



# EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

## **Embody – Digital Divide**

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

*May, 2016*

I have conflicting emotions about my smart phone. Beyond the obvious ones of child labor and mineral harvesting and piles of electronic waste. Beyond even the rising costs and barriers to access, an imposed state of obsolete on other phone options, and the ease of misuse of their data.

My unease also comes from their ability to create isolated notes in the data stream out of people.

On my morning bus commute, I have often counted books vs. phones (I will never consider a Kindle to be a book, but I do count it towards literary pursuit) and inwardly cheer when the rarest of all things happens: a conversation. More and more I feel surrounded by ghosts—I can see them, but they can't see me, lost in the glow before their face. Everything is only somewhat real, not nearly as bright or tasty as what the internet has to offer. Cranky avians, cutting edge videos, the latest music, another news article you'll never believe—it's compelling!

Here's the list of conflicting parts: I use and advocate the use of social media for personal connection, business, community, and activism. I use my phone as a camera almost daily as part of my gratitude practice. I use my phone as a shield between myself and pushy men, tedious trips, and a world just too much some days. I long for a glimpse of my mother's kitchen, my nibblings growing up so fast, so far away. I understand social anxiety; the high alert of a guardian, or someone tracking urgent health or illness info; the need to sometimes disappear.

And I miss eye contact.

I miss looking up from the middle of a story and seeing the expression on someone's face, waiting for the next sentence, ready to engage. I miss finishing a story without being interrupted to see a meme or a game or a viral video. I miss going deeper than 30 second social setting attention spans will allow. This is not always, but it is often.

I am well aware we are a product of this capitalist machine, grinding us out into the shapes that buy best, digitally programmed to respond to the quick and shiny. I am not mad at you, I am mad for you. I am mad that this world is so harsh we need a buffer at hand, just to get through the day. I am mad that so much of the material on it is equally harsh; that we need to hack our way through a thicket of hate to find each other; that sometimes we can only find each other in that tiny square of projected reality.

There is no one right answer. I do not have an answer. I have only feelings, and questions.

Are you already aware of how much time your phone is in your hand? How it affects your bones and muscles, as well as your mind? Do you feel like you get enough connection and human contact? Is your phone your first thought upon waking?

Some of my own answers to those questions trouble me. This is a conversation I am also having with

myself.

Part of my job as a writer is to observe, and to connect with what I am observing. I have created several rituals around my writing practice, which intersects frequently with my gratitude practice, being as they are basically the same thing. These rituals involve my phone: the easiest, cheapest, most accessible way available to me to take photographs, and to write love notes to portland (examples of both on my twitter feed: @sossitywrites.) The conflict of all this leads me to offer you another reason to use your phone in the midst of my concern about the use of cell phones. It's quite the pretty trap we're in.

I'm trying to find my own balance. To remember to hit send on that tweet and then put the phone away. Look around the bus and out the window. Note how the street is changing, or if a stranger looks sad or lost, or just actively enjoy my own bubble of alone time in the rush of everyone's day. To remember that life is still really happening, even without a photo to prove it.

What is your emotional connection to your phone?

If you really sit with that question, the answer might surprise you. Then again, it might not—many of us are quite conscious of our various coping mechanisms, being as how they help us survive. Whatever your answer it, I don't think it's the wrong answer. I don't have the right answer, if there is such a thing, but the questions have been plaguing my mind for years now. Lately it seems to be increasingly prevalent, especially at gatherings where I often find myself pulling out my own phone so as to not feel alone in a group of people.

I'm speaking from all my own perspectives, of course: sighted; somewhat able bodied; in my forties; partial to interactions that tell me more about what you think, than what you think about something someone else made. I also feel the pull of the social networks, the power of direct action and access to information, the chance to connect. It's school, and distraction from school, all at once. It's a haven of so many flavors. It's a magical force field on the winding path through the unknown and the known

to be dangerous.

And I miss you.

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