The Stupefaction of Human Experience

By T.Collins Logan

Although human beings have achieved truly remarkable technological advancements over the past few centuries, and the rate of that progress seems to be compounding itself with each passing decade, in the vast arc of evolution these accomplishments are the briefest, smallest spark rising from the fiery sea of time. Whether that spark ignites enduring fires is yet to be seen, for like so many great civilizations of the past the age of technology may become nothing more than an insignificant footnote in the musings of future generations. At present, all this advancement is still very new. We are only beginning to understand its impact on humanity and our planet, and have yet to fully adjust or adapt ourselves to accelerating cycles of technological self-expression. In this sense, we are like toddlers playing with very powerful toys – and playing almost constantly. Also like young children, in the fervor of play we often make mistakes; we break things, we injure ourselves, we harm others. We also make up magical stories about our toys, imbuing them with powers they really don't have. A most compelling question, then, is whether we will learn from these mistakes and mature past magical thinking; whether we have the capacity and wisdom to fully integrate technological unfolding with other facets of our being.

To clarify, what I mean by technology is any material mechanism created to supplant or augment human capacities or functions. The material technology involved here always relies on one or more physical components that begin their existence as imagined objects and concretize into usable objects – a computer chip, a drug injection, a generated electrical force, a block-and-

tackle, a manufactured gas with special properties, and so on. So is there anything innately deterministic about material technology? Does it possess transformative or destructive power on its own, or is it empowered by the context of societal development or cultural currents? Part of our modern mythology surrounding technology is that technological advancements inherently transform human society. But I suspect this is just one more example of magical thinking. Any technology has the potential to influence change, but that influence is catalyzed by forces, circumstances and motivations that have preexisted technology for millennia – they are new expressions of age-old psychosocial dynamics.

For example, it is well-established that direct marketing of pharmaceutical products to consumers results in hefty increases in profits for manufacturers,[1] profits that frequently outpace the measurable benefits of the drugs themselves. In fact, many of the most successful direct-marketed and highly profitable drugs in recent history (Celebrex, Avandia, Paxil) either do nothing at all for people who take them, or result in health outcomes potentially far worse than if they hadn't taken them at all.[2,3,4] But people do take these drugs whether they need them or not, because well-funded advertizing campaigns have persuaded them to do so, usually via emotional appeals, exaggerated claims, sparse facts and even sparser comparisons to other remedies.[5,6] And of course this is true for countless other products as well – from vibrating weight-loss belts, to fuel-saving engine components, to devices that promise better cell phone or digital broadcast reception, to promises of unprecedented convenience and utility for the most useless of gadgets, and so on. Wherever a need exists, or is perceived, or is created, a given technology is empowered by savvy advertising campaigns to satisfy that need – whether the product actually fulfills the need or not. All of this is not the consequence of technology, but is occurring as a result of commercialistic enculturation; it is not technological advancement that is transforming the human condition, but the habits of consumerism that are constantly reinforced by snake-oil enticements. And, from what we understand of history, these inflated sales pitches are a timeworn companion of human society.

But this is just one example of culture driving technology adoption, integration and propagation. For if it isn't well-funded advertising, it's something else. It's teenage peer pressure that insists on the latest communication gadget. Or fear-based tribal groupthink that demands we protect our

home, family or person with the latest security technology. Or a new phase of socioeconomic elitism that demands the most energy-efficient, low-carbon, green-panacea products. These cultural structures exist whether technology is readily available or not, and advancing technological augmentations and replacements become facilitators rather than determiners of these human behaviors. So although it is true that certain technologies have revolutionized how human beings interact, travel, gather information, produce food, heal diseases and so forth, none of these innovations are causal. They only amplify the causal impulses that have always been present in the individual and collective psyche.

However, modern culture has frequently assigned a deterministic role to technology, especially in terms of social trends and behaviors. Whether it's Facebook instigating an Arab Spring, or video games increasing violence in American society, or Internet porn hypersexualizing people and destroying intimate relationships, or Rock music corrupting teenage morality and inciting rebelliousness, or recreational drugs luring people into escapist dissipation, technology has often been endowed with miraculous, somehow irresistible powers. We are encouraged to believe that, before Facebook, oppressed people never gathered in spontaneous and influential protests. And that violence in the U.S. hasn't always outpaced other developed countries. And that sexual curiosity, experimentation and infidelity didn't exist before the Internet. And that rowdy, boundary-testing teens never rebelled or questioned authority before there was Rock 'n' Roll. And that before crack cocaine or crystal meth people never tried to escape their suffering through high risk activities. But this is just more magical thinking. Yes, technologies have supported, augmented and expanded our abilities…but they have not altered the fundamental drives and behavioral characteristics of human beings.

