The Suffocating Void

Domestication and Pathological Distraction

Kevin Tucker

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fact that we are losing the very ability to even situate or reconcile our loss and context.

They are counting on our inability to recognize the world around us.

And yet this is not the world as it exists.

The earth is suffering from the consequences, but it is still alive. The wildness refuses to be tamed. It refuses to succumb to the machine.

Our hunter-gatherer minds and bodies know this, despite everything that we have been taught. These misdirected impulses and synapses linger amidst the confusion. That is why we still reach out in the first place.

That is why these caged birds Tweet.

In that moment, that second when we look up, that second when we feel the crushing realness of our circumstance, we are human. We are afraid. We are scared. We are lonely.

And we do have a choice.

If given the chance, these realities will never be reconciled. These words might be etched forever in silicon and roam electrical feeds so long as the power lasts, but that feeling is real. This world is real.

It is our work to smash the distraction. To pull the plug. To render the machines useless.

To see this world the way our bodies feel it and our minds know it, there is no other option but the annihilation of civilization. We have guides. We have instincts.

We have our wildness.

So before we are lost in a sea of unending, constant nothingness: to take the first step, we must first look up. Breathe deep.

And fight back.

"It would be imprudent to deny, or even to play down, the profound change which the advent of 'fluid modernity' has brought to the human condition. The remoteness and unreachability of systemic structure, coupled with the unstructured, fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics, change that condition in a radical way and call for a rethinking of old concepts that used to frame its narratives. Like zombies, such concepts are today simultaneously dead and alive." – Zygmunt Bauman[1]

Something has changed. Radically. And for the worst.

It is tellingly difficult to describe something without a name. And that something has quickly crept into our minds and psyche. We call it "social media" or the "social network", but those words normalize what is a revolutionary change in our relationship to technology. We're not talking here about a mere platform of technology, we're talking about a mindset, a constantly flowing stream of information whereby a refusal to participate renders the human, now reduced to the status of a "user", obsolete.

There has been a distinct turn away from the internet being relegated to a computer and it is now not only with us at all times, but always on, always moving, always watching. The internet has moved from a form of communication to the increasingly predominant one. So much so that the United Nations has declared internet access a human right.[2] As fiber optic cables are buried in plain sight, Wifi signals permeate our world.

Your muscles twitch. You believe it's your phone in your pocket, but you're holding it in your hand[3]. You didn't notice you were

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[1] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*. Blackwell: Malden, MA. Pg. 8.

[2] http://www.wired.com/2011/06/internet-a-human-right/ Retrieved 12-29-2014.

[3] This vastly increasing occurrence does have a name: "Phantom Vibration Syndrome". A word first used in print in 2003 by Robert Jones who reiterated

even checking it. Our immersion into the world of the machine is most notable in how little attention we pay to it.

We expect it and we are expected by it.

This is the suffocating void, the demanding emptiness of Modernity, the obtuse compliance with the domestication process as rendered in binary by programmers.

We need to stop.

Stop our movements, still our minds, silence our devices and for a moment, even just one moment, just be present. It's not easy. It's not easy to get there and it's not easy to stay there. The air is thick, it is difficult to breathe and even harder to get your bearings. It is overwhelming. The weight of our stuff, our drama, our baggage comes crashing in. In our world, stagnancy is the equivalent of death.

We are stuck in constant movement. We become the flood, the rushing waters, a conversation with no beginning, no end, and no content. To our nomadic gatherer-hunter minds, there's an inkling of familiarity. Our bodies want to move, to flow and respond. But this is not the movement of bodies within a rooted world: it is a trap. We are stuck within the eye of a tornado, so we try to move with it, but it never stops and it never ends. And when you attempt to stop and assess the situation, the true horror of our reality, the crushing impact of what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has aptly labeled "Liquid Modernity" will overcome you.

It will annihilate you.

Our ancestors, our shared lineage that formed our bodies and minds, were driven by movement. Within our crisis, the pathetic

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his earlier thoughts ten years later with the following comment: "Whether PVS is the result of tissue over-stimulation, neuro-psychological unconscious bias, a genuine mental health issue, or all of the above, this persistent phenomenon indicates that we long ago crossed the line in the sands of privacy in this "always on" society."

From: http://inclusiveworks.com/cn-executive-coaching-corner/phantom-vibration-syndrome-update/ Retrieved 12-29-2014.

and their processing are absolutely toxic.[38] We are killing the earth, poisoning water ways, driving species to extinction, forcing labor, keeping sweatshops open, and on, for a device that allows nearly half of the earth's population to remain constantly in contact without ever just being there.

And this is how civilization ends: consumed by an uncaring and unfeeling impulse to reach out to those who are strangers surrounding us.

Lest you think the problem is simply capitalism, those operating the mines, work camps, poppy fields and mono-cropped farms are quite often socialist revolutionaries. No matter who is in control: this is the point that Modernity has gotten us into.

It is a quagmire of drifting along on limited resources with a sense of infinite wants and no fulfillment.

