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## Does Technology Block Our Human Ways? : Conversation and the use of Art Within Technology

One of the most controversial topics today is that technology is a roadblock for many essential life skills, including conversation and a sense for community. In the passages "The Empathy Diaries" by Sherry Turkle and "Making Conversation" by Kwame Anthony Appiah both authors provide exceptional examples of what they believe conversation is defined as and what is obstructing conversation from happening. Additionally, Yo-Yo Ma the author of "Necessary Edges: Arts, Empathy, and Education" brings in many ideas that corroborate Appiah's including the idea of creativity and engagement. I believe that both Turkle and Appiah complicate each other, but can also expand on each other's ideas. One of Turkle's arguments is that technology is the crucial object and idea getting in the way of conversation and our ways of humanity. She also brings in the ideas of the "virtuous circle" that many individuals fall 'victim' to. The virtuous circle is described in Turkle's writing as the everlasting cycle that people get stuck in between the idea of self reflection and conversing with others. Turkle's ideas show that technology interrupts this cycle. On the other hand, Appiah points out that "conversation" can be a metaphor and is used for engagement, creativity, and imagination. This is something that Ma can relate to in his writing. He talks a lot about how adding art into STEM can introduce a different type of engagement, creativity, and imagination within school and even the workplace. Taking a more modern day approach to these passages, technology is needed in every aspect of

life nowadays. Turkle's ideology of technology disrupting the virtuous circle isn't completely true as many people use technology everyday to converse, show their creativity and imagination, and even use it for their own self engagement, technology is not the artifact that disrupts people from the virtuous circle.

One of Turkle's crucial ideas is that "Face-to-face conversation is the most human - and humanizing - thing we do" (343). For Turkle one of life's most important topics for her is that conversation is what keeps us human. But, in modern day how is this possible when one of the most common ways that individuals talk to each other is over the phone? The topic that Turkle brings into this argument is that the first chair of the virtuous circle is one for solitude. In saying this she means that no technology should get in the way of what we are thinking and that we need that chair of solitude to reflect on the things we do. Another main topic she points out is "Solitude reinforces a secure sense of self, and with that, the capacity for empathy. Then, conversation with others provides rich material for self-reflection" (348). This is where the circle part comes into play, we become more aware of certain things that involve self reflection due to conversation and then we use that self reflection to bring up conversation. This is where people fall into the virtuous circle. A main thing that Turkle brings up is how technology is disrupting the circle, but if one of the most crucial ways in today's time is talking over the phone to build conversation then how does this cycle make complete sense? Bringing in my own experience, I know that if I did not have the technology I have now I would not be able to talk to over half of my family and be able to celebrate many things like my religion, creativity, and imagination with any of my family who lives in England and Canada. One of the main traditions that takes place in Canada is Boxing Day, which me and my family who live in the United States would not be able to participate in with my family on the other side of the world if we did not have the

technology that we have today. Turkle does not go into any detail about religion, but does talk about the virtuous circle and mentions solitude, friendship, and society. One of the biggest topics in the world is religion, so how could this have not come up in any of her writing? Especially when religion is one of the biggest conversation starters. In order for someone like me to follow my religion and talk about certain details of my Catholicism, I need the technology we have today. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when we couldn't go to church and practice in the right ways, we had to watch it all online. So, with this being said we had to find creative ways to have conversations and slowly bring imagination in so that we could also work on our engagement in conversations, while being online.

Appiah brings in the ideas of how conversations bring up creativity and imagination in people. He also talks a lot about how the evolution of religion has taken place in conversation and how it has spread all over the world. One main thing that Appiah states that stuck with me is that "So I'm using the word *conversation* not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others" (55). The way that I interpret this quote is that Appiah utilizes the word conversation as much more than just face to face talk that makes us more human. He sees the benefit it can have for people and their creativity, imagination, and even religion as religion can fall under the benefits of life for many individuals. Appiah is not strictly saying that this conversation has to be face to face either, he is just saying that conversation is used for more than just human connection. We can also see in Appiah's writing that he talks about the evolution of religion. He asserts "Why did these young women, in the heart of Asante, decide to urge the young men of Adum to do what was not just untraditional but taboo? One possibility is that circumcision somehow became identified in their minds with being modern" (49). Appiah starts to bring in the idea of the modern world which I think is very

