

# THE MIDDLE PATH

*consciousness and the negative effects of technology*

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## INTRODUCTION

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With the advent of modern technology, more and more of our lives are mediated by machines. While this enables our experience in some ways, it also greatly inhibits, distorts, and induces sociological and psychological problems.

This pamphlet is to bring to your consciousness the negative effects of technology, and a middle path to help steer your consciousness in a healthier direction.

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## CONTACT & FEEDBACK

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*MiddlePathPamphlet.blogspot.com*

Even though this may seem hypocritical, I have set up a blog for you to leave feedback and comments regarding this project. You can also contact me there. Please visit the website above for further details.

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THE  
PANCAKED  
SOCIETY

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*the first*

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Rather than talk in person, we text. Rather than meet for drinks, we send out mass e-mails. Rather than live in the moment, we live vicariously. Anxiety, fear, false validation: overstimulated, overwhelmed, and a sense of being unfulfilled.

"THIS ALWAYS-ON, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME,  
ANY PLACE BEHAVIOR INVOLVES AN  
ARTIFICIAL SENSE OF CONSTANT CRISIS"

-Linda Stone

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## FLAT AND SPREAD OUT

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The use of modern technology has infiltrated every aspect of our daily lives: how we interact (or lack thereof) with one another, how we stay connected, how we are constantly on the go, how we think, how we present ourselves, and how we manage time. It has started to dehumanize us and create psychological and sociological problems.

Even though 61% of Canadians wish they could go back to a time where reliance on technology wasn't so heavy, we use technology an average of 17 times per day to connect with others socially, compared to connecting in person with an average of only two people per day (Ipsos Reid).

Technology "contributes to a stressful lifestyle, to operating in crisis management mode, and to a compromised ability to reflect, to make decisions, and to think creatively" (Stone).

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## FOUR TECHNOLOGICAL TRUTHS

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- 1 Technology lends to suffering. Technology is not perfect, nor is the virtual world we work and play within. The information world is not real: we cannot touch, grasp, or see the amounts of data that pass through. It is impermanent and invisible. Things get lost, misplaced, or not received.
- 2 The origin of suffering is attachment to transient things and the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to them: not only iPods, cell phones, and laptops, but also things through them: our idea of self, Facebook status, MySpace pictures, video games characters, etc. Suffering is desire, craving, and clinging – the attachment to an outcome. Loss is inevitable.
- 3 The cessation of suffering is attainable. This is done through removing the causes of suffering and improving human activity. (Although living without technology in our modern world is near impossible for most, we should use it as a tool and live with less emphasis.)
- 4 There is a path to the end of suffering – this middle path.

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THE  
TETHERED  
SELF

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*the second*

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We are always on, perpetually connected to devices that allow a greater range of mediated interactions throughout the world, yet ignore our interactions with people right next to us. We are underestimating the importance of connecting face-to-face.

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## PERPETUALLY 'IN'

