OPINION
GUEST ESSAY

Your Smartphone Should Be Built to Last

April 25, 2021

Years from now, what creature will digest the new iPads and AirTags that Apple announced on Tuesday? What soil will absorb their metals?

The shiny gadgets of today will be waste tomorrow. As you eye that upgraded tablet, consider that Apple shipped so many new iPads last year that if they were all laid flat and stacked, they would be about as tall as 862 Empire State Buildings. Then think about whatever old iPad of yours is languishing now in some unknown place.

Manufacturers don't talk much about this turnover when they announce the big new thing that will replace your mostly just as good old thing. This is all by design. There's a term for it: planned obsolescence, or designing a product with an intentionally limited life span. Ever try to get your TV repaired?

Apple, Samsung, Sony and other manufacturers of high-tech electronics release waves of new hardware every year even as the tide of screens and circuitry is engulfing us in discarded devices.

Now there is a movement afoot to change that approach. This year, the French government began requiring tech manufacturers to list an *"indice de réparabilité,"* a repairability score, on product pages for items like the iPhone and MacBook. If a device can be repaired, then its life can be extended, saving consumers money and the planet the burden of so many trashed gadgets. None of Apple's iPhones or MacBooks earned above a 7, with 10 being the top score — making the company a "C student at best," the website Grist noted. Other manufacturers like Microsoft and Samsung fared about the same. Equipped with this knowledge, consumers can make better choices about which products to buy. If unrepairable gadgets don't sell, manufacturers will change course.

Some 59 million tons of old TVs, computer, screens, smartphones, washers and other electronics are discarded every year. This waste is dangerous. Batteries explode in recycling facilities. Toxic substances like mercury leach into soil and groundwater and disperse in the air. Manufacturing flat screens adds greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. We need tech companies like Apple — so progressive in so many ways — to lead the charge to solve this problem. If they won't, governments must make them.

France is not alone in stepping into this mess. The movement is in the United States as well. More than a dozen states are considering so-called right-to-repair legislation, a rare bipartisan concern centered on the idea that manufacturers should not restrict access to information and parts that would allow independent shops to fix busted gadgets.

The New York State Assemblymember Patricia Fahy will hold a virtual town hall on the topic May 5. Anyone can attend. And the Federal Trade Commission is expected to release a long-delayed report soon on repair restrictions in consumer technology that could set the stage for a bigger push from the Biden administration.

Repairability is a surefire path toward longevity. Items become waste when they are no longer useful. Some of this is the simple march of progress. Other times, it is much harder to see the justification, such as when a Sonos speaker is cut off from software updates seemingly overnight.

ALTHOUGH tech companies will often speak of sustainability, many lobby against repair legislation, fearful it will loosen their control and eat into their profits. This can lead to a sort of cognitive dissonance.

Apple's annual environmental report, published this month, asserts a commitment to device longevity and sustainability. It also speaks of the Apple Pencil stylus as though it contains secrets lost in some fragment of the Rosetta Stone. The company is "designing, developing and testing additional disassembly tools — including new methods for recovering materials from Apple Pencil," it says, as though the methods could only be reverse-engineered, rather than integrated from the very first stage of design.

There's the issue in a nutshell: Sustainability matters, but marketable design appears to matter more to these companies. Consumers are urged to upgrade their devices annually. 1 billion smartphones were shipped in 2020 — and it was a sluggish year because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Manufacturers must do better. Their devices must be repairable by all and kept compatible with software updates for as long as possible, not artificially obsoleted. Consumers should support right-to-repair legislation. Buy what you please, be it a fancy fridge or a smartphone — no one is changing the world by holding on to an iPhone 7 for an extra year — but know to ask three simple questions when you're shopping: "How long will this last?" "How will I get it fixed when it breaks?" and "How will I recycle this when I need a new device?" Follow through and get the thing fixed or take it to a trustworthy recycler when it's time. (Apple's store employees can help with this step, for instance.)

In this world, damage is a certainty. But we cannot leave things broken: A problem of our creation is a problem that can be fixed.

By Damon Beres

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Pre-lectura

1) **Observe el paratexto y determine el contexto de producción de este texto (tema, autor, género discursivo, fecha de publicación, fuente, etc.)**

Lectura

2) **¿Cuál es la tesis del autor? Seleccione la opción correcta**

   a) La obsolescencia programada consiste en diseñar un producto con un tiempo de vida limitado de manera intencional.
   b) Los dispositivos electrónicos deberían ser diseñados para ser duraderos y poder ser reparados.
   c) Los dispositivos electrónicos de hoy serán los residuos del mañana.
   d) La sustentabilidad importa.

3) **¿Qué argumentos esgrime para sustentarla?**

4) **¿Qué recursos argumentativos usa el autor a lo largo de este texto?**

   a) Cita de autoridad
   b) Pregunta retórica Involucramiento del lector
   c) Analogía
   d) Datos estadísticos
   e) Anecdota personal

5) **Decida si cada una de los siguientes fragmentos (subrayados en el texto) expresan un hecho, una posibilidad futura o una situación hipotética.**

   A) consider that Apple shipped so many new iPads last year that if they were all laid flat and stacked, they would be about as tall as 862 Empire State Buildings.

   B) Items become waste when they are no longer useful.

   C) If unrepairable gadgets don't sell, manufacturers will change course.

6) A**nalice el conector ALTHOUGH (en mayúsculas y negrita en el texto) ¿Qué relación lógica expresa y qué ideas vincula?**

7) **Explique con sus palabras (no traduzca) qué quiere decir el autor con la frase** *"Apple, Samsung, Sony and other manufacturers of high-tech electronics release **waves** of new hardware every year even as the **tide** of screens and circuitry is engulfing us in discarded devices"* (subrayada y en negrita en el texto)

8) **Explique la conclusión.**

Poslectura

9) **Redacte una síntesis conceptual de este texto en un párrafo de cuatro oraciones.**