Final Draft

Introduction

Community is a defining part of our human nature. We all innately crave community. Whether it is a group of like minded individuals, a society, or a neighborhood, community creates a sense of well-being and connectedness. Community is what makes the human condition bearable. The very definition of who we are is influenced by the community or lack of community that we are a part of throughout our lives. The pieces of who we are, our language, speech patterns, desires, inspiration, purpose, diet, goals, relationships are defined by the communities that we are a part of.

Community is where we find our humanity and the humanity in others. Our foundational needs of knowing others and being known by others are fulfilled by good community.

Simply, when we know a group of people deeply, and that group of people knows us, we are more able to be who we are.

Why Community

A community is a group of people associated and interacting with one another because of location, common interest, common purpose, common history, common experience, or relationship.

Everyone belongs to some kind of community, with varying levels of commitment (or non-commitment) and influence, both influencing the community and being influenced by the community.

The individual in a community benefits for the social construction of the community, as well they contribute their individual identity to influence the character of the community itself.

The community isn't static. The individuals that make up a community contribute to its development or detriment, influencing the ebbs and flows of its other members. Conversely, the community affects the individual in their development according to the combined influence of all of its members.

Individuals, based on the way that our society is structured, will inevitably belong to multiple communities at once. They may be part of a family, live in a neighborhood, work at a company, attend a religious service, belong to a local Elks Lodge, regularly attend the same bar, go to school, or

participate in online social communities.

Each of these communities will contribute to the definition of who this individual is at a particular point in time. The influence from a certain community on an individual will, in turn, influence a separate community that they participate in. Depending on the individual, they may compartmentalize these different communities depending on their commitment to the community, based on their dependence on that community, or considering the control they have over membership of that community.

The Ideal Community

The ideal community serves a purpose outside of itself. This can be called the community's mission. The mission doesn't need to be philanthropic and could be just common interest amongst the community's members. Within this mission, individual members should contribute to the whole for the benefit of the mission, supporting other members and being supported by them.

Another important aspect of a community is diversity based off of localization. This means that the members of a community are made up of the diversity of the location that they live in, whether physical location or their location within the shared interest in the community's mission. This has benefits in perspectives brought into the community, however, it can already be seen here where a community may succumb to a lack of diversity and homogenization that will lead to technique's impact on community and how community may be co-opted by technique.

Technique's Influence on Community

"Traditional societies were centered on human needs and instincts (for example, in family, clan, seignory). Modern societies, on the other hand, are centered on technical necessity and derivatively, of course, on human adherence. Man, in modern societies, is not situated in relation to other men, but in relation to technique; for this reason the sociological structure of these societies [communities] is completely altered. There is no longer any question of autonomous collectivities or groups with specific values or orientations. Modern collectivities and groups have no existence beyond technique - they are representative of the major tendency of our time." - pg 305

We have adapted and been adapted to technique and we are unsure and unable to act or respond outside of technique (pg 331). Our time is managed by our work, our television show schedule, our events, our vacation time - all measured out to precise minutes and hours. Our relationships have

become efficiencies in support of technique. Our communities become simulations.

Third Places

The first area to explore is the idea of *third places.* Third Places, briefly, are defined by the places where people congregate outside of the home and the workplace. These could be a bar, a library, a church service, or a barbershop, essentially anywhere people can come together that are centered around potential conversation. Third places are where communities are formed.

Third places are inefficient in how we use our time, our resources, and our relationships. As technique's requirements on us, between work and consumption, increase, our time for third places decreases. In our consumption of media (television, social media, podcasts), we receive an imitation of community where we feel as though we have experienced genuine human interaction, but have actually not experienced anything. We conflate distraction and consumption with relaxation and connection.

When we do find a third place, we will tend to find that it has been adapted to mimic the representation of human interaction presented in the media that we consume. Our conversations center on the latest media or hot topic. Our interactions are mundane imitations of the exciting interactions we've witnessed on television. The third place itself becomes co-opted by technique.

