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Bart Van der Auweraert

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The art of Boredom and the origin of creativity



In our age of constant connection, many of us have grown uncomfortable with stillness. Between the glow of our devices and the hum of public spaces, true silence can be surprisingly hard to come by.

Yet, moments of quiet are not simply for rest. They are also gateways to fresh insights, creativity, and self-discovery. Let's explore why so many people shy away from quiet, how our culture fuels this avoidance, and the hidden benefits of embracing stillness and even boredom.

Being bored already? Then you are in a good place.

The Discomfort of Solitude

Creative activities often demand solitude and focus. It means setting aside the frenetic pace of daily life, turning off notifications, and being okay with the gentle hum of one's own thoughts. For those unaccustomed to silence, this can feel unsettling. We're often told that "success" looks like a busy schedule packed with social activities and endless entertainment. In contrast, quietly being alone with one's thoughts can be perceived as unproductive or dull. But in truth, these quiet spaces allow the mind to slow down and engage more deeply with ideas — an opportunity that's increasingly rare in modern life.

The Ever-Present Noise

Why is it so hard to find quiet these days? Many public places have background music or ambient chatter that acts as a buffer against silence. This cultural norm of constant noise can make quiet moments feel unnerving. When there's no external input — no streaming show, no social media updates — people sometimes realize they're unsure how to handle their own thoughts and daydreams. Over time, this discomfort can evolve into an aversion to activities that require sustained focus and reflection.

The Hidden Upside of Boredom

Think boredom is a bad thing? Although boredom often has a bad reputation, it can serve as a powerful catalyst for creativity and problem-solving. Neurologically, reducing external stimuli allows the brain to engage in more internally focused processing, which can foster creativity. When our minds are not bombarded by external stimuli, they're forced to invent their own "entertainment."

For instance, a musician might stumble upon a new melody while idly strumming their instrument, or a writer might conceive a plot twist while staring out the window.

Or Consider Albert Einstein, who, while pondering the constant speed of light, imagined what it would be like to travel on a train at high speed and shine a light forward. This thought experiment, born from a moment of intellectual curiosity, was a key step in developing his theory of relativity.

Daydreaming leads to unexpected ideas, and seemingly mundane moments can spark a new project or breakthrough. Moments of boredom can allow us to discover new connections and ideas.

Reading slowly and reflectively can play a similar role. When you're immersed in a challenging book or article, your mind is free to make original connections — turning the quiet act of reading into a creative spark.

Navigating the Inner Conflict

Ever feel that pull to constantly check your phone? Our hyperconnected digital lives thrive on rapid-fire updates, brief posts, and quick video clips. These fleeting bursts of information cater to a craving for instant gratification. However, they also whittle away at our ability to concentrate. The very thought of spending an evening immersed in a book can feel daunting. It's easy to slip into the cycle of scrolling through our phones to fill every spare moment. Overcoming this inclination requires a conscious effort to disconnect, to accept some boredom, and to make peace with temporary unease.

Yet, just like embracing boredom, scheduling time for deep reading can sharpen focus and kindle new ideas — if you give your mind the space to wander around what you're reading.

Why Silence Matters

- 1. Enhanced Creativity:** When your brain isn't occupied by constant noise, it can play with new ideas, explore uncharted mental territory, and assemble fresh perspectives.
- 2. Deeper Comprehension:** Engaging with complex ideas, whether through reading, problem-solving, or creative endeavors, requires sustained focus. This “slow thinking” process allows for a richer understanding and the development of nuanced perspectives.
- 3. Emotional Well-Being:** Moments of quiet give us space to process thoughts and feelings that often get drowned out in daily clamor. By nurturing solitude, we’re better equipped to handle stress and anxiety.
- 4. Self-Discovery:** Silence can act as a mirror, reflecting parts of ourselves we rarely notice. Although it can feel uncomfortable, it’s in those quiet pauses that we learn who we truly are.
- 5. Encourages deep reading:** By carving out quiet time, you create the mental room to engage deeply with books or articles, sparking fresh insights and nurturing long-

term creativity.

