

Lepton Perkins
Technophilia
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An acquaintance of mine has a teenage daughter. Like most teens in this century she spends her day **texting** her friends, abbreviating her life into 140 character hints, flinging these haikus out to an invisible clan of mutual texters. It's an always-on job, this endless encapsulation of the moment. **During dinner, while walking, on the toilet, lounging in bed, or in any state of wakefulness,** to chat is to live. Like all teens, my friend's daughter tested the limits of her parents' restrictions. For some infraction or another, they grounded her. And to reinforce the seriousness of her misconduct, they took away her mobile phone. Immediately the girl became physically sick. Faint, nauseous, and so ill she couldn't get out of bed. **It was if her parents had amputated a limb.** And in a way they had. Our creations are now inseparable from us. **Our identity with technology runs deep, to our core.**

an extension of her body

real
relatable
a bit extreme

foreshadowing

According to psychologist Erich Fromm (and famed biologist E.O. Wilson) humans are endowed with **biophilia, an innate attraction to living things.** This hard-wired, genetic affinity for life and life processes ensured our survival in the past by nurturing our familiarity with nature. In joy we learned the secrets of the wild. The eons which our ancestors spent walking to find coveted herbs in the woods or stalking a rare green frog were bliss; ask any hunter/gatherer about their time in the woods. **In love we discovered the boons each creature could provide, and the great lessons of hurt and healing organic forms had to teach us.** This love still simmers in our cells. It is why we keep pets, and potted plants in the city, why we garden when supermarket food is cheaper, and why we are drawn to sit in silence under towering trees.

interesting

evolution through learning

yes.

But we are likewise embedded with **technophilia, the love of technology.** **Our transformation from smart hominid into Sapiens was midwifed by our tools, and at our human core we harbor an innate affinity for made things.** We are embarrassed to admit it, but we love technology. At least sometimes.

makes the idea of connection to technology

Craftsmen have always loved their tools, birthing them in ritual, and guarding them from the uninitiated. As the scale of technology outgrew the hand, machines became a communal experience. By the age of industry, lay folk had many occasions to encounter complexifying technology larger than any natural organism they had ever seen and they began to fall under its sway. **In 1900 the historian Henry Adams** visited and revisited the Great Exposition in Paris, where he haunted the hall showcasing the amazing new electric dynamos, or motors. Writing about himself in the third person he recounts his initiation:

To Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within an arm's-length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring — scarcely

obsessed with all types of cameras. The list for other artifacts, tools, and machines commanding their own smitten followers would run into the hundreds.

SHERRY!!

MIT sociologist Sherry Turkle calls a particular specimen of technology that is revered by an individual an "evocative object." These bits of the technium are totems that serve as a springboard for identity, or for reflection, or for thinking. A doctor may love his/her stethoscope, as both badge and tool; a writer might cherish a special pen and feel its smooth weight pushing the words on their own; a dispatcher can love his ham radio, relishing its hard-won nuances, as a magical door to other realms that opens to him alone; and a programmer can easily love the root operating code of a computer for its essential logical beauty. Turkle says, "we think with the objects we love, and we love the objects we think with." She suspects that most of us have some kind of technology that acts as our touchstone.

hint to technophilia

I am one of them. I am no longer embarrassed to admit that I love the internet. Or maybe it's the web. Whatever you want to call the place we go to while we are online, I think it is beautiful. People love places, and will die to defend a place they love, as our sad history of wars prove. Our first encounters with the internet/web portray it as a very distributed electronic dynamo - a thing one plugs into -- and that it is. But the internet is closer to the technological equivalence of a place. An uncharted territory where you can genuinely get lost. At times I've entered to web just to get lost. In that lovely surrender, the web swallows my certitude and delivers the unknown. Despite the purposeful design of its human creators, the web is a wilderness. Its boundaries are unknown, unknowable, its mysteries uncountable. The bramble of intertwined ideas, links, documents, and images create an otherness as thick as a jungle. The web smells like life.

real

why people like the web

how you get lost

It knows so much. It has insinuated its tendrils of connection into everything, everywhere. The net is now vastly wider than me, wider than I can imagine, so in this way, while I am in it, it makes me bigger too. I feel amputated when I am away from it.

web makes people smarter = bigger

I find myself indebted to the net for its provisions. It is a steadfast benefactor, always there. I caress it with my fidgety fingers; it yields up my desires, like a lover. Secret knowledge? Here. Predictions of what is to come? Here. Maps to hidden places? Here. Rarely does it fail to please, and more marvelous, it seems to be getting better every day. I want to remain submerged in its bottomless abundance. To stay. To be wrapped in its dreamy embrace. Surrendering to the web is like going on aboriginal walkabout. The comforting illogic of dreams reigns. In dreamtime you jump from one page, one thought, to another. First on the screen you are in a cemetery looking at an automobile carved out of solid rock, the next moment, there's a man in front of a black board writing the news in chalk, then you are in jail with a crying baby, then a woman in a veil gives a long speech about the virtues of confession, then tall buildings in a city blow their tops off in a

Weird relationship

relaxes the mind

the internet is a part of us

the net is in us

good point
I guess?