Even where a given technology seems to assure a clearly constructive or destructive outcome, human beings will mold it to what their hopes, whims and fancies either demand or avoid. Despite the dark shadow of mutually assured destruction that pervaded the Cold War, nuclear weapons have not yet annihilated all life on the planet. And despite an explosion of technological literacy and revolutionary access to information and educational resources in the U.S., Americans remain largely ignorant of their own cultural history, the structure and purpose of their government, the most basic understanding of science, and the meaning and value of the

arts. Advances in our understanding of what is healthy for our minds and bodies has not prevented people from persisting in self-destructive habits, nor has our increasing awareness of the impact of excessive consumption on the Earth's natural systems reigned in our avaricious appetites. And even though technology affords us constant availability of entertainment, escape and self-medication for our woes, most people still get out of bed in the morning, go to work, have relationships and contribute to society.

So technology is a tool. It responds to our proclivities rather than shaping them. And although some tools may have more constructive or destructive capacities than others, they do not ensure those outcomes. It is most often preexisting cultural currents that determine any technology's ultimate contribution to society. But can we enumerate the specific cultural attributes and contexts that will determine whether any given technology becomes either beneficial or detrimental? Can we define some reliable metrics for assessing technology's impacts? Well, it depends. It depends on individual and collective levels of experience, knowledge, intent, foresight, skillfulness, appreciation of history, self-awareness, moral development, and so on. It depends on a lot of things, which taken together synthesize a generalized level of wisdom regarding how we use tools. An adult's understanding of the appropriate use of a tool will differ from a child's, just as our current understanding differs from our ancestors, and those who live far in the future will undoubtedly evolve an understanding that departs from what we hold dear today. So to evaluate our current utilization of technology, we will need to explore some of these dependencies; we will need to establish what mature wisdom looks like.

A Proposed Framework for Evaluating Technology

Many of the disagreements and debates among various disciplines over different tools and methods are really the result of fundamentally differing views on what is "wise." When a teenager hasn't accumulated enough experience to appreciate their parents' insights, there will be misunderstandings and conflicts regarding priorities. Someone who values cultural traditions above innovation will find themselves at odds with those who believe change is the wiser course. And in every field of expertise there also tend to be different emphases on what constitutes a wise choice. An engineer might prioritize efficiency over aesthetics, an artist might view aesthetics as

more important than emotional sensitivity, a social worker might elevate emotional sensitivity above financial gain, a CFO might insist that increased profits are paramount, and so on. For each of these disciplines and their corresponding worldviews, beliefs about the wisest use of tools or the wisest course of action will be generated differently. So…it depends.

Add to this that, over the past few centuries, we have experienced an accelerating number of fields of study and expertise, and within those fields an ever-increasing tendency towards specialization. Each of these disciplines has its own language, its own standards and metrics, its own prioritization of values and outcomes, it's own definition of wisdom. This differentiation is then strengthened by the natural tendency of human beings to group themselves into like-minded communities, tribes and institutions that may compete with each other for the same resources, cultural recognition or survival. In many cases, the end result has been that a group identifying itself with one specialty or worldview simply cannot comprehend the operating assumptions of another, and the chasm between competing wisdoms becomes too vast to bridge. Thus modern discourse often stagnates in confusion and antagonism, because on emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels we have become completely alienated from each other; we see ourselves as wise, and the Other as not.

So are we boxed into a corner? Is it possible to define a universal wisdom with which to evaluate technology, or do we always risk excluding some ideology, branch of knowledge or community of experience when we attempt to define the sagest course? I believe it is possible to transcend these differences and draw from all disciplines and worldviews to synthesize a unified definition, but the process inherently demands that the definition be fluid, constantly evolving and adjusting, and iteratively evaluating itself. In other words, such an integralizing wisdom can never become fixed or codified, because it continues to incorporate new information and language, new ways of thinking, new insights and convictions, new technologies, etc. Such a process can, however, offer us a guiding ethos, a governing intentionality that filters our perception, reason and intuition, nudging our conscience and consciousness along a consistent course.

I believe the world's philosophies and wisdom traditions have consistently hinted at such a guiding ethos. Flowing beneath their more superficial differences we can intuit a connectedness, a common ground of shared understanding that suggests a unifying purpose. Of course, this belief is itself a personal bias. As a Perrenialist mystic, underlying unities color my intuitions, inform my thinking and define much of my vocabulary. So I can offer up my own version of common ground and how I think it can be applied as a guiding ethos for wisdom, but only according to my own limited understanding and convictions. So rather than citing prophets and philosophers who echo my sentiments, I will simply relate what I what has been illuminated within my own gnosis, and from that insight propose a working definition. With such as working definition, I hope we can speculate on how best to evaluate modern technology.