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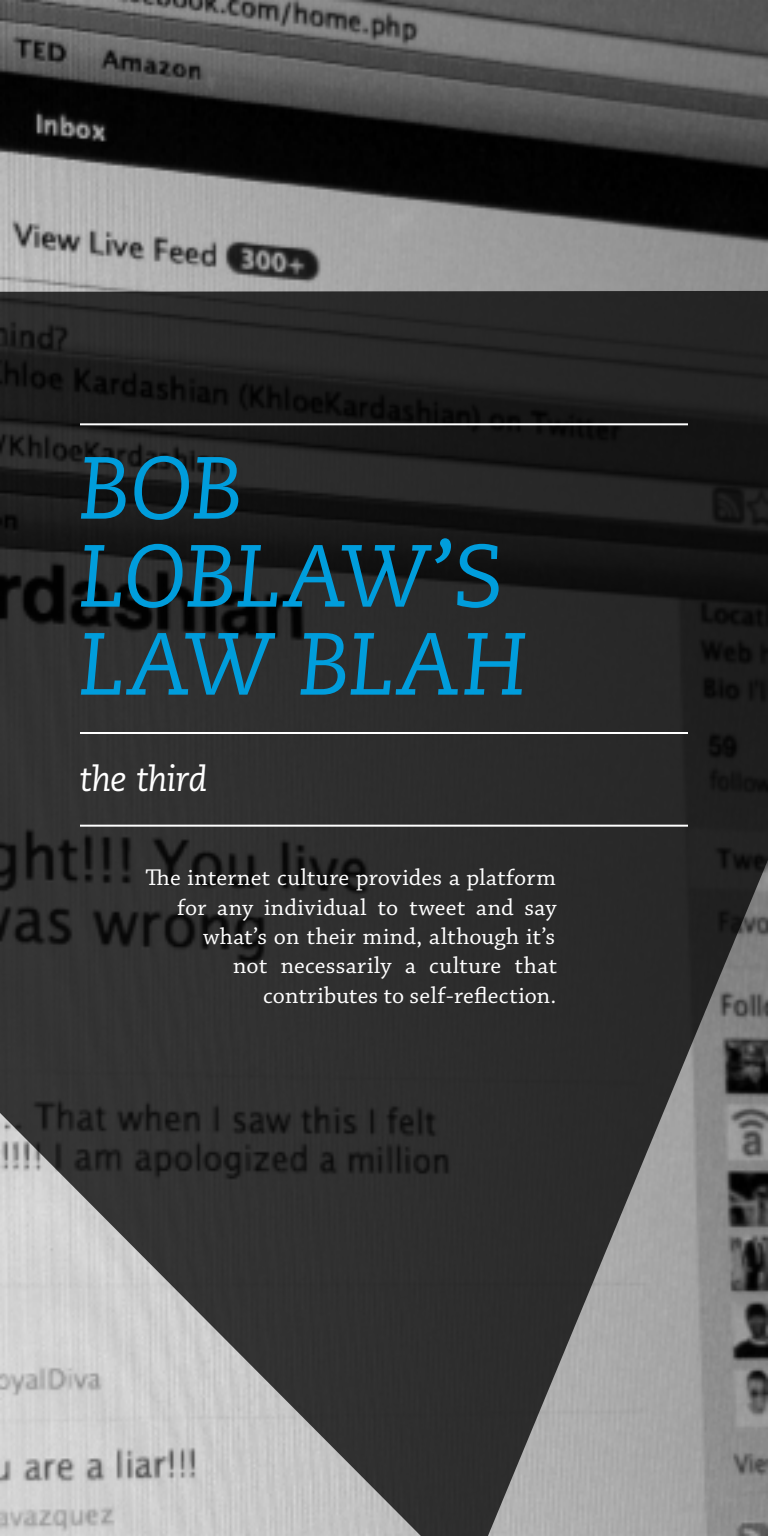
We are tethered to the world of technology: iPod in hand, laptop in bag, and phone in pocket. The phone is a gateway: internet, instant messages, e-mails, and people halfway around the world are all readily accessible at your fingertips, just as you are accessible to them. You are always on, and they are always on you.

Technology is able to take the user to other corners of the world that can be physically or temporally separate, leaving them hanging between co-present and virtual spaces. "Mobile electronic devices make it possible for people to 'leave traces of their selves in informational space'" (John Urry qtd. in White 196). Which parts of our selves do we leave behind, and what sort of void does that create?

The anxiety teens report when they are without their cell phones or their link to the Internet may not speak so much to missing the easy sociability with other but missing the self that is constituted in these relationships. (Turkle 127)

"A TRAIN STATION IS NO LONGER A COMMUNAL SPACE, BUT A PLACE OF SOCIAL COLLECTION: TETHERED SELVES COME TOGETHER, BUT DO NOT SPEAK TO EACH OTHER. EACH PERSON AT THE STATION IS MORE LIKELY TO BE HAVING AN ENCOUNTER WITH SOMEONE MILES AWAY THAN WITH THE PERSON IN THE NEXT CHAIR. EACH INHABITS A PRIVATE MEDIA BUBBLE. INDEED, THE PRESENCE OF OUR TETHERING MEDIA SIGNAL THAT WE DO NOT WANT TO BE DISTURBED BY CONVENTIONAL SOCIALITY WITH PHYSICALLY PROXIMATE INDIVIDUALS.