Conclusion

Despite living in a world overflowing with distractions, quiet reflection is not an outdated luxury. It's fundamental to our emotional and intellectual well-being. To cultivate more silence and embrace boredom, consider scheduling regular "digital detox" periods, even if they are just for 30 minutes a day. Tolerating, even embracing, boredom can unlock creative insights, strengthen our attention span, and foster a deeper sense of self. The next time you find yourself reflexively reaching for your phone to fill a few spare minutes, consider allowing yourself to simply be with your thoughts — let silence be the backdrop that fuels your imagination.

You made it up to the end, congratulations, you are certified now to be bored!

Footnote: This article was inspired by listening to the YouTube video "The Dread of Silence: Why We Avoid Reading and Contemplation," which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g-OaS50gbA>.

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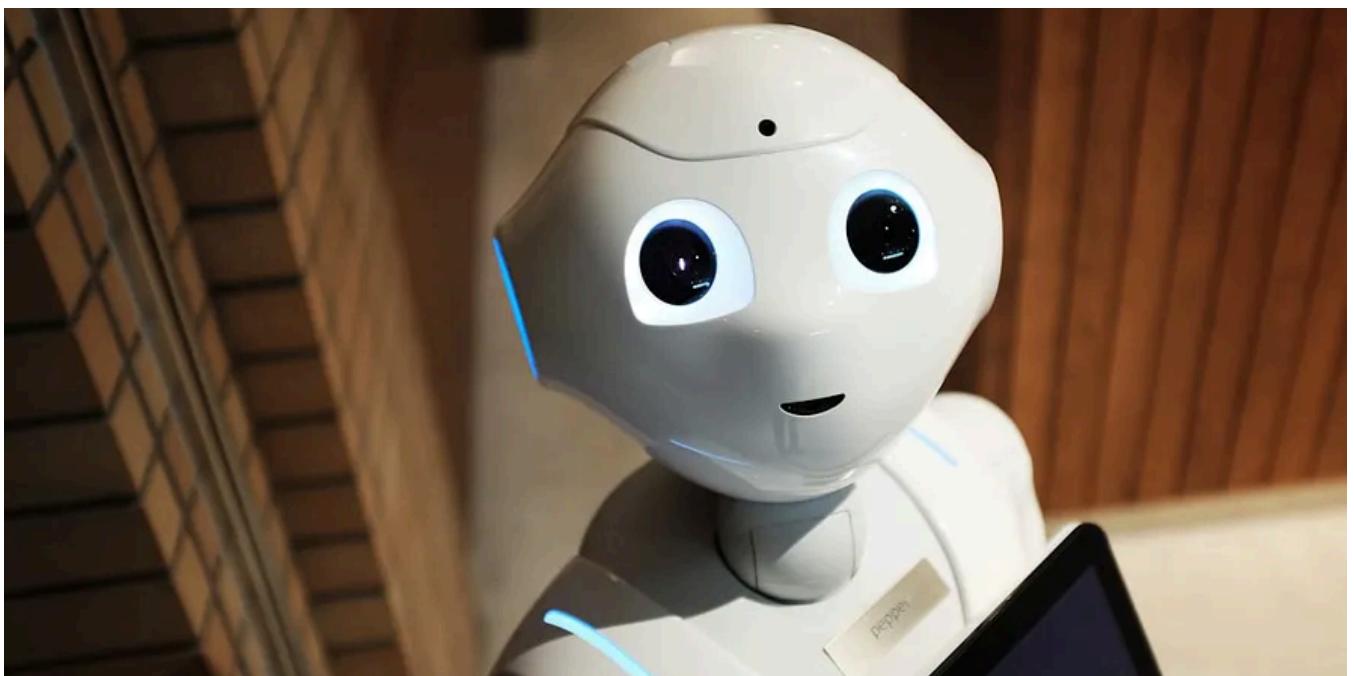
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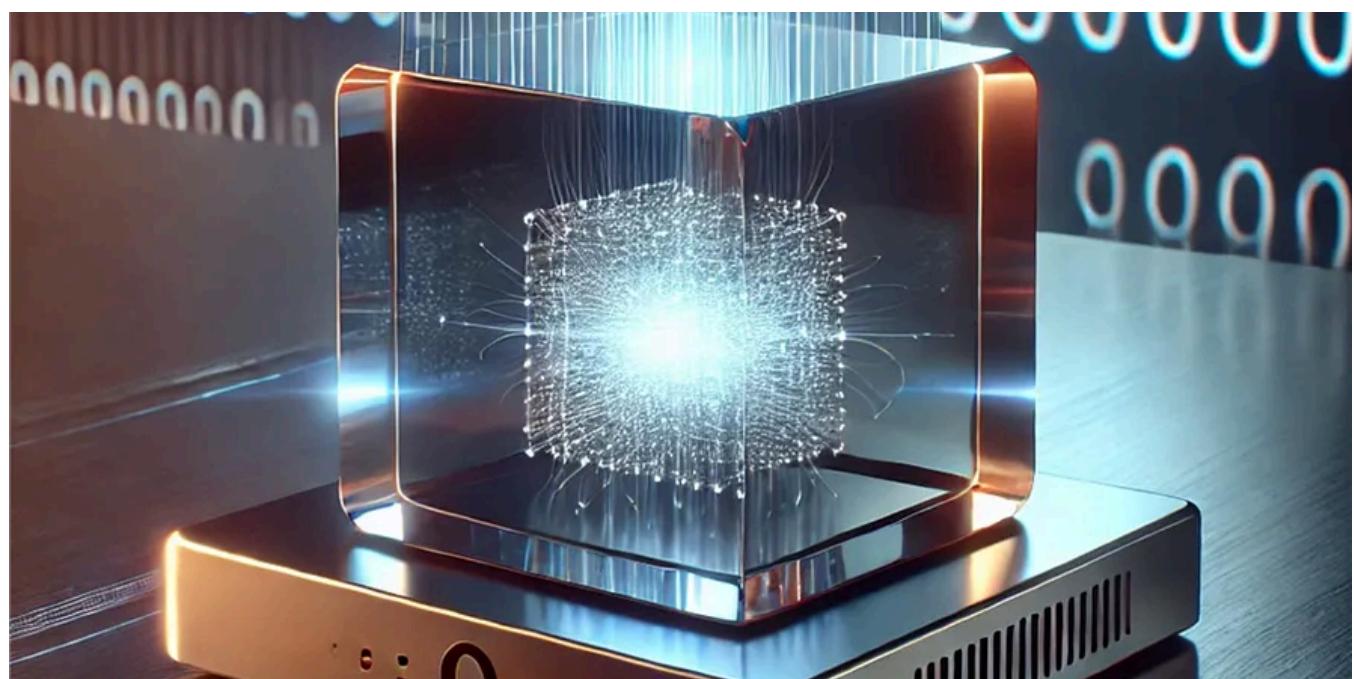