My current interpretation of maturing wisdom is built on cascading assumptions. It begins with the foundation that wisdom pursues the greatest, most immediate, most effective, most skillful and enduring good for the greatest majority of recipients possible. The motivation to pursue the greatest good is anchored in a felt sense of affectionate compassion for all objects of that good. As to what the "greatest good" actually represents in any given situation, the methods may vary but the outcomes are always the same as defined by their efficacy to facilitate multidimensional nourishment. What I mean by multidimensional nourishment is a balanced energization of every dimension of being – mind, body, spirit, heart and so on – which in turn results in the healing, growth and positive transformation of that being and, as a broader consequence, the healing, growth and transformation of everything in relationship with that being. We could simplify this by saying that wisdom is the most skillful manifestation of loving goodwill towards every aspect of ourselves, others and the Universe in any given moment. The shorthand for our guiding ethos might then be "a passionate compassion for the good of All."

In order to navigate the best course for the good of All, our wisdom requires multiple input streams. This is true for anything complex, dynamic and enduring – for anything that evolves and reshapes itself over time. I define these multiple input streams as the dimensions of heart, mind, body, spirit and will, all contributing to a carefully integrative process of discernment. The dimension of heart is comprised of a keenly felt sense of rightness around any thought or action, combined with a keenly felt sense of affectionate compassion for the subject of that thought or

object of that action. The dimension of mind involves the skillfulness gained through experience and disciplined thinking; that is, accumulating the knowledge and developing the reasoning capacity necessary to use the most effective tools and methods in the most elegant ways. The dimension of body includes somatic knowledge stored within our biology – our genetic instincts and learned patterns – that help us generate an intuitive response to a given situation. The dimension of spirit invites a profound mystical awareness of the essence of things, a peak experience of spiritual perception-cognition that grounds our understanding and intentions in an all-encompassing spiritual unity. And finally the dimension of will invokes follow-through: the actuation and reinforcement of wise choices from moment-to-moment, first as intention and then as conforming actions.

This is a straightforward formula, and although it has percolated up out of my own mystical discipline, it is easy to experientially validate. Given enough time, space, attention and opportunity, the input streams of heart, mind, body, spirit and will can confirm the potent nature of wisdom and its governing intentionality. But for now, let's just treat the formula as a proposed method of affirming our guiding ethos, which in turn helps us facilitate discernment – that is, a means of making wise choices. What becomes evident when applying this formula in daily decisions is that what is wise really *equates* self-propagating goodwill. Why? Because the ultimate objective of that goodwill is multidimensional nourishment – that is, the care and feeding of every aspect of self, and every aspect of everything around us – which in turn informs the wisdom of the next choices we must make. A neat circle of cause and effect.

In my own transformative practice, Integral Lifework, there are twelve dimensions of being which, when nurtured and energized in a mutually supportive way, are intended to instigate healing, then growth, and ultimately transformative evolution. These dimensions include things like physical well-being, supportive social interactions, stimulating our mind, being playful and creative, having a sense of purpose and so forth. And as with most systems that look at being and becoming from many dimensions at once, balance is essential. Without balance, one dimension is overemphasized while another is depleted. More specifically, there is a dynamic equilibrium necessary for our being to thrive, where different facets of self may compete with each other or grow and evolve in seemingly opposite directions, creating a tension that can only be resolved

with forward movement. In other words, as we honor and nourish every aspect of self, there will never be a static plateau, but continual change. You could even say that our inner harmony and equilibrium is the result of our encouraging this ongoing tug-of-war. Without this balance, it is impossible to maintain a guiding ethos as we have defined it, in part because wisdom is energized by every dimension of our being (so each dimension must be honored and fully supported), and in part because wisdom is itself always in flux, always evolving. So dynamic equilibrium is a critical mechanism in wisdom's actuation.

What is also interesting is that the mere inclination of goodwill – a felt desire without a clear objective – seems to amplify and replicate through every medium it touches. The subsequent nurturing of beings and systems is the evidence of that nonobjective replication, the memetic propagation of goodwill as loving kindness. This is a distinctly mystical view, but if wisdom desires beyond all else is the good of All, the greatest good, the most effective means of actualizing full-spectrum nourishment for the largest quantity and variety of recipients in perpetual ways, then wisdom will seek this outcome by any means possible. A "wise choice" thus becomes a choice that radiates this felt desire, and, as a secondary consequence, enables holistic, nourishing and enduring energies. So the internal experience of love-without-and-object is also part of how wisdom's guiding ethos is transmuted into supportive choices and actions.