thousand pieces in slow motion. I encountered all those dreamy moments this morning within the first few minutes of my web surfing. The net's daydreams have touched my own, and stirred my heart. **If you can honestly love a cat, which can't give you directions to a stranger's house, why can't you love the web?**

dirty → clean

Our technophilia is driven by the inherent beauty of the technium. Admittedly, this beauty has been previously hidden by a primitive phase of development that was not very pretty. **Industrialization was dirty, ugly, and dumb in comparison to the biological matrix it grew from.** A lot of that stage of the technium is still with us spewing its ugliness. I don't know whether this ugliness is a necessary stage of the technium's growth, or whether a smarter civilization than us could have tamed it earlier, but the arc of technology's origins from life's evolution, now accelerated, means that the technium contains all of life's inherent beauty - waiting to be uncovered.

technology as its own "being"

technology as
an art

Technology does not want to remain utilitarian. It wants to become art, to be beautiful and "useless." Since technology is born out of usefulness, this is a long haul. Robots will proliferate in a million different varieties and levels. Most will never be as smart as a grasshopper, and only few droids will surprise us with their intelligence. But the goal of every robot, and every machine and tool, is to exist for its own sake. **To exist not only because it is useful, but because its existence is beautiful.** There is evidence of that back on the fields of the Dream Machines, in the rows of mechanical glamour. While the Blastolene and lollipop 1950s Chevys are potentially useful - as transport - few are actually used that way. They are coddled, nursed and nurtured, repaired and improved, adored and honored, and sculpted into longevity by the sheer love of their innate beauty. **They are art.** tech = art

true

Today, at the start of the 21st century, **there are tens of million species of tools and technologies at loose in the world.** Assuming a modest increase of only 5% additional new tools and kinds of artifacts every year, by the end of the century our planet will be overrun by manufactured possibilities. Our own human needs are not expanding at this rate. **The continual rise in technological variety is propelled by the needs of other technologies.** You have a house, then you get a car. Now your car needs a house, too. It doesn't have hands like you do, so it needs a garage-door opener for its house. It needs check up equipment to keep it healthy, and add ons to keep it comfortable. The same goes for other kinds of hardware. Handheld devices need jackets, houses need paint, computers need peripherals. I estimate that about half of the denizens of the technium are technologies serving other technologies. If you remove a **keystone technology** from your home - say the computer - how many other devices and equipment would immediately become redundant? Remove your car, and what else can go? Remove your stove, and then count the pieces of gear no longer needed.

More tech =
more tech

like keystone
species

up the fantasy of torturing the robot. You know, if it's alive enough to need a blindfold, then maybe it's alive enough to be tortured."

she has a good point

We are so eager to love technology that Turkle is worried this love blinds us. In her laboratory Turkle observes how ordinary people feel about anthropic technology. She has been surprised at how little encouragement humans need to surrender love for machines. The merest suggestion of human-like eye movement, the tiniest hint of active eyebrows, and the roughest ready smile on an otherwise obviously metal machine can make a person melt before it. Even feel bad about turning it off. Humans will treat any minimally anthropomorphized droid like it not only deserves our affections, but in some strange way is returning our love. That worries Turkle because she is concerned whether we will diminish our own humanity in order to match this minimal humanity we spy in our creations. If we let robots take care of the elderly as they want do in Japan, will the elderly become robot like to meet them? As computer scientist Jaron Lanier, another worrier of technophilia, puts it: "We make ourselves stupid in order to make computers seem smart. I don't worry about computers getting intelligent, I worry about humans getting dumber."

people unable to feel real emotions

EMPATHY!

Willing to dumb ourselves down

In the future, we'll find it easier to love technology. Machines win our hearts with every step they take in evolution. Like it not, anthropic robots (at the level of pets at first) will gain our affections, since even minimal life-like ones do already. The internet provides a hint of the maximal passion possibilities of the technium. The global internet's nearly organic interdependence, and emerging sentience make it wild, and its wildness draws our affections. No human can turn away from the trick of anthropomorphism, and not be seduced by the humanity we project onto look-alikes, but the attraction of highly evolved technology is not only in its reflection of our faces. We are deeply attracted to its beauty, and its beauty resides in its evolution. Humans are the most highly evolved organs we have experienced, so we fixate on imitations of this form (quite naturally), but our technophilia is fundamentally not for anthropy, but for evolution. Humanity's most advance technology will soon leave imitation behind and create obviously non-human intelligences, and obviously non-human robots, and obviously non-earth-like life, and all these will radiate an attractiveness that will dazzle us.

but technology stealing our love

technology as an art

As it does, we'll find it easier to admit that we have an affinity for it. In addition the accelerated arrival of tens of millions more artifacts will deposit more layers onto the technium, polishing existing technology with more history, and deepening its embedded knowledge. Year by year, as it advances, technology, on average, will increase in beauty. I am willing to bet that in the not-too-distant future the magnificence of certain patches of the technium will rival the splendor of the natural world. We will rhapsodize about this technology's charms, marvel at its subtlety, travel to it with children in tow, to sit in silence beneath its towers.

technology as an art

technology, which can't feel, always needs our love

technology over the real world