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### **The endless scroll and why we should embrace it**

Watching an episode of the BBC's *Panorama* programme on smartphone addiction prompted me consider the not-so-hidden dangers of devices we have come to depend on so much. In the programme, app developers and former employees of social media giants such as Facebook openly admitted (and confessed their guilt about) the techniques used to keep us interacting with our devices. Practices such as the 'endless scroll', where there is no need to click onto a new page, means that we are trapped in a kind of Sisyphean task in which we can see no end. The only response, it seems, is to keep on scrolling. Aside from the physical health risks that smartphone addiction might present, the psychological damage that is being caused is perhaps more profound, something that particularly affects anyone born in the digital age. It is concerning for future, yet to be born generations, who will likely become almost cyborg in their use of technology. As smartphones become more of a prosthesis than a tool external to the body, I wonder how long it will be before we are implanted with electronic chips, literally using our bloodstreams as a form of data.

The dangers inherent in smartphone addiction are closely connected to the socially accelerated culture which dominates the Western, and increasingly Eastern, worlds. It is a given that the use of social media, smartphones and technology will grow exponentially; there is simply nothing that will prevent this from happening as the world economy depends on it and technology becomes the opium of the people. Despite these obvious dangers, perhaps we should learn how to embrace technology rather than find ways of escaping it. In his essay on technology, Heidegger suggests that what "is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger" (2008, p. 232). We should continue to embrace technology, despite Heidegger's warning that it hides an abandonment of being, that we are "cloaked in the increasing authority of ... speed" (Heidegger, 2012, p. 95). Heidegger attributed a loss of a sense of being to the accelerating pace of life, hypothesizing that technology hides the abandonment of being, that it is "cloaked in the increasing authority of calculation, speed, and the claim of the massive" (Heidegger, 2012, p. 95). Calculation, for Heidegger, is found in the machination of society. By machination, Heidegger is not referring to the deceitful

workings one might, for example, associate with Machiavellian behaviour, but to the dominance of machines, which – he suggests – has become like God, as machination is no longer questioned by many. The claim of the massive, according to Heidegger, refers to “what is accessible to everyone in the same way” (2012, p. 96). Thus, massiveness is a common identity that is accessible to all, something that generations of the immediate future feel more than anyone who has gone before, because of the ubiquity of smartphones, tablets and apps.

The liveness and immediacy intrinsic to the ephemeral ‘moment’ of performance found in forms such as theatre, music, dance or other performing arts is replicated by the smartphone’s ability to keep us in the ‘now’ of the endless scrolling, although it simultaneously extricates us from the present moment. This paradox raises a further paradox of how we embrace technology whilst simultaneously being emancipated from it. Perhaps we should examine the notion of freedom and what it truly means to be free. In Sartre’s *The Age of Reason*, the central character, Mathieu struggles with finding a sense of freedom and concludes that, in order to be free, one must become part of the manacles of society. Mathieu concludes that the unassailability of freedom is only in the imagination and thus it is not a failure if one conforms.

Man, according to Rousseau’s famous statement, is born free but everywhere he is in chains. The chains of today, however, are “[n]o longer ... factory machines, but ... in the form of laptops and phones” (Noys, 2014, p. 11) and, indeed, it would be futile to ignore the grip that this technology has on our lives. Unless one wishes to spend life as an anchorite; reclusive and ascetic, there is little choice but to conform. Like Sartre’s protagonist Mathieu, there is comfort to be found in the claim of the massive. Perhaps there will be no end to the leviathan-like growth of smartphone technology and the tight hold it has over our lives. Rather than attempting to emancipate ourselves from this hold, we should embrace it like a frightened child gripping her mother’s hand. As every frightened child knows, it is always better and safer to be connected.

**References**

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