And it is here that our lives, the lives of all beings on this planet and the earth itself are bound. And as we sheepishly reload our News Feed, this is the world that is passing us by.

It's not okay.

We're not okay.

The problems that surround us, the emptiness of Modernity, the thing that has us looking at screens instead of into eyes is a distraction. It is life automated. As you shudder away from that frightening noise, the clutter, the crowds, the moment you look up mindlessly from your phone; you are confronted with all of this.

And it is too much.

It is suffocating. It is an endless nothingness, a weight on the lungs, a turning in the stomach, an unidentified repulsion.

The temptation is to look away. That is why we don't even have the words to address this plague, to address how the hardwired matrix became an invisible leash. We aren't confronting it. And the programmers, the domesticators of Modernity, are counting on the

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[38] http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/rare-earth-mining-china-social-environmental-costs Retrieved 12-28-2014.

otherwise be useful for, let's say, the production of rare earth metals.

In some places, it's just easier to demolish any access to subsistence just to build factories and create a work force. If you can no longer harvest from the land directly, then you need to buy food.

But back to the rare earth minerals example (believe me, there are many options), your phone would not exist without them. Here in Shenzhen, tantalum is used to help make phone batteries lighter and last longer. That tantalum, however, comes from Congo, where forests are cleared by military leaders (often not on the State's side) to build what can only be considered shanty-mining villages.

And who works there? Prisoners, those caught in the crossfire, and, quite often, children.[35]

And these places are horrifically dangerous.

But for your phone to be lightweight and last longer off the charger, a constant and ongoing civil war will find bodies to fill, dig, and exhume those mines.

Then those materials are processed and assembled by overworked and tired hands in China before being sold to you. And while this new phone has a separate light to notify you when something is happening on your Facebook News Feed, every part of that contraption was possibly the worst part of another dozen people's lives.

And this goes on for every single piece of technology that you have in your pocket.

Never mind that those metals are both rare and irreplaceable.[36] Or on that they are on the verge of non-existence.[37] Or that they

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[35] Ibid. Pgs 203-206. Kevin Bales' *Disposable People* (University of California Press: Berkeley. 2000) is also an indispensible source on the matter.

[36] http://gizmodo.com/the-metals-in-your-phone-arent-just-rare-theyre-irre-1477904295 Retrieved 12-28-2014.

[37] http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360544212008055 Retrieved 12-28-2014.

reflection of that primal urge is not movement, but restlessness. We are moving, but we are going nowhere. Shuffling to avoid stagnancy. Moving lifelessly to avoid death.

This is not an accident.

Nothing in our reality really is any more. We are a herd of individuals vying for attention in a sea of selfies, tweets and yelps. The ecologist Paul Shepard long ago pointed out how domestication stunts development[4], but technology derails it. Increasingly unable to find or define ourselves outside of the machine, we move further inwards. And the programmers pull the strings. We learn to express ourselves through the machine and, in doing so, we become one.

Our distraction keeps us from seeing the monumental change taking place: the immersion into a constantly connected, but never grounded social network. We are, so to speak, "always on". Smart phones, tablets, screens everywhere we look, wireless signals pervading nearly all spaces, check ins, GPS and monitoring equipment constantly reassuring the world that we are here and we are consuming this manufactured reality.

Within decades, we went from being sold the mythos and myths of Progress to rendering the narrative null through immersion. We no longer need to dream of a glorious Future, we are here. Progress is no longer spoken of, but expected and systemic.

Like the Agricultural Revolution, Industrial Revolution, and the Green Revolution before it, the Interface Revolution propels civilization beyond the boundaries and limitations of earlier systems. The firewalls of Jericho have been breached. Progress innovated, the processes integrated.

For the programmers, this is no small feat. This is the dream of every domesticator: people lining up and fighting for the latest

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[4] See Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness.* University of Georgia Press: Athens, GA. 1998 and *Coming Home to the Pliestocene.* Island Press: Washington DC. 1998.

technology, fighting for a place in line, paying top dollar for devices with built in tracking and data mining software and willing to remain in debt to sustain the terms of our bondage. Never mind that the world is suffocating under piles of waste, choking down makeshift mines for rare and difficult to extract metals, while workers are forced to sign anti-suicide clauses, villages are displaced, and sustained low budget warfare are both form and function; the expectation isn't just that all of this will be ignored, but that you, the consumer, will be back for more next year. Or sooner.

And when things are really moving along, not only are the consequences of technology (both internal and external) ignored, they are accepted and justified.

If the architects of Uruk had the foresight, they would have been seething with jealousy over the control and obedience this technocratic dystopia holds.

But in their place we have the ever-present bloated smiles of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg encoded into the machines we carry. The smiles of billionaires who built their impossibly massive fortunes on our desecrated earth: buried, literally, in a sea of intentionally outdated and short-lived devices. Devices filled with metals mined by the dispossessed under the directives of warlords. Devices built by the displaced and disempowered. Devices awash in toxic residue that dilute into groundwater, streams, rivers, and contaminate oceans.