And finally, when I evaluate technology within these parameters, I am particularly interested in whether its current manifestations enable balanced nourishment in multiple dimensions as inclusively as possible, propagating balanced nourishment in ever-widening arenas of being and becoming. That is, whether technology facilitate goodwill in the individual, then community, region, Nation, all life on Earth, other beings beyond Earth, other dimensions, the Universe itself…and so on. Desiring the good of All, the well-being of the whole, demands that I not be egocentric, ethnocentric or anthropocentric what is deserving of goodwill. So within this milieu, how has humanity preformed in its utilization of technology? How have we perpetuated goodwill in our technological habits and choices? Has technology allowed us to nourish ourselves and our culture in balanced, multi-dimensional ways? Has it embodied a passionate compassion for the good of All?

Applying Wisdom to Technology

Subjectively, as someone living in the U.S. during the past few decades, a period where technological advances on many fronts at once have proceeded at blinding speed, I have had the means and opportunity to benefit from many different forms of technology. For fifteen of those years I even earned my living as a technologist – first as a computer and network technician in educational institutions, then as an IT consultant for small and medium sized businesses, then as an IT Operations Manager at a Fortune 100 company. After that, as a patient advocate and Integral Lifework counselor, I became well-versed in medical diagnostic technologies and treatments. Even now I am an early adopter of all sorts of new technologies, happily testing beta versions of software or applying the latest geeky gadgets in business, personal life and recreation.

The seeds for these behaviors were sewn in my youth. Around age eight I became fascinated with how things worked, and I began taking things apart – walky-talkies, bicycles, model airplanes, small appliances, etc. – to understand them better. Some things I could put back to together, and some not. But by age eleven I was studying for my ham radio license, designing lasers and hovercrafts, building audio components with my dad, and losing myself in science fiction books. I would even say that I have always been convinced of technology's unquestionable power – either to guarantee extropian visions of the future, or to threaten dystopian ones. So today I am just as likely to be captivated by articles and documentaries on the latest scientific developments as any of the other topics I am passionate about, and I still believe technological advancements will have a profound impact on the evolution of human beings. In short, I've maintained a romance with material technology that has run long and deep. I have always been and continue to be truly enamored of it. To my chagrin, however, what I have also observed throughout this lengthy romance is that technology, in combination with other cultural factors, is one of the greatest antagonisms to balanced nurturing and well-being that humanity has ever faced.

In the context of goodwill and balanced multidimensional nourishment, the problems technology presents are many. The first is that our current cultural integrations of technology have caused us physiological, emotional and mental stress. They induce stress in different ways, but we could summarize these as issues of acceleration on the one hand, and on the other a combined impact of interruption, fragmentation, constriction and repetition. Foremost, our current use of technology accelerates everything we do. What at first may seem like a convenience becomes a necessity; Western culture demands that all increases in efficiency, productivity, accuracy and so forth establish a new norm, a new performance standard. Our cultural attitudes about technology also compel us to commute faster, digest faster, communicate faster, decide faster, accomplish faster, relate faster, understand faster and so on – and technology gamely complies. But the higher the speed with which we operate, the more stressed we become. What at first may have been quite liberating develops into an almost unbearable overload in each of wisdom's input streams. For can we really think more rapidly at all times? Or feel everything more quickly? Or push our bodies to constantly accelerate? Or access the realms of intuition and spirit ever more instantaneously and decisively? Or more hurriedly actuate wise and discerning choices? Of course not, but because we force ourselves to utilize technology with ever greater efficiency and speed, we become mentally, emotionally, physically and willfully stressed in the attempt. But this is only the beginning of these stress-inducing gifts.

Our current adaptation to technology also creates stress through interruption, through perpetual discontinuity in our being, and the resulting redirection of each facet of self. Our mental attention is constantly diverted by phone calls, emails, advertising, moving cars, new skills we must learn to navigate new technologies, new information and new environments. Our bodies must constantly readjust to technologically defined situations – a train, an elevator, a movie theater, a virtual gaming console, a conference call. And in reaction to these constant shifts in attention, perception and physical orientation, our emotional processing is equally subject to interruption, redirection and flooding via external stimuli. Thus our cultural standards for applying material technologies force us to multiplex our awareness, our actions, our emotions, our will, and ultimately even our identity (as an adaptive persona) as we orient to each new situation. They also convince us that everything has equal priority; every task, every stimulus, every impulse achieves the same importance in a time-division-multiplexing mode of operation.

