

The Luddite Librarian

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

In sitting down to a breakfast of English muffin and marmalade I scan the newspaper for items of hope, my soft boiled egg sets smartly in its pink willow egg cup. I am no Lilliputian; I don't care which end is up. I found myself in the classified ads, lamenting the rising costs of a cord of firewood. I shuddered at the inflation of change. And now we have a new Quarterly editor. Welcome, Samantha!

A bookish Luddite such as I, in tartan waistcoat and Fez, would be foolish to think a society could prevent the onslaught of the future. Change is constant, and like the winds of time, always eroding the physically present into a gelatinous and mysterious tomorrow. My ilk does not FEAR the future; we modern Luddites simply find the conveniences of new technologies to be irksome, intrusive into our soul's core, and distracting from the immediate world around. Here begins my terse treatise.

Be vigilant! Be prepared! The term *prevent* comes into our Modern English Language through the Middle English *preventen*, meaning *to anticipate*. This is the work of stock brokers, baseball batters, and young lovers. Where lays the value of anything tomorrow? Recently I decided to part with a collection of a half dozen chapbooks of poetry from a fine modern poet, all first editions. Each, in the colossal emporium of the Internet, were said to be worth a paltry sum, a mere few dollars each! I was glum and fought despondency. The Egyptian pharaohs had it right; build a huge tomb and take it all with you! Yes, I am crying over spilt milk, I know. Pity the myopic whiner.

The Technophile

“Technology is anything that wasn't around when you were born.” - Alan Kay

Just now I received an email from my library notifying me that an ebook I had placed on hold was ready to download. Without leaving my cup of tea, Joan Didion had arrived transporting me into her Year of Magical Thinking. The technology in my hands connected me to her story, her voice, her loss, and the library hadn't yet opened for the day. Here marches the future, into my living room, breaking down the barriers of the physical limitations of storage, delivery, and use so that I may carry 500 books in my backpack and not be sore at the end of the day.

Be Prepared! Who knows when a flood, fire, or earthquake will upset the shelves, cases, boxes, and folders of our shared knowledge. Would the burning of the Library of Alexandria have been so terrible if there had been digital facsimiles of the ancient knowledge? Preservation, prevention and redundancy is the battle cry of the library. While those words may sound static, they are, in reality, the constant activity of librarians, especially those dealing with materials that are beyond the printed page.

The translation to more formats may come with beeping and buzzing, but that can be silenced. I pity the luddite who may confuse medium for mode, and assume that a change in format is the harbinger of a change in values.

We don't just have the contents of our own music collections or the books on our shelves at our fingertips, but vast collections of the world's knowledge, literature, art, film, science, and history (or a facsimile of those treasures) are a few key-strokes away. The memory of the masses is stored on servers in warehouses all over the world. Not

My humble study is filled with books, and I lament the utter fact that all could fit on some drive or in the cloud, that my phonograph records with their glorious art and liner notes could be .mp files on a single device. Is there a home for my family photographs and daguerreotypes? Shall all these matters, like my tacky-tacky plastic paraphernalia end up in the land fill? Surely someplace in our expansive universe the Sumerians and Carthaginians are rolling their eyes with my poor vision. Where then is Utopia?

The scathing technophiles may say, that, ‘Ahhh, this is the spinach in his teeth or the booger in his nose!’ I can only retort with the notion that I err on the path to tranquility. If the gadgets and gewgaws of our age were silent, how more centered would we be? You may seek the fallacy of multitasking as proficiency; we Luddites seek serenity through the prevention of technoangst.

What do the Germans say, *Nie vergessen*? Never forget. Prevention, at its core, is memory. Call it old fashioned, but where is recitation in our culture today? Neglected! Like the forest walking book talkers of Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, we can adapt to the new and yet treasure the past in the robust real estate between our ears. Memorize a poem or speech for the Luddites! You may then choose to blog or tweet about it.

Jim Tindall
tindallj@nwasco.k12.or.us

all of the 300 hours of video that are uploaded to YouTube every minute are treasures, or ever even watched, but alongside that democratic platform there are wondrous items available. The masterpieces, letters from ancient scholars: instead of moldering in archives these are made public, bought into the daylight and are often free to access. There are new ways to treasure our past, new eyes to discover the ancient and the up to the minute discoveries of the world. My study is full of books, but my computer is a portal to the greatest collection of materials imaginable.

Leila Belle Sterman
leila.sterman@montana.edu