Devices that whiten the blood stained teeth of programmers, of billionaires: of domesticators.

And their smiles are injected into every aspect of our lives.

The Flesh Machine

> "With this new 'megatechnics' the dominant minority will create a uniform, all-enveloping, super-planetary structure, designed for automatic operation. Instead

Let's start with those phones.

Most of our phones are made in Shenzhen, China. And it is a city built on cell phones. "Twenty-five years ago it was a fishing village surrounded by rice paddies. Today it is an urban sprawl of 12 million people" observes journalist Fred Pearce.[34]

This is the home of Foxconn's now notorious sweatshops.

Foxconn runs the leading technological production facilities. This is currently where most Apple and Sony products are made, Blackberrys as well in their heyday. The reason they got some news was shocking: employees were forced to sign an anti-suicide clause. According to Wikipedia's numbers, up till 2013, at least 24 workers had killed themselves: the wretched working conditions, exposure to toxic chemicals, monotony of industrialized production, and overall depression being the clear common causes.

The most common method of suicide was jumping from the rooftops of the factories and corporate housing (if we can use the term that liberally), so the response of the corporation? Install netting around the rooftops to catch jumping workers.

Foxconn, for many living beings, sounds like hell.

The marketers promote the myth throughout civilization that you have a choice. And to some degree it is true. You can not purchase a smartphone, the catch is that it is that you are expected to. Consumers laud this as a choice: you lose your right to complain once you bought in. This is the Litmus Test for compliance in the Void. The presumptions here, however, are disgustingly off.

The presumption carried on is that people go to sweatshops because they want jobs. This may be true for some, but there's a long standing colonial and imperial legacy that is endemic (predominantly, though not exclusively) throughout the southern hemisphere whereby subsistence societies live in areas that would

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[34] Fred Pearce. *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner: Tracking Down the Sources of My Stuff*. Beacon Press: Boston. 2008, Pg. 200. Despite it's liberal guilt sounding title, it's actually a really great book.

of functioning actively as an autonomous personality, man [sic] will become a passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal whose proper functions, as technicians now interpret man's [sic] role, will either be fed into the machine or strictly limited and controlled for the benefit of de-personalized, collective organizations." - Lewis Mumford[5]

Lewis Mumford long ago made the observation that the first components of the "Megamachine", the infusion of technology and society, were made of flesh and blood. It has long been the dream of the technocrats to make the flesh the last. While Mumford was talking about the coordinated efforts it took to build monuments and to clear and plow fields in the Mesolithic era, the programmers of our time just want to remove the clunkiness and messiness of their apparatus from our view.

This was the vision of Progress that we had been sold.

The Future would be better. The Machine would deliver us from drudgery. Its "apparent purpose", as stated by former advertising executive turned neo-Luddite, Jerry Mander, "is to eliminate human ailments and human unhappiness…, to expand the human potential, and to create a world of abundance for human enjoyment." Meanwhile driving in the "unstated purpose" to "fulfill the inherent drive of technological society to feed its own evolutionary cravings, to expand its domination of the both Earth and space, and to complete the utter conversion of nature into commodity form."[6]

For many of us, the failures of Progress are no surprise. This is a mythos as distraction: your sacrifice now will benefit you later. It is not only a religious imperative, it is the origin of religious thought

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[5] Lewis Mumford. *The Myth of the Machine.* Harcourt, Brace & World: New York. 1966, Pg. 3.

[6] Jerry Mander. *In the Absence of the Sacred.* Sierra Club Books: San Francisco. 1992, Pg 190.

only to be readapted as seen fit through time. A cosmological delayed return economy[7].

And within Modernity, that adaptation grew into and through the allure of new technology.

Change comes into the picture.

Marshall McLuhan spotted it with the printing press, Jerry Mander spotted it in the television, when Mumford saw the thread, he saw strong hints at the potential of the computer, but he seemingly would have hoped it could have not gotten to the point where we are now: change is expected, integration is constant. Speed itself, as John Zerzan aptly notes[8], has become virtue.

We have suddenly found ourselves at a strange impasse where narratives have collided. The need for the sales pitch of Progress has been surpassed by the want for the new. We aren't questioning the expectation that we are always available, "always on", we are lining up for the newest devices to further those intrusions.

Fighting *for* them.

Getting to this point didn't happen over night, but even within the history of technology, it all happened with unthinkable speed. The mobile phone took a remarkably fast slide from toy of the ultra-rich to nearly universal acceptance. By 2013, 91% of the adult population in the US owned at least one.[9]

The unprecedented nature of this has led two industry proponents to applaud the near universal acceptance of mobile phones as the most quickly adopted consumer technology in the history of the world. Gloating in their sickening book, *Networked*, authors

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[7] The link between domestication and religion is vital. I've touched on it elsewhere and will be elaborating on it in upcoming works. A solid book on the subject is Morris Berman's *Wandering God*. State University of New York Press: Albany, 2000.