Although it can be exciting at first, over time this multiplexing begins to imprint itself on every part of our being, disallowing us from experiencing anything deeply or holistically – that is, preventing us from integrating all of our native intelligences and prioritizing our attention. The idea here is that the different aspects of our wisdom –mind, body, heart, spirit and will – operate in different processing spaces, at different processing speeds, relying on different levels and types of consciousness. Eventually, as we shunt all of our energies into perpetual multiplexing, the connections between those interior processing centers begin to break down, and we are forced to compartmentalize our lives to accommodate nourishment for each aspect of self. We become fragmented in response to fragmented interactions with our environment, reducing our self-care into separate, technologized components that don't interact with each other very well, if at all. We absorb information in one mode, strengthen our bodies in another mode, make love in another mode, connect emotionally in another mode, and so on, each compartmentalized and relating to all others in a sort of Cartesian multi-dualism. A catastrophic consequence of this fragmentation is that the generative synthesis normally possible when multiple dimensions are free to interact with each other becomes greatly curtailed or even disabled. Our dynamic equilibrium collapses, and we are no longer a whole greater than the sum of its parts, but parts that cannot quite unite into a whole.

Adding icing to the cake, constriction and repetition also create additional stressors. Throughout all of the acceleration, interruption and fragmentation, the way we use technology today also demands that we not only constrain interactions with our environment, each other and the Universe itself to a few narrowly defined interfaces, but also that we rely on those same constricting interfaces over and over again in endless repetition. In this way our use of technology confines us to one or two avenues of perception-cognition, and to a unidimensional, mechanistic avenue of processing each and every interaction. So our most frequent emotional connection with loved ones occurs via cell phone; our appreciation of Nature occurs through a TV screen or through the window of a speeding car; our creative self-expression occurs through computer input devices; our sense of community through social media websites; our spiritual edification via self-help DVDs. In each of these cases, we are not expanding our senses or deepening a balanced, multidimensional connection within or without, but narrowing our bandwidth to what technology can immediately provide, then furrowing these narrow ruts in our intellect, kinesthetic awareness, emotional intelligence and spiritual insight through dogged

reiteration until we can't process reality in a non-fragmented way. Thus we inadvertently train ourselves into a confining and compressed rigidity of being.

We can observe the impacts of these stressors every day. As stress-related physiological conditions ranging from hormonal imbalances to carpal tunnel syndrome to compromised immune responses. As impatience, irritability and interactions with others that are more task-oriented than people-oriented. As an insensitivity to our emotional needs and a deafness to the whisperings of our innermost self. As degradation of our relationships, our capacity for intimacy, our sense of connectedness and community, and our store of empathy. As neuroses and psychopathologies. As chronic, often terminal illnesses. As a dumbing down of our intellectual, spiritual and emotional intelligences. As an imprisonment of our imaginal and creative potential. As an inexorable compaction of our very soul. And although technology is not in itself to blame for these conditions, it has become their constant companion and adroit enabler. It has helped embed structural imbalances in our being that rob us of our brightest promise and potential.

Beyond technologically enhanced stress, there is a second problem that compounds the first. And that is modern culture's reliance upon technology to moderate or medicate the very stresses that technology induces. Do we seek relief from these stresses through video games, movies, recording music or other multimedia entertainment? Pharmaceuticals? Going for a drive? Hopping on an exercise machine? Then all we are doing is activating pleasure circuits in the brain that create new dependencies on technology, and ultimately inducing some or all of the same stressors we are trying to anesthetize. In the process, we also are creating additional barriers to the roles of heart, mind, body, spirit and will in their synthesis and actuation of wisdom. I remember in my early twenties programming a game on my computer to "escape" the stress of writing databases and repairing printers during my day job. What was I thinking? I wasn't. I was just following cultural programming that advocated technology as a way out, the remedy to all ills, the best medication for my stress. As a result of this monothematic approach to living, my existence became more imbalanced, my stress level increased, and my body, heart, mind, spirit and will became malnourished and shriveled.

But this is only the beginning of the problem for society as a whole. For what seems to be occurring over successive generations is that those who perform well under technological stress have increased their social standing, wealth and influence in our culture; that is, those who can function well within a confining set of technologically determined parameters, and for whom limited, unidimensional processing is easier or preferred, have tended to be the most successful and esteemed. Meanwhile, those who require regular multidimensional nourishment to maintain well-being have suffered more and been rewarded less. So, for example, a person with Asperger's syndrome or other, high-functioning autism spectrum disorder can actually succeed in professions that rely on high levels of systemization – engineering, mathematics, computer programming, physics, etc. – while struggling with emotional complexity, interpersonal relationships and psychosocial development.[7] In the same vein, someone with a low emotional or spiritual intelligence, a lack of empathy, and little or no theory of mind may still find rewarding positions in the sciences, academia, the arts, or wherever a high IQ and a single dimension of genius is appreciated and supported.

