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The Slow Web Movement

Many in the first world live in a state of near constant connection. They check Facebook, skim Twitter, and watch YouTube in a ceaseless effort to experience everything. Young people in particular are increasingly addicted to engagement, growing up in a society that treats the presence and universal readiness of a pocket computer with blasé disinterest (Druckrey). The growing pressure to share is fatiguing, and many are forced to carefully prune their public image lest a family member or prospective employer stumble upon something less than flattering (Madden). Modern identity demands a technological presence (Postman). Those without one are oddities. We demand complete access to each other, tempered only by personal caution about sharing too much or sharing the wrong thing.

It was once believed that the development of technology would simplify menial tasks, allowing us all to spend more time relaxing or seeking personal goals (“The Land of Leisure”). For decades futurists have predicted the growth of a leisure class reaping the benefits of technological development (Pearson and Neild). That future has yet to emerge. The growth of technology enhancing human capacity has not resulted in greater freedom, but a greater demand on our freedom, with the belief that we can and should meet it. So we become the receivers of more updates, more friend requests, more at-mentions, and push notifications, and hashtags. We lose control of our technology as it becomes a job to troll the sites and services in the hope of staying “updated.”

This is not accidental. The corporations behind our most engaging technologies have a vested interest in engendering our dependency. Furthermore, our own biological needs for support and encouragement make us particularly susceptible to the charms of technology's promises (Parker-Pope).

Some, in an effort to free themselves from the demands of technology, have committed "infosuicide" and deleted themselves from all sites and services (Hanselman). This is certainly an effective method of disconnecting, but is it necessary? Surely technology has something to offer us.

The "Slow Web" movement, a grassroots campaign against technology's demands, offers an alternative path. Walking in the footsteps of the Slow Food movement, which sought freedom from cultural homogenization, the Slow Web movement seeks freedom of personal identity, and freedom of personal engagement. It is not a movement against technology, but a movement for better technology.

The movement is predicated on three founding principles: information should be timely; the rhythm of information should be predictable; and technology should disseminate knowledge, not information (Cheng). In this paper I will expound on these principles by laying out the movement's conceptual and ideological grounding, I will further motivate the movement's development by addressing the cultural, economic, and political influences that have created it, I will work to place the Slow Web movement with an historic context, and I will attempt to provide a roadmap for the development of the Slow Web's ideals into the mass consciousness.

Much has been said about the effects of technology's development, and much has been made of its ability to affect human life. Yet in our collective zeal for the bright and new and shiny

we have sometimes forgotten the permanence and importance of the decisions we make about technology. The Slow Web movement is not a radical new change, it is not a protest movement, nor an anti-capitalist movement. It is a call to sanity for the kids staring at their phones in bed, and the people surfing Facebook and Twitter and Reddit for hours. It is a call to programmers and developers and users to work to make things better, and create a world where our technology doesn't fatigue us, but builds us up. The technologist's utopia may not be achievable, the leisure class may never arise, but the dreams of yesterday should amount to more than a list of updates missed, or emails un-replied to. We can, and must do better, and with the Slow Web we will.

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