-Sherry Turkle



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# BOB LOBLAW'S LAW BLAH

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*the third*

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The internet culture provides a platform for any individual to tweet and say what's on their mind, although it's not necessarily a culture that contributes to self-reflection.

That when I saw this I felt  
!!!! I am apologized a million

oyalDiva

u are a liar!!!

avazquez

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## NEVER WRITE ANYTHING THAT DOESN'T IMPROVE ON SILENCE

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To abstain from false speech, slanderous speech, hurtful words, and idle chatter is the first step in the middle path. Constant Facebook updates, Tweets, texting: they all compile themselves in forms of validation and outcome seeking. “At the moment of having a thought or feeling, one can have it validated. Or, one may *need* to have it validated” (Turkle 128).

Updates are put up not only so we know people know what we’re doing, but also so people can comment and *like* our situations, thus approving our idea of self. It is the major reason we constantly check Facebook, to see who has validated our lives since we viewed it last. Instead of interpolating the situation and questioning it ourselves, we post out thoughts into the hive of information, and the depth of the question is reformatted for the small screen and flattened in the process.

“ALTHOUGH THE CULTURE THAT  
GROWS UP AROUND I/TECHNOLOGY/  
NECESSARILY A CULTURE IN  
WHICH TALK CONTRIBUTES  
TO SELF-REFLECTION.”

-Sherry Turkle

Computers also open a world of anonymity, and along with that bring a deeper hostility in online conversations. People are four times more likely to use hostile communication – *flaming* – through computers than in face-to-face interactions (Gackenbach 46). Anonymity, sensory overload, and a reduction in self-focus – user handles and online personas; pop-ups, animated banners and multiple browsers; multitasking and web surfing – lead to deindividuation and therefore disinhibited, hostile behavior (Joinson 265). Even when people are known to each other, the internet’s visual anonymity provides “depersonalizing effects” (Joinson 266).

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# INTERACTION FULFILLMENT HIERARCHY

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*the fourth*

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We are constantly degrading the way in which we communicate. The effectiveness, depth, and quality of our interactions are devolving through technology. We condense emotions into idioms (LOL, TTYL), abandoning meaning, quality, and face-to-face interaction for convenience and ease.

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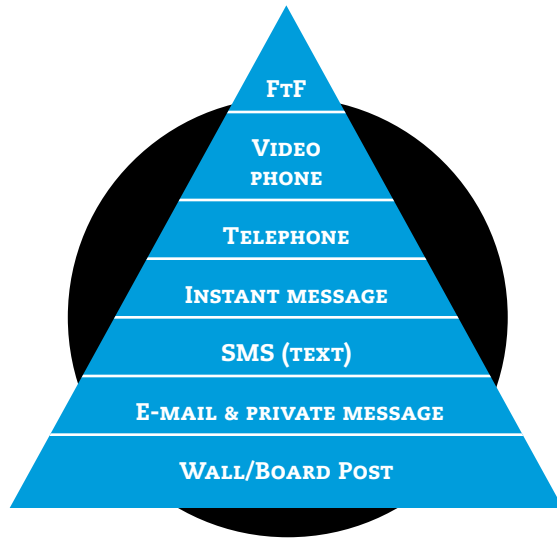
## CONSCIOUSLY MOVE UP THE PYRAMID

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There is something lost when we rely on technology as a mediator of our communications: it cannot replace the connection made when actually making someone laugh out loud, or the warm embrace of a goodbye to satisfy our emotional needs. There is no substitute for face-to-face communication.

The Interaction Fulfillment Hierarchy can be used to describe the effectiveness and satisfaction derived from interactions. 93% of communication is created non-verbally (tone of voice accounts for 38% and body language for 55%), so the higher one moves up the pyramid, not only will the correct message come across, a more fulfilling interaction will ensue. An SMS, for example, will not be able to reproduce social cues such as tonality and emotion that are prevalent on the phone. This makes it less rich as a communication medium.