[8] See John Zerzan's on-point essay "Faster!" in this issue of *Black and Green Review*.

[9] According to a PEW Research survey: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/06/cell-phone-ownership-hits-91-of-adults/ Retried 12-29-2012.

when we're away from our computers. Our brains become adept at forgetting, inept at remembering. Our growing dependence on the Web's information stores may in fact be the product of a self-perpetuating, self-amplifying loop. As our use of the Web makes it harder for us to lock information into our biological memory, we're forced to rely more and more on the Net's capacious and easily searchable artificial memory, even if it makes us shallower thinkers."[32]

The machine is not controlling your mind: the machine is absorbing it.

This eternal present comes at the death of memory while the future hangs in the balance. It is widely noted that nomadic hunter-gatherers lack a sense of anything other than cyclical time. Living within the realm of an immediate return subsistence, it's easy to conflate our sense of immediate gratification. These are two greatly opposing realities: one lives in honor of the past and the future, the other exists at their expense.

The real world struggles to keep up. Amazon, the largest internet retailer in the US, pushed Sunday delivery as an option, is working on same day delivery, always offers one or two day shipping, and is just one of many corporations trying to cash in on streaming and immediately available content.

While our nomadic hunter-gatherer lives are typified by immediate return interactions, this sad repackaging of immediate gratification is an entirely different beast. It sacrifices long term relationships and sustainability for short-term acquisition. Another impulse to feed. Another plug to fill. A furthering of our integration with technology.

We are addicts.

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[32] Ibid, Pg. 194.

equal footing. And our minds don't take the sensory overload of one site more seriously than others.

We are losing the ability to remember.

Our brain treats the internet as an external source: the very warehouse of information that the programmers have sold to us. We don't need to retain this full information because we can access it at any time through our computers or, more commonly, our phone. To say, "Google it" is hardly a passive phrase, it is an intrinsic change in the way they we find information.

We no longer gather it; we just seek it out when we need to reference it.

And then it is released again into the internet. This is not an intentional process on our part, but it is absolutely underpinning the nature of our relationship with the world through the megamachine. This is the suffocating void: that fogged sense of place, filled with the pressures to maintain existence while always searching for another reason to prolong the presence.

As Carr states, we are "outsourcing memory" and in doing so, we are outsourcing function. This is our integration with the machine, our delusional participation in the Spectacle and yet it's as though we're not even there.

It's worth quoting Carr at length here:

> "The influx of competing messages that we receive whenever we go online not only overloads our working memory; it makes it harder for our frontal lobes to concentrate our attention on any one thing. The process of memory consolidation can't even get started. And, thanks once again to the plasticity of our neuronal pathways, the more we use the Web, the more we train our brain to be distracted – to process information very quickly and very efficiently but without sustained attention. That helps explain why many of us find it hard to concentrate even

Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman state: "the Mobile Revolution has allowed [Information and Community Technologies] to become body appendages allowing people to access friends and information at will, wherever they go." The key being "always accessible", but, in true form, they see "the possibility of a continued presence and pervasive awareness of others in the network"[10] positively.

The architects of civilization have long understood that the power of the domestication process lies in its ability to be internalized. The mythos of Progress requires daily affirmation. The programmers, however, realized that affirmation could become integrated.

They just needed to eliminate any distance between a given technology and the user. Lo and behold, a trip into a recently built suburb or even newly gentrified city will show that the eyesore of power lines have been rid from sight. We go wireless so we no longer see the machine as separate. Unsightly and inconvenient wiring goes to routers in corners and under furniture. Corporations sponsor "Wifi Hot Spots" to customers. We remove the wiring from sight to internalize its function.

And this has sadly been effective. Very effective.

What you see when you step into public places are faces illuminated by backlit devices. Groups of teens walking together and each lost in their own virtual presence. 1.3 million car accidents in the US during 2011 were caused by drivers distracted with their cell phones.[11] You will see people constantly swiping their screens to look for updates, feeds, messages, or just blindly glancing out of habit at their phones, most seemingly with no recognition of what they are doing.

The conclusion of the Megamachine, the necessary step to furthering the goals of Progress, was to eliminate barriers. To make it

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[10] Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked*. MIT Press: Cambridge. 2012, Pg. 12.
[11] http://www.textinganddrivingsafety.com/texting-and-driving-stats/ Retrieved 12-29-2014. That's 23% of car accidents in case you were wondering.

so we treat phones as an appendage, while the Programmers dream of making them one.

To make us complicit.

To make us comply without even noticing it.

I have long held that the genius of civilizers is falsely attributed to manufacturing needs. Simply put, they aren't that smart and we aren't that gullible.

What it does come down to is an understanding of what a human being needs. We are social animals. In our minds and bodies, even when lost in some ridiculous App on an iPhone, we are trying to reconcile the world of the hunter-gatherer with the path that Modernity has set us on. For the most part, our emotional and mental free fall is held in place so long as our inertia is matched by social rebounding.

