



The Luddite Librarian

"I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots." **Albert Einstein**

My sojourn took me to the Mall of Wonders for the hopeful purchase of a new typewriter ribbon, when before me stood the alluring and phantasmagorical Chuck E. Cheese. A small pride of children stood transfixed, not at the glorious portal to such tantalizing pleasures to come, but to their handheld devices. As upon sacramental relics they gazed. This invention of distraction can never be our corn or salmon of reverent sustenance-- these young people choose it over cheese pizza!

The light of the future is bright, dear reader, but still, I stare into it, seeking clarity beyond hazy apparitions. The same is true aurally. I listen for new voices, but the only clarion call is one of cacophony, the whirling, clanging gongs of Chuck E. Cheese! From whence comes the new prophet of understanding, of true intergenerational empathy? Are the trumpets of Jericho, in fact, the bells and whistles of a Las Vegas casino? The melodies of Chuck E. Cheese prevail in my mind, industrial counterpoint that simultaneously mean everything and nothing.

Living via technology is a vicarious entity, living in effigy. It is my mission in life, at least in these tirades, to blast the new electronic gizmos and our frailty that comes with such utter dependence. Yet, let us look back to the mother of all devils, the television remote control! Surely its shape and size was one clever component of a corporate scheme to dupe us all into complacency over things to come. It appealed to all ages, so brilliant was its efficiency! Like the insidious Princess Phone, it was so sleek and slender and fit into the palm so appealingly. Oh, the lures business will use to bait, hook, and net us! From drooling toddler to delirious granny, the remote control zapped our will to be independent beings. It was the

The Technophile

Alone in the forest recently, I had the chance to sit and hear stories from strangers that captivated my afternoon. Driving by myself across vast stretches of the uninhabited West, I have heard scientists and industry leaders divulge secrets about themselves and their successes. Sitting alone at a transportation hub, waiting out the seemingly inevitable delays, I have been transported by words.

While there are many types of recorded sound that have the ability to captivate, to move, to transfix the listener, today I give praise to that bit of preserved radio, the home expert with a microphone, the celebrity with more than a pretty face: the podcast.

Recorded sound may not fill your belly or provide shelter, but the tradition of crowding around a speaker for news, entertainment, and a glimpse of something beyond your living room is almost as old as the 115 year old medium. Digitally recorded sound still involves electricity and magnetism, they have just been recombined into more durable, portable technologies.

The word Podcast, from "iPod" and "broadcast" describes the whole range of recorded sound that can be retrieved from the internet, generally in series or episodic form. This form of communication is accessible from both the creator and listener perspectives. The equipment needed to produce these recorded audio files is a relatively small expense, the expertise needed to edit and post them could be learned in an afternoon, and the content may be as simple as a conversation. As a listener, any device that can connect to the internet or a computer and has speakers or can connect to speakers is all you need.

As an easily accessible medium for storytelling and communication, people have created podcasts about any topic you can imagine. If there isn't one, why, you

John the Baptist of technology! In the day we heard this advancement as the New Voice of luxury, of leisure; and yet, it was as if we just paid no attention to the man behind the curtain. Look to Rome and its vomitorium! Caligula adores his device! The marketeers of these items care deeply about the effectiveness of commercialism, and that simply leads us down the road in our bovine need to follow the crowd at any financial or spiritual expense.

As we have all heard at an interment, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Our handheld devices distract us from the earth, catapulting us away from the baser elements that are at the very core of humankind's meaning. Perhaps it is more a hovering, and our living through technology may be likened to an out-of-body experience.

The handheld device crosses all lines, all cultures, all creeds, all generations. It yanks us from any grounding, dispossessing our species. I have seen the geriatric and the elementary student alike transfixed by the hypnotic magnetism of the Internet. What can save these souls but the salve of introspection? Someone whistles in a shrieking pitch, and the children, like a murder of crows, abandon one shiny thing for another, scampering willy-nilly into the maw of Chuck E. Cheese.

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could start producing your own next week. Podcasting is a cheap reliable means of transferring knowledge. Like blogs have democratized the written word, audio broadcasting has the ability to make every voice heard (at least to a few people).

One of the wonders of digital access is that we do not need to be grounded in the menial task that is necessary, or isolated in geographically disparate places from those who enjoy the same things we might. If we are slavishly fixed to technology, we also owe it the price of passage to regions of the world and our brains that we might not reach on our own.

Little will surpass the joy of staying up late without noticing, deep in conversation with a kindred spirit but when that is not an option, pipe in someone else's conversation and hold on for the ride.

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