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Only Disconnect

By GARY SHTEYNGART

Since fiscal year 2008, I have been permanently attached to my iTelephone. As of two weeks ago, I am a Facebooking twit. With each post, each tap of the screen, each drag and click, I am becoming a different person — solitary where I was once gregarious; a content provider where I at least once imagined myself an artist; nervous and constantly updated where I once knew the world through sleepy, half-shut eyes; detail-oriented and productive where I once saw life float by like a gorgeously made documentary film. And, increasingly, irrevocably, I am a stranger to books, to the long-form text, to the pleasures of leaving myself and inhabiting the free-floating consciousness of another. With each passing year, scientists estimate that I lose between 6 and 8 percent of my humanity, so that by the close of this decade you will be able to quantify my personality. By the first quarter of 2020 you will be able to understand who I am through a set of metrics as simple as those used to measure the torque of the latest-model Audi or the spring of some brave new toaster.

“This right here,” said the curly-haired, 20-something Apple Store glam-nerd who sold me my latest iPhone, “is the most important purchase you will ever make in your life.” He looked at me, trying to gauge whether the holiness of this moment had registered as he passed me the Eucharist with two firm, unblemished hands. “For real?” I said, trying to sound like a teenager, trying to mimic what all these devices and social media are trying to do, which is to restore in us the feelings of youth and control.

“For real,” he said. And he was right. The device came out of the box and my world was transformed. I walked outside my book-ridden apartment. The first thing that happened was that New York fell away around me. It disappeared. Poof. The city I had tried to set to the page in three novels and counting, the hideously outmoded boulevardier aspect of noticing societal change in the gray asphalt prism of Manhattan’s eye, noticing how the clothes are draping the leg this season, how backsides are getting smaller above 59th Street and larger east of the Bowery, how the singsong of the city is turning slightly less Albanian on this corner and slightly more Fujianese on this one — all of it, finished. Now, an arrow threads its way up my colorful screen. The taco I hunger for is 1.3 miles away, 32 minutes of walking or 14 minutes if I manage to catch the F train. I

follow the arrow taco-ward, staring at my iPhone the way I once glanced at humanity, with interest and anticipation. In my techno-fugue state I nearly knock down toddlers and the elderly, even as the strange fiction and even stranger reality of New York, from the world of Bartleby forward, tries to reassert itself in the form of an old man in a soiled guayabera proudly, openly defecating on Grand Street. But sorry, *viejo*, you're not global enough to hold my attention. "Thousands of Uzbeks Flee Violence in Kyrgyzstan." "Gary, what do we want to do about Turkish rights?" "G did u see the articl about M.I.A. + truffle fries = totes messed up." I still have to eat, and when I finally get to my destination that taco tastes as good as my iPhone said it would. But I am not dining alone. The smartphone, my secret sharer, is in my other hand. Even as the pico de gallo is dribbling down my chin I am lost to the restaurant, the people, the commerce around me, my thumb pressing down the correct quadrants of the screen to tell the world just how awesome this taco is, even as "Kyrgyz Authorities Order Uzbeks to Remove Barriers," while "A Third Filipino Journalist Is Killed," and, over "In Eritrea, the Young Dream of Leaving."

I dream of leaving, too. Heading upstate in the summertime with a trunk full of books, watching Roosevelt Island sweep by in a rainstorm, I wake up from the techno-fugue state and remember who I am, the 37 analog years that went into creating this particular human being. Upstate I will train for my vocation, novel-writing, by tearing through the Russian classics that gave me my start, reading up on those frigid lovelorn Moscow and Petersburg winters while summer ants crawl up my shins. In the meantime, I will start conjuring my next book, one that with any luck may still be read on paper by live human beings five years from now. In my quest for calm, I have a surprising ally. As far as I'm concerned, American Telephone & Telegraph has done more for the art of reading and introspection than all the Kindles and Nooks ever invented. Because up in the exalted summer greenery of the mid-Hudson Valley, completing an AT&T call is like driving a Trabant from New York to Los Angeles: technically feasible but not really going to happen.

I am sitting underneath a tree beside a sturdy summer cottage rebuilt by an ingenious Swedish woman. The birds are twittering, but in a slightly different way than my New York friends. I open a novel, "[A Short History of Women](#)," by Kate Walbert, a book I will grow to love over the coming week, but at first my data-addled brain is puzzled by the density and length of it (256 pages? how many screens will that fill?), the onrush of feeling and fact, the surprise that someone has let me not into her Facebook account but into the way other minds work. I read and reread the first two pages understanding nothing. Big things are happening. World War I. The suffragist movement. Out of instinct I almost try to press the text of the deckle-edged pages, hoping something will pop up, a link to something trivial and fast. But nothing does. Slowly, and surely, just as the sun begins to swoon over the Hudson River and another Amtrak honks its way past Rhinebeck, delivering its

digital refugees upstream, I begin to sense the world between the covers, much as I sense the world around me, a world corporeal and complete, a world that doesn't need the press of my thumb, because here beneath the weeping willow tree my input is meaningless.

Soon my friends will get off that Amtrak, they will help me roast an animal and some veggies, even as they point their iTelephones at the sky, praying for rain. Their prayers will not be answered. *Connecting*. . . will flash impotently on the screen, but they will not connect. In the meantime, something “white nights” will be happening out there; the sun has set and yet it has not. With the animal safely in our stomachs, with single malts and beers before us, we can read or talk softly about what we're reading, about the glory and sadness of finding ourselves *this* close to the middle of our existence (cue the Chekhov, cue the Roth) and as we do so the most important purchases we have ever made in our lives are snugly holstered in the pockets of our shorts, useless, as we commune in some ancient way, laughing and groaning, passing around lighted objects and containers of booze while thoroughly facebooking one another for real in the fading summer light.

Gary Shteyngart's latest novel, “Super Sad True Love Story,” will be published later this month.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 25, 2010

An illustration credit last Sunday with an essay about the tribulations of modern telecommunications misstated the illustrator's surname. He is Paul Sahre, not Suhre.

Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.â Kaczynskiâs sense of disconnect appears as purely political Orwellian disgust, but was driven by a number of personal factors. Thomas Cole, A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)-1839. It means that this only acts as a "disconnect", which means you use this to "disconnect" the power, to either work on the equipment, or as a way to wire in portable equipment. As opposed to a breaker, which means that it is both a disconnect and an over current device, which automatically stops all current from flowing when it pulls too many amps. This is there to stop the wires from overheating in the case of a malfunction. Also from my high school french class I learned that when "ne pas" is used it means "not". So I just checked and it works as-expected (disconnect isn't even fired on connection change). What's strange is there's not much difference between demo and what I do. The only thing I imagine it could be is that I use application context. Could this be the issue? Copy link. Translations in context of "only disconnect" in English-German from Reverso Context: When disconnecting the red interconnect cable, only disconnect one end.â These examples may contain rude words based on your search. These examples may contain colloquial words based on your search. Translation of "only disconnect" in German. only. nur einzig erst lediglich ausschlieÃlich. disconnect. trennen abziehen ziehen Sie Disconnect Verbindung. Other translations. Only Disconnect. By Andrew Reiner. September 24, 2012.â One need only walk into any nook or cranny of a college campus to see the blur of fevered thumbs at work and the hypnotic glow of Facebook walls to know what lâm talking about. In fact, new studies conducted by Reynol Junco (a researcher whose work focuses on college students and social media) suggest that American college students may spend an average of at least an hour and 40 minutes a day on Facebook and three hours a day texting.