Community is etched in our Stone Age soul. We don't just want others; we need them.

And herein lies the tragedy.

This is our animality being torn from us, repackaged and then sold back to us. We want movement, we want connectivity, we want contact, and, in the absence of the physical, the electric options are literally inescapable waves penetrating our minds and bodies.

This is how Progress was sold to us and this is why we buy into this Void. Amongst 7 billion people and counting, in a sea of unending electric synapse and stimuli: we are lost, alone, and confused.

While it may be utterly unrecognizable, the mound builders of Mesopotamia and the high-tech sweatshop worker serve the same function: to become the apparatus so that we may consume it.

And that downward spiral is driven by our consumption.

While we are told that life without civilization was a struggle, we ignore that while things can happen fast, our minds and bodies have evolved to cope with them. Should we suddenly realize that we're being tracked or should a hunt take an immediate turn: our bodies are built to respond.

On the other hand, we were not built for prolonged exposure to over-stimulation. If anything, our inability to process the overwhelming input from life in Modernity is testimony to how much more relaxed our nomadic hunter-gatherer life really was. And yet we continually attack and offend our sensibilities. The result is exhausting, stimulating, exciting, depressing, crushing, lost, and searching all at the same time.

In true form, that is what the internet looks like: a barrage of ads, information, stimulus, and options. It is a visceral and literal distraction.

Following McLuhan, being on the internet forces the use of some senses at the expense of others: "We can assume" Carr observes, "that the neural circuits devoted to scanning, skimming, and multitasking are expanding and strengthening, while those used for reading and thinking deeply, with sustained concentration, are weakening or eroding."[31]

And the biology behind this is worse.

Not only are we impacting what senses are being used; we are altering the way our brains take in information. To move from short-term to long-term memory, a particular event or piece of knowledge requires a sense of depth, a memorable moment. It stops the flood of input in our waking lives long enough for the mind to find a reason to hold on to it.

As enraging as your online arguments can get or as off-putting as something might be, when read on the internet, the form dictates function in the mind. In a sea of distraction, all things are given

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[31] Nicholas Carr. *The Shallows.* WW Norton: New York. 2011, Pg. 141.

tions and so on are all consumable. Quantifiable in nature, ever expanding in form: this is the world stripped of life and coded in binary and algorithms.

That information that you were after, that pressing question you had to Google, that curiosity that you had? Those are all starting points. The internet does act like a web. Every point is measured in its relation to others. It is a multiple-choice adventure at all times and if you weren't aware, the hyperlinks can sell you on directions that flashing ads might not.

They want you to click. They beg you to click.

Once you do, you start down their rabbit hole: this fog of consumption of information and products, opinions and trivia. There's no explanation for how you found these random factoids when you paste them in on your News Feed, but there's a science to it. Click. Share. Integrate.

At its heart, this visceral assault is not a new concept. We've known from the inception and integration of the television how this external and contrived fantasy (especially when driven by fright) deeply impacts our fight or flight synapse. We are overwhelmed with options even if they all lead to the same complicity.

This is how our brains work.

And this is what the programmers know.

That is why they can adjust algorithms on Facebook as a social experiment to see how the tone of a News Feed can impact worldviews. They call this "emotional contagion". To date it's been clearly exposed at least once as part of a weeklong emotional experiment conducted through tweaking the tone of shared content in your News Feed on Facebook.[30]

This is your cage.

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[30] http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/06/everything-we-know-about-facebooks-secret-mood-manipulation-experiment/373648/ Retrieved 12-30-2014.

The Zuckerburg Galaxy

"There is a huge need and a huge opportunity to get everyone in the world connected, to give everyone a voice and to help transform society for the future. The scale of the technology and infrastructure that must be built is unprecedented, and we believe this is the most important problem we can focus on." – Mark Zuckerberg[12]

Facebook didn't invent social media, but it has become iconic in its acceptance and usage. While often being joked about as a scourge, near the end of 2014 more than 1.35 billion people logged on at least once per month[13]. That surpasses the population of China.

And it continues to grow.

As much as the mainstream celebrates social media, even attempting to posture it as the tool of liberation during the Arab Spring (though ironically demonizing it when it was used in the same way in the Ferguson Uprisings of 2014 and beyond), our sense of how radical this change in form really is becomes lost.

Marshall McLuhan famously made the case that the "Gutenberg technology", the printing press, had made universal change in the way its users and consumers saw the world. This pattern, beginning with the written word, cannot be overstated. Yet it is so often lost within civilization because everything we know is taught through the lens of symbolic culture: the internalized whispers of domesticators reinforcing our own perceived split from the wild world and necessary dependency on masters. This is how domestication works, but the purpose of technology is to update form and context. And as McLuhan famously observed: form dictates function, the medium is the message.

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[12] http://readwrite.com/2012/02/01/zuckerbergs_letter_to_shareholders_personal_relationshi̧ Retrieved 12-31-2014.