Make a conscious effort to move up the pyramid with every interaction, ideally using technology to set up face-to-face (FtF) interactions with people. Spending 30 minutes catching up is more rewarding and uplifting than reading about one's life through Twitter and Facebook.



*The Interaction Fulfillment Hierarchy is a framework that can be used to describe a communications medium's ability to fulfill basic human-to-human connections.*

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# EXPECTATION & OBLIGATION

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*the fifth*

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The distinction between work, play, and travel is rapidly disappearing. We are able to connect anywhere in the world, and when a new message or e-mail pops up, we feel that have to answer it: be it at the dinner table, a date, or a foreign country.

"...STRESS AND HENCE THE COGNITIVE DAMAGE CAUSED BY E-MAIL, TEXT AND SIMILAR INTRUSIONS ARE INVERSELY RELATED TO A PERSON'S SELF-ESTEEM AND TO HOW MUCH CONTROL HE PERCEIVES HE HAS OVER HIS WORKING ENVIRONMENT. PEOPLE WHO FEEL THEY ARE AT THE WHIM OF INDIVIDUALS AND FORCES BEYOND THEIR CONTROL TEND TO SUFFER THE WORST..."

*-Robert J. Rader*

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### **OVERSTEPPING CONVENTIONAL BOUNDARIES**

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In the always-on world, we cannot escape being connected. Cell phones incite an expectation of availability, and in turn an obligation to that availability. The lines between work, play, and travel have nearly disappeared, and people feel obligated to be accessible 24/7: continuously checking BlackBerrys, responding to e-mails, and constantly updating everyone 'back home'.

Adults are stressed by new responsibilities to keep up with e-mail, the nagging sense of always being behind, the inability to take a vacation without bringing the office with them, and the feeling that they are being asked to respond immediately to situations at work, even when a wise response requires taking time for reflection, a time that is no longer available. (Turkle 129)

People too bring their technological baggage with them while travelling. By carrying their tethering technology, they choose not to immerse themselves in the surrounding culture or landscape, and instead choose to be socially present back home even though they are physically absent: emotionally and socially they do not leave. The body may be temporarily removed and lounging in the sun, but the mind-connected BlackBerry will always be tuned into work and things of little consequence to their situation. (Important things may come through, but the overwhelming majority of times it is inconsequential to that exact moment.)





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# RIGHT EFFORT

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*the sixth*

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Without effort, which is itself an act  
of will, nothing can be achieved.

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## EFFORT FROM TECHNOLOGY

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This is achievable with commitment. The mental energy it takes to create a pointless blog entry, text nothing in particular, update Twitter, or browse mindlessly through the internet is the same kind of mental energy it takes to become aware of the need within to pursue such activities – to become the viewer of your desires and insecurities – and to consciously change these habits.

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### FOUR PILLARS OF EFFORT

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- 1 To become aware and prevent the arising of anxieties that are related to technology use.
- 2 To abandon/diminish the role of technologies that already cause great anxieties.
- 3 To create more time and space – both mental and physical – from technology.
- 4 To maintain and perfect breaks from technology that are already used to escape.

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## A CONSCIOUS START

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Here are a few practical applications to reduce the role and negative impacts of technology in everyday life:

- 1 Zero inbox: trying to get your e-mail inbox cleared to zero.
- 2 Deleting 'sent' messages that are unimportant to relieve the anxiety of checking if they've been received.
- 3 'Forgetting' your cell phone at home once a week.
- 4 Removing or hiding technology from view.
- 5 If using Firefox, download a plug-in called Ad Block Plus to eliminate all internet ads.
- 6 Start spiritual practices: working meditation, yoga, even naps. Stay *present* while using technology.

