a paper they are assigned and I explain and teach them how to use them do the kids use them. However, once they do they think they are awesome. Inevitably after I introduce them the students will grab them during quiet reading time and thumb through them. They love discovering what is already there. It is interesting to watch this happen it is as if the students are engaged because it is “new” to them. Another aspect of my classroom my students love is pen pals. They love the anticipation of waiting for the mail to come so that they can get the letters. I think there is something to knowing that the actual papers they are holding are the same ones that their pen pals held and wrote across the ocean. It would not be the same experience if it were done through e-mails.

The least feasible is distance and inner space. I agree with Powers when he says that slowly all the space where one can go to get away will be taken over. I think at some point in the future (probably more near that I realize) people will have access to connectivity anywhere. Other than maybe the moon, I am not sure there will be a place left where they will be able to physically move themselves away from the space where connectivity is available.

Along with that, I do not think people will be able to give up their technologies. Therefore, I think that having inner space will only become increasingly more difficult. Conversing is a skill. Personal relationships take work and practice. Without the practice and work ethic (which is another side effect of technology, people are getting lazier) it will get more and more difficult to spend time with people outside of the technological world. (I do think doing things with your hands is more feasible, but I was looking at this more relationally.) Again, people have no will-power, and less work ethic (have you seen our obesity rates?) any solution that involves self-regulation will be next to impossible.

I completely agree with many of the things Powers put fourth. None more so, however, than the idea that moderation is the key while keeping the things important to you at the center of your world. Dependency is bad. Utilizing it as a tool is good. "The point isn't that the screen is bad. The screen is, in fact, very good. The point is the lack of proportion the abandonment of all else, and the strange absent-present state of mind this produces." (*Hamlet's Blackberry*)