[13] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/11194049/Facebook-profits-pass-1bn-as-more-users-log-on-every-day.html Retreived 1-1-2015

So his words for the impact of the printed word hold equally true for the updated technology: when a technology is introduced "if it gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses, the ratio among all of our senses is altered. We no longer feel the same, nor do our eyes and ears and other sense remain the same."[14]

Technology flattens our world by reducing our reliance on senses while over stimulating particular sensory input. Our brains are, to put it simply, overworked and underwhelmed. Mediation and representation as evidenced by blogs, Youtube channels, Facebook feeds and Twitter handles.

This is the form.

This is the form that creates a world filled with crushing depression, alienation, suffering and anxiety. A National Center for Health Statistics study found that by 2008 the usage of anti-depressants in the US had gone up 400% over the previous decade across all demographics.[15] The iPhone was released in 2007. The researcher's period of study from 2005-2008 saw an increase of Facebook users from 5.5 million to 100 million.[16] That is an increase of over 1700%. And this isn't even touching on the horrid and dire social and ecological consequences across the world.

The point isn't to say that Facebook caused these things, but, along with all other facets of the social network (both past, present and future), it exacerbates them. It amplifies on exponential terms.

The content and platforms drive each other. But they always have.

Hyper-internalized and portable technology is the form.

Domestication is the function.

As the domesticators developed technology to employ their will, the ability to make change with intentionality arose. No longer was power in the scythe and the stored grains. The agrarian curse of

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[14] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Signet: New York. 1969, pg 35.

[15] http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db76.pdf Retrieved 1-2-2015.

[16] http://news.yahoo.com/number-active-users-facebook-over-230449748.html Retrieved 1-2-2015.

So it is hardly ironic when Zuckerberg famously proclaimed: "A squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa."[29] The use of the word 'relevant' obscures the horrific confluence of our realm of being and our realm of understanding. Zuckerberg, like all other programmers, knows that when faced with the challenge of addressing the consequences of our actions, it's far easier to sink back into the reality that they've sold us than to address the one we live in. We'll get back to this, but it's pertinent for understanding the pathological drive of the social network for directing our impulses and how they can do it.

And the reality here is frightening.

If there is a canary in this coalmine, it should be Nicholas Carr's excellent book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*. As far as I'm concerned, it's the *Silent Spring* for the crisis of the further integration of the internet and technology into every aspect and moment of our lives.

There are many points he touches on that are crucial to understanding how our interactions with technology, particularly the internet, impact the function and development of our minds.

While programmers like Zuckerberg extol the faux-virtues of transparency and giving voice to individuals through their platforms, the subtext is about instilling their vision into our minds through channeling synapses. Literally.

When we buy into or accept their mythos that the internet exists to make the world a freer, better place, stuffed beyond recognition with information, we are accepting an argument on their turf. And that turf is a confusing place.

There is almost nowhere on the internet where you aren't being sold products: be it physical, ideological or cosmological. This is the message in the medium. Information, relationships, connec-

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[29] David Kirkpatrick. *The Facebook Effect*. Simon & Schuster: New York. Pg. 181.

Less surprising was the FBI's official call out to social media corporations and platforms requiring them to offer a "back door" to organize, gather and collect information that might have been unavailable through real world social networking.[27]

Though science fiction writers might have dreamed being the first to come up with a technology as absurd as Google Glass (a literal technologically infused lens) it is in the more common forms of technology that the programmers claim their victories.

We chose to take part in this inexplicably vast social experiment and database without seeing it as a choice.

Again, this comes down to a redirection of impulses. The world that we live in is one in which every decision, purchase and action that we make has dire consequences across this globalized, technologically dependent world.

This is not the connectedness that hunter-gatherers knew and felt.

This is far from the relationship with the breath that moves through all things which our wild souls are intertwined with.

This is a vast, intentional, disconnected hyper-dependence. Our minds are wired for nomadic movements within familiar landscapes. That is how we are shaped. Our hunter-gatherer minds are bioregional in practice and global in spirit, but not consequence.

The unnatural world that civilization has created and Modernity has accelerated are simply too large for our minds to even comprehend. Our inability to empathize with the consequences of our actions is literally out of our world.[28] Programmers and marketers know this.

And they prey upon it.

[27] http://www.cnet.com/news/fbi-we-need-wiretap-ready-web-sites-now/ Retrieved 12-30-2014.

[28] I touch on this point in more detail in my essay 'Everywhere and Nowhere: the Pathology of the Machine' from my book, *For Wildness and Anarchy* (Black and Green Press, 2009). It's also, ironically, easy to find online.

drudgery and toil for the perceived pay off in the heavens paved the way (literally) to updated industrial forms.

And the mythos evolved.

Collective consciousness was slowly channeled into individual consumerism. It is no surprise that the overstressed working class in early industrializing nations thought their liberation lied within possessing the machine collectively, nor is it surprising that the antidote to that notion was selling individual heavens on an increasingly closer horizon.

Progress remains. Mythos adapt.