In the U.S., we see evidence of this continual narrowing of human capacities and overemphasis on certain types of intelligence everywhere. Arts programs are losing funding in K-12 education even as math and science curricula are expanded. The number of college science and business majors have skyrocketed while humanities enrollment has languished. Corporate advertising increasingly appeals to the basest instincts of human nature while deliberately avoiding complexity, subtlety and nuance. Most news media likewise focus on what titillates rather than what informs. Our political discourse avoids philosophical debate over issues of substance, and concentrates on ad hominem attacks of individual candidates. Even the average reading level in America is in steady decline[8] as language and the thought processes behind it are stripped down and simplified. In each of these arenas, the empirical trumps the imaginal, the practical trumps the speculative, the functional trumps the experimental, and the materialistic trumps the spiritual.

But what about someone who appreciates multidimensional balance enough to insist on maintaining it – even to the extent that their own particular dimension of genius is deemphasized? Or someone who enjoys processing the world at different speeds and honoring different facets of their being? Who inhabits the realm of abstract ideas and artistic synthesis? Or who navigates all

of their decisions via intuition and a felt sense of what is spiritually profitable? Or who has determined that technology interferes with their overall sanity and wellness? As these other developmental threads continue to be discarded and demeaned in a technological culture, essential aspects of the human experience are being expunged from the collective. The zeitgeist of a globalized human civilization is progressing toward a thin, pale, monothematic echo of our innately broader spectrum of capacities.

Overdependence and Stupefaction

Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we insist on such overinvestment in technological problem-solving? Why do we rely so heavily on technology? Why do we suppress non-technical abilities and elevate technical skills and affinities? One contributive explanation is that, as children immersed in constant flow of new, technological toys, we are perpetually distracted by playful abandon. Technology is overstimulating us. Another partial explanation is that humanity had developed a sort of collective counterphobia around technology, embracing it not just because it is exciting and new, but because on some level we are afraid of technology and are compelled to integrate it aggressively into our lives in order to cope with its otherwise overwhelming impact. Yet another contribution is the perpetual cycle of stress and stress mitigation we have engineered with technology, creating an addiction we can't quite escape; for while seeking release from technological stress we experience pleasure, and that pleasure masks our increasing stress and encourages escalation of self-medicating behaviors.

But my favorite angle on this is that our self-imposed technodependence is mainly the result of a basic human impulse: we enjoy worshiping created things. We like to imbue inanimate objects with quasi-magical abilities just as our ancestors did. Whether it is the carving of a beloved deity, a newly developed drug or the latest Apple product, we want to believe that some help for our condition, some relief for our suffering, some aid to our success and thriving can exist outside of our interiority. But technolatry is just one more unnecessary externalization of our deliverance. And like any other externalization, we are only distracting ourselves from the real work to be done: the difficult, courageous, disciplined work of getting to know our innermost selves. Technology may be a projection of that inner essence – and a fantastically creative, dazzling and

wondrous one – but *it is not us*, it does not define our true identity, and it does not even point us in the right direction for answers. Yet we worship it nonetheless, refusing to pause in our devotion long enough to evaluate the real and lasting value of our toy-gods.

As a consequence of all this, we can readily observe that humanity's overreliance on technology is not particularly wise. Not only does it amplify stress and fear and then medicate it inadequately, but it maintains pervasive lifestyle conditions, language and thought processes that keep returning us to that stress-medication cycle instead of inspiring us to look beyond it for more full-spectrum nourishment. Through our technolatry we can supplant connection with the realm of spirit, the unfolding of our inner gnosis, communal interactions that inspire healing and growth, and perhaps even our relationship with the Universe itself. Generationally, this process amplifies selective adaptation of our culture into increasing technodependence – rewarding the short-term advantages of the technically-minded and choking off other modalities of being until our dominantly expressed genes begin to reflect this adaptation.

To reiterate, as individuals and a cultural whole, we are continually distracted and diverted from connections and energy exchanges that exist outside of technologically defined interactions. Communing with Nature, meditating in stillness and quiet, experiencing genuine intimacy and vulnerability with our community, making and sharing our meals together, talking a slow walk around our neighborhood, gazing for an hour or more into the night sky – all of these take a back seat to the immediate gratification of the latest technological gimmick. We ignore our intuition in favor of calculation; we drown out our spirit with exciting stimulation; we favor an endless flow of noncontextualized information above relying on our own experiential knowledge; we avoid the felt experience of our environment and perceptions; we reject our innate wisdom in favor of external sources.

So instead of instigating self-propagating goodwill, our technodependence creates self-propagating addiction, idolatry, and injurious reductions to human sensitivities and capacities. And it is this particular combination of forces and habits that result in what I call *the stupefaction of human experience*. In a sense, we are engineering our own idiocy, then rewarding it so that it

self-perpetuates. And because of our overdependence, we are so far removed from what is real, sustainable, transformative and essential to our own existence that we don't even realize how far out-of-balance we are, and can't recognize the most obvious paths to a healthy equilibrium. Although I am convinced that our spirit is always spurring on us to the next stage of evolution, I am also convinced that our current relationship with technology is confining our awareness and nourishment, holding us back from substantive growth. Like a child who has become fixated on acting out the same predictable story over and over again, we are arrested in an immature stage of interaction. And we certainly won't find our way out of this situation using the same technological tools that got us here.