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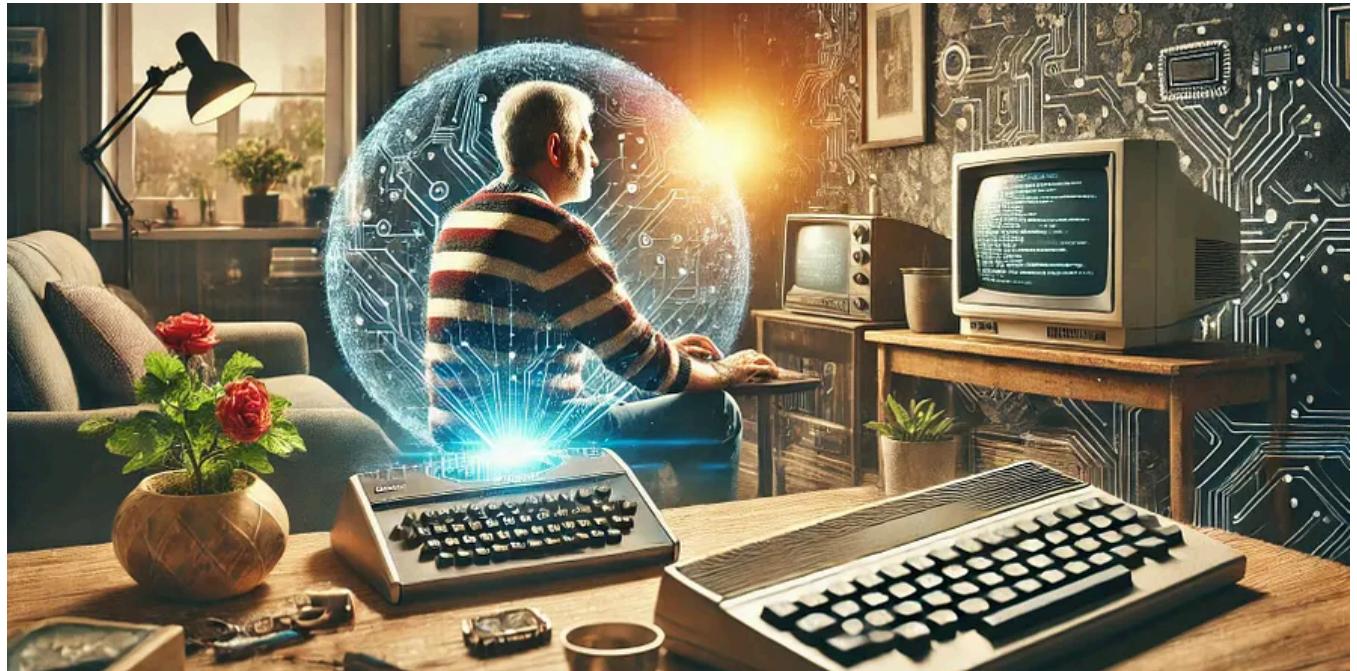
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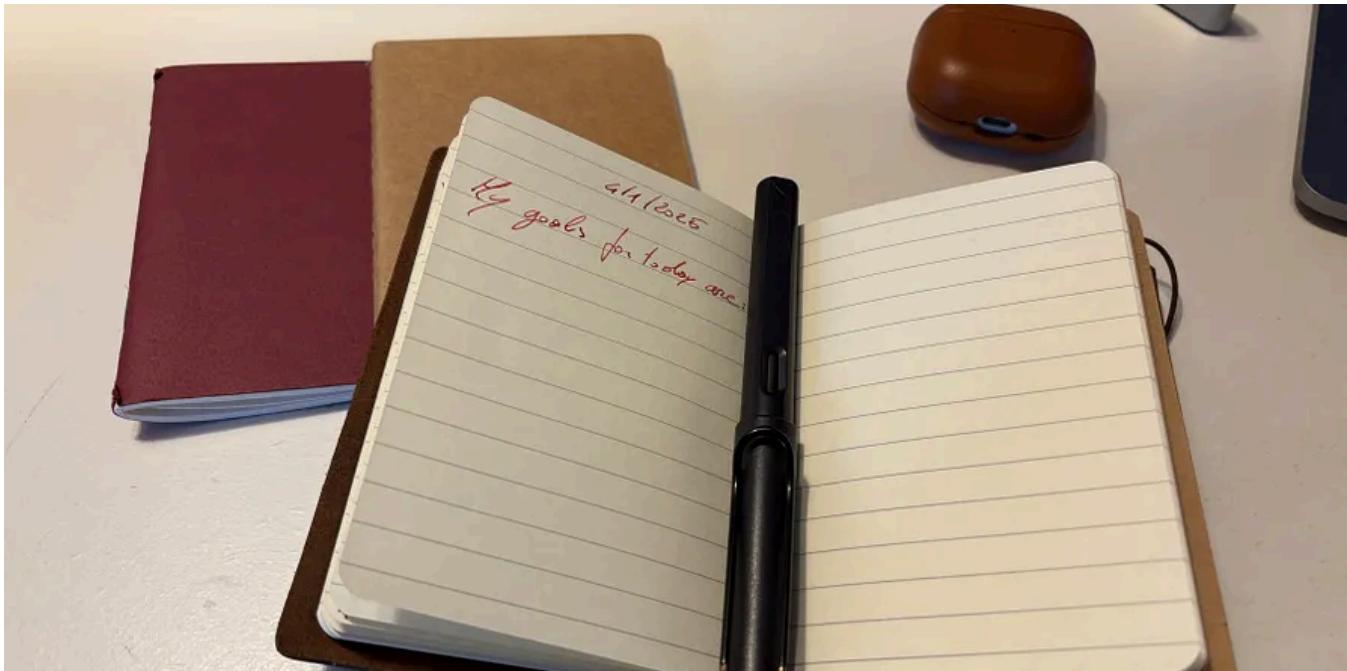
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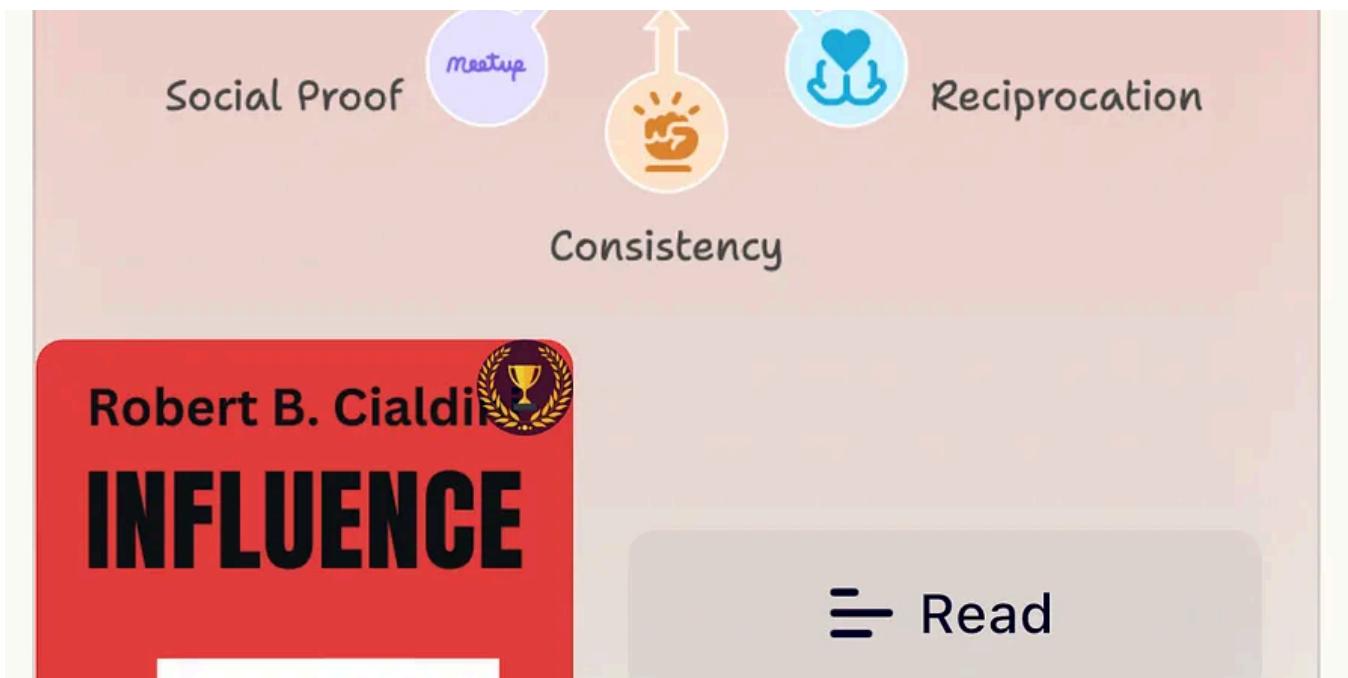
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