Social Media and Technology

An example of the simulation of third places is presented to us through technology, especially social media. We curate our words and images, our conversations are curated for us by the technology companies, finely tuned algorithms whose goal is to simulate human interaction in order to build a dataset that can be used to quantify who they think we are.

In this data collection, we are cohorted into common data attributes which are then used to identify us within specific groups of people. The more we interact, the more we are able to be quantified, and the more our dataset can be made complete.

This data is then used to provide focused propaganda, either by the state or advertisers, as well as to encourage us to engage more and more with the technology. In the same way that, today, every company is a technology company, every company is also a data collecting company.

Technique is aware of our deep desire for community. And through the means of collecting more and

more data, we have been integrated and quantified for the ideal simulated community engagement that is tailored specifically to who we are. Our relationships have been formed by a feedback loop based on the dataset of previous interactions we have made.

Us Against Them

Through this cohorting of data into algorithmic defined communities, our groups are targeted with messaging that amplifies an echo chamber of the same voices that resonate within the individuals. Within our human need for community is a fear that maybe we will be excluded and, when pushed, that our community will be infiltrated by outsiders who will change what we have become accustomed to. Our herd mentality is used against us in a mindset of scarcity and survival that considers the outsider or the opposing group as an enemy.

"The human being tells himself he can only attain paradise through the destruction of his enemies." - pg 191

And in this, we lose one of the key benefits of technique that can be realized, not just at the individual level being known and knowing another, but at the community level where a community can know and know another. Our morality becomes defined by what is good for our group, not for the good of all.

Summary of Impact

When Ellul was writing, technique and technology had a separation that no longer exists today. Technology itself was a subset of technique's implementation. In the past few years, technology subset has grown to envelope nearly every other subset. I harp on social media and digital social networks because they are a culmination of technique, not because of any particular technological advancement, but because of its use in quantifying man and nature. Our technology and our humanity are defined by the mantra "Anything worth doing is worth measuring." Technology has become our post-modern babel, building towards an efficient temple in worship of our efficiency.

Our humanity is at stake and community can provide us opportunities to resist technique's grasp.

Community as Resistance

Resistance itself cannot happen in isolation. And in saying this, we may feel technique's integration into how we think about community and organization and the means in which we resist. Some of this

is unavoidable.

However, we need others to come alongside us and for us to come alongside to make resistance possible. This is, by nature, what real community can lead us to as we find our humanity in the other and in relationship to one another.

Bridging Gaps

There is a trust that is built that enables actual conversation and change within the context and nuance of knowing and being known by one another. With this trust, we are able to confront a person as a whole person, we are able to have empathy for their situation, and we are able to actually communicate with one another outside of the

As technique pervades our politics, economy, and infiltrates our humanity, we become isolated into bubbles of people and mindsets. As we spoke about earlier, our echo chambers resonate and anyone outside of our homogenized technical community becomes an other who is identified by the technical communities that they are a part of.

A healthy community is a diverse community. Diversity provides ways for us to bridge gaps between us and the other. Different life experiences and perspectives can come together and continue to be a community.

A healthy community is also a welcoming community, which may be welcoming for others to enter and be accepted into the community or could be welcoming to those outside of their community in a way that serves those others.

This becomes resistance when the community exists for the benefit of those outside of the community. The members of this community would need to encourage one another in practicing healthy communication that seeks understands the other.

Knowing and Being Known

Which leads us to our second form of resistance - knowing and being known.

Within the community, the members should seek to know and be known by one another. This requires vulnerability and humility. Being vulnerable and humble is inefficient, it goes against the method and

propaganda that tells us who we need to be and what our appearance needs to aspire to be like. We have a need to look put together because that is what we see in our media.

Knowing another also lets us know a person beyond a dataset that defines them. A person's story, how they tell their story, the way they move their hands, and their micro-expressions build a fuller picture of who they are. Community allows us to experience that together, both in practice together and in the fact that a person's same story will open up differently to different individuals in a way that the separate individuals who hear the story will understand different aspects of their story. When those individuals are in community knowing that person, the community as whole has a more complete understanding of that person.