However, I want to restate that technology isn't achieving this all by itself. Perhaps I am a stubborn romantic, but I still believe technology is a *neutral* tool, and still retains great potential to accomplish good. It has only been brought to this antagonistic low point through a synthesis of cultural factors. What are these factors? One is the exponential increase in population around the globe, a population that strains all available resources and generates an ever-increasing demand for technological solutions for society's needs – including the concealment of resource depletion. For example, a widening majority of the world's population now requires technology to produce and distribute its food, water, energy, clothing, housing, and so on.[9,10,11] And whenever there is a shortage of those resources, technology scrambles to compensate. No more fish in the sea? Breed them on a farm. Aquifers drying out? Drill deeper. Cotton yield not high enough? Genetically engineer a new breed. So just as we medicate our personal, technology-induced imbalances with technology, we medicate any imbalances in Nature that our technology has created…with more technology and more unintended consequences.

Another factor is the escalating concentration of human populations in urban environments[12] that rely heavily on technology to self-sustain; in everything from infrastructure to transportation to essential services to information, technology plays a critical and often unusurpable role in cities. Can any city exist without electricity? Without water and food transported from far away? Without complex methods of transporting, managing and entertaining its populace? Without computer modeling and design for urban planning? Without sophisticated traffic control and communications systems? Without machines to supply air and remove waste? When taking in a

post-apocalyptic movie, we can be certain some horrible cataclysm has occurred whenever a city is portrayed as overrun by Nature, devoid of all technology.

Another important factor we've already touched upon is a commercialistic system that creates artificial demand for new technologies at a frenzied pace, and with little regard for the consequences to consumers. Do we really need a new smart phone every few months? A new wardrobe every year? A new computer operating system every couple of years? A new multimedia system every three years? A new car every half-decade? A scandal in the news every day? A tweet every thirty seconds? Of course not, but our current version of corporate capitalism is strongly dependent on perpetual consumption. To maintain profits there can be no rest, and even if some new innovation is pointless it must be produced, exalted and consumed to create the next sales cycle. As a culture, we have come to equate newer with better to a ludicrous degree, creating mountains of waste as we improve something by mere fractions of utility. Perhaps more than any other cultural factor, corporate commercialism has incited idolatrous fervor for technology; at the alter of consumerism, we eagerly worship all that is brighter and faster more beautifully new.

There are other influences that add to this deleterious momentum, but these three factors create a perfect storm for technology's worst weaknesses to be amplified and perpetuated. Overpopulation has increased competition for resources and accelerated their depletion, then demanded technological solutions to conceal or defer resource shortages. Urbanization has made humans even more technodependent because cities are designed around technology from the ground up. And corporate commercialism has heartily encouraged technology worship in order to enhance profits. In all cases, more, faster, bigger and better technology is promoted as the solution to every challenge. But technology is not the solution to every challenge, as our definition of wisdom helps us realize. Humanity requires multidimensional nourishment that technology can't provide. We must find ways to expand our awareness and avenues of interaction rather than constrict them further. We need to stimulate and energize parts of our being that have been neglected as a result of technological dependence. We must free ourselves from a cage of hubris gilded in silicon.

A Vision of Freedom

How can we wean ourselves off of our technodependence? Some people have responded by rejecting certain forms of technology altogether. My mother, for example, refuses to use computers at all. I myself avoid taking medication of any kind. Some of my friends grow nearly all of their own food, or simplify their lives by owning fewer things and consuming less. Others have instituted "technological Sabbaths" where they either avoid relying on any technology at all for a day or two each week, or greatly curtail their use of tech that has become the most addictive for them. But by themselves these are half-measures, compensations that will not heal what is broken. We must also focus nurturing efforts on facets of our being that overreliance on technology has inadvertently depleted. So instead of emailing our friends, we can invest in regular face-to-face interactions. Instead of watching nature programs on TV, we can spend more time out in the wilderness. Instead of allowing multimedia to inundate our senses with aesthetics and information, we can take time to appreciate stillness, silence, and the murmurings of our own spirit. Instead of consuming other people's creative expressions or being entertained by their playfulness, we can become more playful and creative in our own thoughts, activities and friendships. Instead of acquiring more and more technology to medicate our sense of isolation, or our anxiety, or our disconnection from self, we can cultivate non-technological methods of self-care that stimulate all of the various processing centers within, and erase boundaries to healthy exchanges and balance. Instead of relying on technology to actuate our will, we can use our physical presence, our voice and the quality of our intentions to affect the world. Instead of allowing technology to isolate us from others, we can create close-knit, mutually supportive communities. Although we may still incorporate various technologies as important tools in all of these self-nourishing tasks, we can abandon excessive technolatry and relearn to trust our own abilities and the abilities of others with whom we interact.