important because everyday the world is changing. It isn't just change, it's evolution. The world is evolving in many ways and some people cannot grasp the idea of technology slowly taking over and this is what we can see in Turkle's statements. But Appiah, pulls in the idea of evolution which makes me think that he understands why conversation is so important and that no matter what, technology is going to be used. The more modern approach of things is always going to include technology, it is how people talk and how they get in contact with one another. While Appiah realises the importance of the way the modern world is changing, Turkle seems to have it stuck in her head that all technology is bad.

Another author that has clearly shown the importance of the modern change in the world is Yo-Yo Ma. He shows each reader the importance of adding art to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), therefore making it into STEAM. Ma explains that adding art in is good for people in many ways. He states "If you have these tools, you can do well in any field from software engineering to the biosciences" (247). With this statement, we can now easily understand why adding art allows the mind to become more creative and engaged during many things like work, school, and even personal reflection. Another great statement Ma makes is "The arts help us cope with these issues by engaging, not avoiding, the deep emotions of intimate loss involved and retelling over and over again the story of the human condition and its limits" (248). Adding art into STEM is clearly something that helps the community with a sense of creativity, imagination, engagement, and even self reflection. One of the main points in Ma's writing is the fact that people use art as a coping mechanism. He talks about the equilibrium it can create for people. Taking a more modern approach to this topic, we will see that technology will be used in almost every aspect here. Technology is what connects us as individuals, it is what scientists use, artists use, engineers use, and even mathematicians use. One of the main

words in STEAM is technology. Without technology this world would not be able to evolutionize and grow. I think that Ma corroborates strongly with Appiah and it can complicate what Turkle is standing up for.

While I think that what Ma and Appiah are saying corroborates one another, I think that Turkle's point is fair as well. Many people may say that technology disrupts the virtuous circle and it can become a distraction rather than a facilitation for creativity and imagination. But, there are many ways that can help to find a balance between the use of technology and having face to face conversations. Some ways that this can happen are simply setting timers and reminders to get the work that you need to get done, done. Another great way to use technology to facilitate the face to face time that Turkle requires is by texting to your friends to meet up, facetimeing one another. Even though using facetime as a tool doesn't seem like the face to face interaction that people long for, it is better than just texting or calling. There are many ways that technology can be useful and I believe that if people use it the correct way then there wouldn't be a problem and a roadblock on what people can and can't do. Learning to use the resources that this modern world is creating is the best way that people can ultimately feel more human. While Turkle makes great arguments about the way technology is used nowadays, there are ways around the disruption of this virtuous circle. Ma and Appiah both talk about how art and technology can be used as a way of communication, coping, and engagement activity. I think that without all three of these people would feel less human. Everyone has certain needs that will help them to feel more human and if using technology is that, then I think that it is what should be done. For me one of the biggest social events in my life is my religion. I have family who live all the way in England and Canada and I cannot talk to them without using technology. One of the main topics I talk to them about is my Catholicism. Another topic I would like to point out is the fact that

during the Covid-19 pandemic the only way I could practice my religion was over live streams on Facebook and Zoom calls with my CCD teachers. Another thing that has also helped me through life is art and drawing. I love to draw and it helps me cope with whatever is going on in my life, but without my Ipad I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted. Sometimes I need help thinking of things to draw and other times it's easier to draw what I want on my Ipad. Although Turkle sees technology as all around bad, I think it is one of the main things that makes the world more human.

While I think that the counter argument is very strong and brings many great points into this piece, I also think that without technology and the use of technology today, we wouldn't be able to find out who we are and be able to find that creativity, imagination and engagement with certain people. I know that if I didn't have the technology we have today then I would not be able to share the creativity that I have found with others, I wouldn't be able to reflect and find that virtuous cycle that Turkle has talked about. We live in a world that is constantly evolving and face to face conversation isn't the main root of humanity anymore.

## Works Cited

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