Technology increasingly spread from the means to the purpose itself. The time clock led to the pocket watch to the wristwatch and now to the cell phone. We embrace the objects that confine our minds to think on an artificial sense of place and self.

Our world becomes both larger and smaller, so we turn to the machine, to this bartered identity. Even in a sea of flux, the technology itself increasingly becomes the constant. It becomes the savior.

Chellis Glendinning called this process by what it is: "techno-addiction". "In such a society people have historically become obsessed with anything that helps them to cope with the trauma of it all."[17]

We buy to know we're alive.

And, increasingly, we Tweet to remind everyone that we're still here.

Facebook's creator, Mark Zuckerberg, saw the writing on the wall. He didn't just sell it: he bought it. His rise from a computer programmer at Harvard up to the richest 20 people in the world is sadly well documented and pathetically emulated.

While not coming up from the bottom of the social ladder, his story is more of an emotional rags-to-riches triumph. The reader can relate. A teenager in the 90s, a product of great technological

[17] Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis & I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization.* Shambhala: Boston. 1994, Pg. 101.

change and raised in an atmosphere where "play" went from being outside with friends to inside and playing video games. Or, in Zuckerberg's case, programming them.

This story is drenched in the turmoil of responding to adolescence through increasingly mediated means. The starting point for what would become Facebook was a site that rated other students by their looks. It should not be surprising that the origin point of Facebook is driven equally by a bully's entitlement and an unrelenting sense of insecurity. And that is the tone that carried on.

Facebook didn't arise in a vacuum. This is hardly even history at this point; we're talking about websites that increasingly dominated the social atmosphere over the past decade. It's hardly necessary for me to recant them.

What is important here is how and why Facebook took off.

The obnoxiously entitled "Blogosphere" matched with former Facebook contender, MySpace, both served, as necessary steps towards what social networking would become. The blogs were driven by an attempt at a, and I'm biting my tongue here, "grassroots" sense of giving voices and reporting. Often centered around contemporary topics, their necessary role was less in what was being said, but littering the fairy tale notion of the internet as an "information super-highway" with opinions equally weighed with actual reporting and research. A huge part of the lucrative Search Engine Optimization (SEO) field existing relied on the hopes for bloggers to have their posts on a subject get the highest ranked search results in Google or whatever else is currently being used.

Blogs quickly became an accepted resource. The internet is, after all, marketing. A blog is a brand for an individual. A public face: a personalization of a perspective that transfers the subject from content to provider. This is the cult of personality moving from the television, books, politicians and newspapers to overly excitable and entertaining personalities. These people were enthralling because they could be you, the spectator. This was a move driven home even further via Youtube not long after.

people are trying to communicate in a certain way on Facebook — they share information with their friends, they learn about what their friends are doing —so there's really a whole new opportunity for a new type of advertising model within that."[25]

The very notion of creating an all-encompassing platform for communication is to expand into previously unreachable areas. This is why Facebook bought Foursquare: an application that "checks in" and posts on your News Feed where you physically go. Not to be left behind, they also purchased Atlas: an application that tracks offline purchases.[26]

This information is key to automation.

Every time you ask Google or Siri a question, Google, Apple and the NSA are listening.

The goal of programmers is to track your movements, decisions, thoughts and statements to create algorithms to predict and influence your actions. The cell phone, an early platform for GPS tracking, is the perfect platform for this. It is on your person, it is your electronic leash and confidant. It's an object you can stare at with intent when you don't feel like making eye contact or uncomfortable small talk.

And it is a tool to continually gather information about you.

Little is telling about the power of the temporary and shallow nature of new information from the Void than how quickly the outrage over the exposed US government's far and wide reaching surveillance programs died. Nothing changed, but everything was accepted. If the alternative option was to give up on cell phones and social networking, then it was an uncomfortable, but possibly necessary evil.

The users could live with it.

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[25] http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1644040,00.html Retrieved 12-31-2014.

[26] http://www.wired.com/2014/12/facebook-atlas-google/ Retrieved 1-3-2015.

it stands now, 3.2 billion people are active mobile network subscribers.[22]

This is a massive economic force. Planned obsolescence is no new concept in terms of acquiring wealth. As the technology advances, so does the life expectancy decrease. But as the cell phone and its programs become the only acceptable form of communication, their monumental costs simply become a begrudgingly accepted burden.

The average smartphone in 2013 cost $337.[23] Imagine running into you from a decade ago and saying that's what you would be paying for a phone and that it would only have an expected lifespan of 2 years, at best. The absurdity of it is lost both in the cost of owning and using a cellphone (the average 2013 bill in the US weighed in over $700 per year[24]) but, as we'll get to in the following section, the ecological and social costs far outweigh all others.

Beyond planned obsolescence lies functional obsolescence: the perception that a technology is no longer functional in comparison to its contemporary options. You see this rampantly in the cell phone world where even replacing a battery or charger on a 2-year-old phone can be a feat. Just as with the News Feed, if you can't keep up, you are left to believe that you will drown.