This aspect of a community that is working towards knowing and being known by one another is attractive to people outside of that community. Outside of the healthy community, the community should seek to know and be known by other communities. Our communities are pitted against each other based on data points that are used to increase our isolation from one another. We lose all nuance and become stereotypes and sound bites to one another.

A community knowing and being known by another community opens up our echo chambers, it dampens the resonance, so that we are able to identify why we feel the way we do about one another. Individuals knowing and being known by one another within a community is hard, communities doing the same is even harder.

Time

This is hard because it takes time. When do we have time to know one another within our own community, much less people outside of our own community?

Community takes time. Community takes intentional and flexible time that our technical society does not provide for us through what it requires of us.

We would miss a part of this resistance if we didn't speak about how media distraction uses our time. Television, social media, podcasts, they all require our time and we give it to them. Our media is tailored towards our dataset defined community in order to entice us to stay, to give it more of our time. We could explore this for hours.

In addition to intentionality with what we don't commit ourselves to with our activities, flexibility in

our time is equally important. This is more intangible, but participates in resistance in a way that frees us from our reliance on the clock dial. Flexibility is also unaffordable for many. We work in jobs that require us to punch in and punch out for companies that monitor and measure our efficiency according to the hours that we work. Many of us, unintentionally (this is what economic technique integration has forced on us), would not be able to survive financially if we were to take the time out of our day to spend with another. This is an imposition that economic technique requires of us.

The healthy community of resistance needs to work towards enabling flexibility and freedom for time for one another.

Inefficient and Unproductive

Should we get to the point where we are participating in a healthy community, it will feel inefficient and unproductive. Knowing one another, in taking time, will feel counter intuitive to how we feel as though we should use our time. And this is the point.

Technique requires our time and attention, healthy community does as well. The difference is that there are no way to know others and to be known by others in a way that contributes to technique as a whole. Media, social media, and other technologies will attempt to co-opt these relationships through methods and data and algorithms, but in doing so, they quantify humanity into data points that then exclude the nuance and ignore our need for actually finding ourselves in another, seeing our humanity in the relationships within a community.

As Ellul says, "human activity in the technical milieu must correspond to this milieu and must be collective." Doing good for an other with our expectation of return and outside the confines of what is efficient and productive will never follow that correspondence and in turn will go against the nature of technique.

Healthy community will, by its nature, resist technique and be the way in which we "rethink the whole situation of man." -pg 335. Community, in knowing and being known, is how we are able to step outside of our integration and see, even if just for a glimpse, how firm a hold technique has over us all.

Conclusion

Listen, our humanity is at stake. The very nature of who we are is realized in the relationships that we have with others in community with one another. Technique has attempted and has succeeded in replacing our community relationships with a technical reproduction. This has been in progress, but is,

through more recent technologies in the past couple decades, more efficient and all encompassing than it has been.

As we look at our current state of technology, considering Generative AI and Augmented Reality, we can see the inevitability of them through the lens of Ellul's vision for technique's ever increasing desire to isolate us into defined sets of data so that our time and attention are always attuned to what technique desires to show us. "Our deepest instincts and our most secret passions will be analyzed, published, and exploited. We shall be rewarded with everything our hearts ever desired. And the supreme luxury of the society of technical necessity will be to grant the bonus of useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile." (Pg 427)

These technologies and what will come iteratively through them are our post-modern Babel in which we, thinking that we are in control, come to the point of complete integration into the mass man, defined by a data model and algorithm in order that we might improve the methods in which technique work towards its next level of integration. We will have the sense that we are building a tower, a temple, to ourselves in competition with the gods, but it will be technique that we worship.

Full resistance seems impossible, however, community provides a way for us to resist. When we begin top engage with the other, when we are known by another, when we know an other, and when we do this within a diverse community, we loosen techniques grasp on our humanity.

Finally, I'll end with this quote from the introduction to The Technological Society, "each of us, in his own life, must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants. Each man must make this effort in every area of life, in his profession and in his social, religious, and family relationships." (Pg xxxii)

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