A critical dimension of self – and the cornerstone of Integral Lifework – involves spiritual nourishment. I describe this nourishment as connecting with our ground of being, with the essence of all things, with our innermost and most authentic identity. Over the past thirty years, I have encountered technologies that enhanced this connection for me and others. Psychoactive substances like psilocybin mushrooms, for example. Or audio-visual aids that help induce

different mental states. In what might seem an apparent contradiction to my thesis, I even created an audio CD that stimulates a meditative frequency of mind. But these are just helpful starting points in a spiritual journey, a "leg up" in the process of training and self-discipline. And like any starting point, they are meant to be left behind. By helping us open a door into spiritual perception-cognition, they give us confidence that we can return to that door and open it with our own volition. In the right context, with the right intention, they can be very powerful tools. Ultimately, however, they cannot become the central focus of our nourishment, or substitutions for more interdependent and self-reliant modes of spiritual exploration.

And I think this begins to define some guidelines for a wiser use of technology. We don't need to abandon it, but we do need to abandon our compulsion to rely solely on technology for every aspect of our existence. We can attenuate our investment in material and mechanical solutions, relinquish our belief in technology's magical properties, and prioritize our reliance on other modes and methods of interaction, exchange and interior processing. We simply require more balance. As we pursue the greatest good for everyone and everything, we can consider the impact of technology on our well-being and the well-being of the Whole in all our undertakings. Ultimately, we can include technology in our efforts when it adds value to multidimensional, all-inclusive nourishment – but not before we relinquish our compulsive attachment to that use.

How does this unfold in practice? Let's use this essay as an example. When I first sat down to write, I had been meditating about the topic of technological dependence for a number of days. I hadn't been reading books or listening to podcasts or doing web-based research, but searching within myself for the themes that I felt needed to be expressed. When that well ran dry, I went for a walk, hobnobbed with my neighbors, made a meal, conferred with my partner…and then meditated some more. In other words, I nourished various aspects of myself – physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually – to inspire the essay's content. And, as my writing began to take shape, I finally did do some technologically-based research – both to feed myself mentally, and to confirm, refine and more accurately convey what the other facets of my being were offering up. So I utilized technology to help me navigate my ideas and intuitions, and of course to express them via a word-processing program, but this was my last and least important step rather than my first and foremost.

Even back when I was a technologist it was not difficult to implement some of these principles, though doing so tended to fly in the face of convention. For example, a truly multifaceted cost-benefit analysis of technological enhancements for business processes often revealed a potential reduction in institutional knowledge, a loss of productivity, an increase in personnel costs, and a crippling of run rates. Conversely, adding human beings back into customer interactions after a period of automation often increased perceived levels of customer service and improved certain service delivery efficiencies. Extending the features of legacy technologies rather than installing entirely new systems almost always saved time, energy and resources in the long run. And while armies of business analysts sought to justify multi-million-dollar IT implementations, a few informal meetings with stakeholders often disclosed an intuitively obvious, non-technological solution to a given challenge – often one that emphasized the power of human relationships. These approaches did not make me a hero among those advocating more and more dependence on complex technical systems, but it did impress some who grasped the advantages of simple, common-sense approaches using technologies, personnel and skill sets that were already present in an organization.

Of course, putting technology in its proper place will not remedy all of humanity's ills. Overpopulation, urbanization and corporate commercialism still remain to pressure us into ignoring our inner Light, becoming attached to external solutions, and consuming our way out of every difficulty. So these factors must also be addressed. But when we commit to multidimensional nourishment first for ourselves, and then as an effective means of loving kindness towards everyone and everything around us, we begin to erode the influence of these other factors as well. This requires courage and resolve, but courage and resolve are byproducts of investing in our inner resources and learning to trust them.

As a result of our overdependence on technology and cultural factors that inspire it, there is a long and difficult road ahead for humanity. And the longer we delay reorienting how we interact with our own spirit, each other, the Earth and the Universe itself, the more treacherous that road will become. The more invested we are in worshiping our own creations, the less room we will have

in our hearts and minds to appreciate the other miracles of existence and the many mysterious gifts the Universe has to offer us. The more imbalanced our nourishment, the more likely we will remain immature, fragmented and unwell. So let's not delay. Let's get started on more balanced interactions and more expansive, multidimensional interfaces with each other and the world around us. Perhaps, as a first step, you could put a reminder in your smart phone to email me agenda items for a virtual conference on this topic.

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