But the function here is key.

The technologies being actively developed and sold serve a single purpose: to further entrap the user into the social network.

To become the algorithm.

When Facebook finally went public in 2012, Zuckerberg spoke to investors like old friends: "Advertising works most effectively when it's in line with what people are already trying to do. And

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[22] http://www.gsmamobileeconomy.com/GSMA%20Mobile%20Economy%202013.pdf Retrieved 12-31-2014.

[23] http://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prUS24461213 Retrieved 1-2-2015.

[24] http://www.dailytech.com/Average+Mobile+Phone+Bill+in+US+is+Growing+Despite+Co article34485.htm Retrieved 1-2-2015.

MySpace was the place to market the self under the guise of a place to keep in touch with friends. A place to sell the image of yourself that you wish to portray. Echoed along the lines of Twitter, where irrelevant quips of 140 characters, and in an increasingly entangled and over-sharing, yet selective, web, the social network became accepted enough that the nearly stalker-esque Facebook was ready to take its place.

The idea of posting your quips and selling yourself was worthless unless it was the main feature: the News Feed. This is a sea of words projected onto a constantly shifting wall as if it was news. From the hyper-personal to the irrelevant, it's laid out flatly for your selected audience.

And there are no mistakes here.

These moves are intentional. They are marketing.

Sold as a supplement to the life anyone wants to live, they have become the main course. And they become the platform for broadcasting the life you want others to see. Far from being a tight knit group of friends, social networking sites, as Jose van Dijck states in his critical history, "forge personal, professional or geographical connections and encourage weak ties."[18]

This is that urge that we all have within us: the need for community. It is your inner-hunter-gatherer and their band associations.

An impulse redirected for a reality supplanted.

We spread ourselves widely. We feel that having information about others is as good as having actual relationships with them. And every time we log on, we are selling ourselves.

The grotesque level of acceptance of the social network is apparent in how Zuckerberg basks in it: "Think about what people are doing on Facebook today. They're keeping up with their friends and family, but they're also building an image and identity for themselves, which in a sense is their brand. They're connecting with the audience that they want to connect to."

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[18] Jose van Djick, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Me-*

And to always end on a high note: "It's almost a disadvantage if you're not on it now."[19]

We buy this reality because we sell it. If you want to take part in this society, if you want to stay connected with friends and family, both close and distant: here is the platform, here is the place to do it.

It almost seems ridiculous to give this platform such intense scrutiny. In the timeline of civilization, it won't even be a fragment of a blip. But the spread, grasp and ramifications of Facebook, its intentional and unspoken uses, are monumental. You simply cannot escape them. It's not as simple as deactivating an account (it was years before deleting was even an option).

These have become the terms, the grounding on which this late stage of Modernity stands.

The narrative of Progress hardly needs to sell a distant future; it has created an eternal present. And in doing so, it has removed the presence. It removes the essence of being human.

This is change.

This is change at a rate and depth that is unprecedented even in the nasty, short and brutish history of civilization. Amongst all of the critiques of technology, this is something that was predicted in dystopian terms, but the reality is far scarier and by the time most of us noticed its effectiveness, we are at a loss for outlets and terms to even discuss this ongoing and worsening epidemic.

The News Feed ticks.

Against the backdrop of a 24 hour "news" cycle, it is a fitting backdrop: the techno-addicted need constant stimulation. Going outside hardly cuts it unless it's for taking selfiesor a necessary part of the sale for the projected self.

The Self, driven by hyper-individualistic consumerism, takes a form and precedence that could make even the most rampant ego-

ist blush. This isn't just posturing; it's an attachment to a projected and widely cast image. An online persona is increasingly less foreign to our sense of identity. McLuhan was hardly off base when he claimed, "schizophrenia may be a necessary consequence of literacy."[20] In the digital age, schizophrenia may very well be a prerequisite.

It is hardly surprising that cyber-bullying has become such a massive issue. The bully and bullying are no longer physically confined to a psychical place. And the amount of information and sources of self-doubt of the victim are broadcast far more widely.

And these are the terms on which marketers and programmers think. The social network is the place where they act.

Mining the Shallows

> "It is a common fallacy, though, to think of platforms as merely *facilitating* networking activities; instead, the construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive."[21] – Jose von Dijck

The link between social networking and technological production is vital. The point is, after all, to find ways to keep participation constant and consistent: to be always on.

Capitalists are no strangers to malicious forms of aggressive marketing. For a technocrat like Zuckerberg, it's clearly a two way street. New phone technology allows for updates to his system and updates to Facebook sell new phones.

The mobile industry is, after all, a force to be reckoned with. An industry report projects revenues to pass $2 trillion by 2017. As

dia. Oxford University Press: Oxford. 2013, Pg. 8

[19] http://www.wired.com/2009/06/mark-zuckerberg-speaks/ Retrieved 12-

31-2014.

[20] McLuhan, 1969, pg. 32.

[21] ibid, pg. 6.