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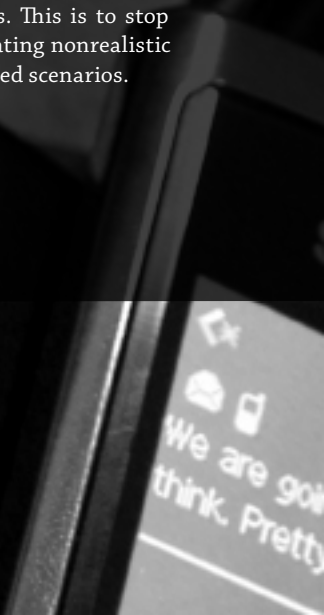
# THE WHAT IFS OF MIND

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*the seventh*

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We check to see if someone has liked our status, or checked our message, or replied to our thread; and if they haven't, we play out elaborate scenarios in our minds. This is to stop our minds from creating nonrealistic technology-induced scenarios.



We are going to think. Pretty

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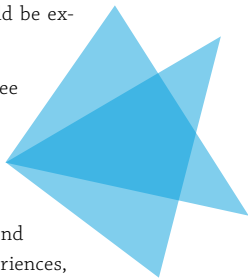
## RIGHT MINDFULNESS

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We wonder if they got the SMS. They haven't replied yet, so we check the outbox to make sure it's been sent. Maybe they're mad, but why would they be mad? Has something happened? Maybe it's something that was said, or maybe they found out that thing. If they would just message back, everything could be explained!

In reality, nothing is awry. The inability to not see informational space, to see what the other person has and has not done, causes us to extrapolate the mind-made situation in unworlly anxieties. It begins with a sensation caused by a thought, yet does not just stay with that sensation. The mind forms relations with other thoughts and experiences, which take it past the original sensation. The mind then creates interweaving scenarios and complex situations. This all happens half consciously, and we see things unclearly.

We must step back and view everything with clear perception and mindfulness before we get carried away. We must become aware of our supposition and define our thought patterns as they unfold.



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## FOUR MINDFUL FOUNDATIONS

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- 1 The analysis of the body – what sort of sensation are you feeling in which particular part of your body.
- 2 The analysis of the emotion – what emotion is it exactly or closest to.
- 3 The analysis of the mind – what reality is unfolding in the mind, and what thought patterns continually arise.
- 4 The analysis of the situation – what true objective reality is unfolding in the present.

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# CONTINUOUS PARTIAL ATTENTION

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*the eighth*

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Being overly connected while constantly dividing our attention between multiple tasks degrades cognitive performance. Tasks performed in the presence of distracting technology fell IQ tests by an average of ten points (Namoi Baron).

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## INTERRUPTION OVERLOAD

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In a world where we are so accessible and have multiple things on the go, our attention is divided and spaced out: not particularly on one thing or the other. We want to stay connected and be connected, to be constantly in the loop. We pay partial attention in an effort not to miss anything, continuously. “It contributes to a stressful lifestyle, to operating in crisis management mode, and to a compromised ability to reflect, to make decisions, and to think creatively” (Linda Stone). This continuous partial attention is caused by checking technology regularly.

Even when we believe we’re being more productive by multi-tasking, we’re not. Our brains are not set up to do multiple things at once – they rapidly oscillate between the tasks at hand. “It takes time to bring your mind back to the task you left when the BlackBerry called, which means (if that task was listening to someone, for instance) you have missed more than occurred during just the seconds it took to read an e-mail” (Sharon Begley

**“IN A 24/7, ALWAYS-ON WORLD, CONTINUOUS PARTIAL ATTENTION USED AS OUR DOMINANT ATTENTION MODE CONTRIBUTES TO A FEELING OF OVERWHELM, OVER-STIMULATION AND TO A SENSE OF BEING UNFULFILLED.”**

*-Linda Stone*

qtd. in Rader 44). We are missing important pieces of the moment by constantly searching for other moments to live in.

To live outside of this, give your *full* attention to the particular task at hand, even if it means turning off certain pieces of distracting technology. Also, if you’re set to use technology for an extended period, set up breaks where you feel the flow of your breath for five minutes every hour.