

Text A: Article

Technology is taking over my family

By Tim Lott

Tim Lott says there's too much technology at home - but he's the worst offender

I once wrote an article headed, "Technology ate my marriage". It recorded how, since the introduction of the internet, mobile phone and PC, my wife and I spent less and less time in face-to-face contact, even when under the same roof. Since then things have become worse. Technology is eating my family – myself included. Virtual space aces physical every time. [...]

I pleaded for my 10-year-old daughter not to be bought a Kindle Fire for Christmas, knowing full well what the outcome would be. It was to no avail. She has spent at least 20% of her available time since 25 December completely out of Earth contact. Her principal family is now the Sims.

My wife and I can no long¹ simply watch a film on TV together. She is tweeting simultaneously and spends more time with her eyes on the computer than the TV. It's not what I would call a shared experience. [...]

My eldest has been known to text me from another room to ask for a cup of tea.

Meanwhile, though we have long had a ban on watching television on schooldays, I find my six-year-old watching re-runs of My Little Pony on YouTube (computers are allowed, see). And this is before either has a mobile.

I would like to claim that I was the virtuous exception to this virtualisation of family life, but I have been gradually crumbling into the habits of everyone else. Now I access my computer first thing to check my tweets. I suffer from what my teenagers call "tweet incontinence", pinging off inappropriate messages to the wider world about what should be purely domestic affairs, thus stoking conflict. In the evenings, I can often be found playing online Scrabble with a friend whereas I used to play real Scrabble with my wife.

I am going down with the ship into the whirlpool of electronic half-life. This all has a positive side. The web has made the world more interesting. Too interesting. Real life, real people, real members of the family are dull and problematic in comparison.

But the real richness that is to be found on computers, tablets and mobile phones is too often overtaken by the slough of habit. The same people who would sneer at others for keeping their TV on at all times happily sink their lives into the cyberworld, perhaps under the illusion that it is inherently more intelligent, and "human", as it is interactive.

This is open to question. Telly junkies have given way to cyber junkies, and I am not sure that an hour in front of Angry Birds or on some dimwitted Twitter feed is any more nourishing to the soul than, say, an hour in front of some halfway decent TV programme.

Yet it is socially acceptable. I think the same kind of controls should be put on technological devices that bien-pensant families used to put on TV watching.

35 I have become aware that when you initiate talk with a stranger, they look startled, as if you have broken a taboo. I suspect that people are becoming programmed, at family level, not to deal with genuine flesh and blood humans.

This is why we need to put away the gadgets – at least for a while. Actual life may be duller, and more prone to conflict, than virtual life. But it has this one, signal advantage: it
40 is real.

(563 words)

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Annotations

Lines

⁴ to ace to gain an advantage over somebody or something

⁶ Kindle Fire mini tablet computer version of Amazon's Kindle e-book reader

⁹ the Sims strategic, life simulation video game series

¹⁵ My Little Pony animated television series, primarily for girls

²⁰ to ping off informal: to send

²¹ to stoke here: to cause

²³ half-life length of time it takes a radioactive substance to lose half of its radioactivity

²⁷ slough sad situation one cannot get out of

²⁹ inherent existing as a natural or basic part of something or somebody

³¹ Angry Birds very successful video game (in which angry birds kill pigs)

³¹ dimwitted stupid, idiotic

³⁴ bien-pensant French: having the right views, self-righteous