

An End to the Fog. Understanding the World We Live In...

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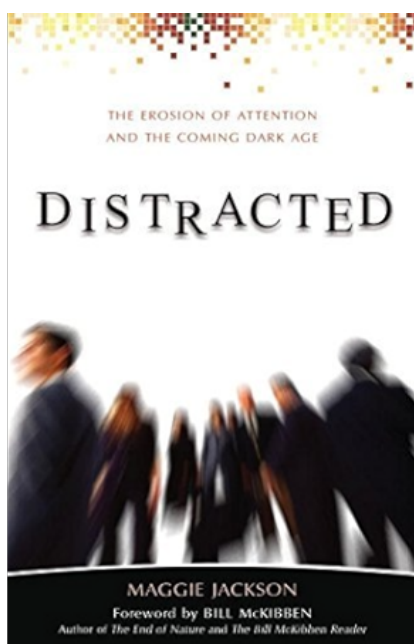
Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

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Understanding the world we live in seems more confusing than ever, and, advanced technology is part of the problem, presenting information not always reliable and bringing to the front real and fake conspiracies. Our attention, often hostage of social media, can easily become addicted to noises and flashes losing us in pursuing nonsense. It becomes difficult to listen to our thoughts, or develop them, reflect and grow. To get to the reality of things, normally difficult, seems next to impossible in a world with so much “noise.” And yet, critical thinking can find in the net a tool that puts valuable information at our fingertips. Among the chaos we can find valuable pieces, bring them forth and learn to understand a pattern often hidden to us by our managers. Can we overcome this fog? Can we find our way despite the confusion and survive as a species?

A visible aerosol of tiny water droplets or ice crystals suspended in the air, a low-lying cloud, fog limits visibility. A state of mental confusion affecting the brain, fog limits capacity to focus, access memory, concentrate, use logic and problem solving. Associated with mental fatigue, brain fog, can result from stress, lack of sleep, hormonal changes, diet deficiencies, medications, and a number of medical conditions. (1)

Distracted...



In her book, “Distracted,” Maggie Jackson argues that our inability to think clearly can result from the erosion of our attention and be connected to advanced communication technologies. Many think these technologies promote well informed people and close-knit

communities, she says, but they are causing the opposite. Modern societies are more ignorant and fragmented; an increased number of competing calls for our attention erodes it and can lead to the erosion of society itself. (2)

Caroline Beaton, also concerned with shrinking average attention span, believes we face a competition between our evolution -who we evolved to be, and the demands of civilization. The Microsoft Canada (2015) study she mentions showed that average attention span (the amount of concentrated time on a task without becoming distracted) is shorter than before. It was 12 seconds in 2008 but only 8 seconds 5 years later -a second less than that of a goldfish. In productivity per day terms, she points, distractions and recovery time from email, the web, instant messaging and interruptions, made the average knowledge worker lose 2.2 hours a day costing the US \$588 billion per year. (3)

Modern humans and society changed Beaton argues, what was instinctively right for our ancestors in the savannah -a focus on new information on safety, weather, food and movement, is no longer right for us. The internet and advanced technology surround us with *information* -a melt of information and movement. Our higher conscious mind might realize that *checking email, browsing social media and running down the YouTube rabbit hole isn't fulfilling, productive or important, (but) our instincts tell us that's exactly what we should be doing.*" We are competing with what we evolved to do while civilization rewards ignoring these things to focus instead on "*staying still and single minded long enough to concentrate and produce something valuable.*" It is a challenge that, as technology produces faster *information*, it becomes increasingly difficult to overcome and have the self control needed to succeed. (3)

Deep life: Beyond "elite of thinkers" and "mass of followers"

Whether our attention is eroded or we are simply incapable of overcoming evolution to focus on *deep work* and produce *value*, is important to Cal Newport, a science professor at Georgetown University, who argues that to enjoy a *good life* (defined by him as *deep life*) we need to manage distractions. Yes, we are vulnerable to become addicted to our phones and, yes, this addiction can block our ability to achieve a *healthy level of solitude* that liberates us from input from other minds, so that alone with our thoughts we flourish and thrive. Deprivation of solitude increases our anxiety and limits our personal and professional growth. The author of "Deep Work" asked initially for *digital minimization*, questioning our constant downloading of new apps without need and out of fear of losing out on something. Newport asks now for more; we do not need social media he says. (4)

Checking constantly our phones led us to see them as a *constant companion*. Ongoing disruptions, however, create *attention residues* that reduce cognitive performance. Inability to focus impedes us from attaining our potential and achieve fulfilling and meaningful lives. Most *deep workers*, Newport explains, develop rituals to relax and increase their focus for deep work. Charles Darwin had a ritual while writing the *Origin of the Species*: he walked his favorite path (the sand path) a fixed number of times not allowing his mind to wonder even to count the loops completed. Instead, he used stones, kicking them one by one to keep account. (4)

Yes, we can sense we are at a crossroads and need increased abilities to think deeper, and not only to achieve a good life but a better world and to stop the merry-go-around of increased consumerism, destruction, poverty and exploitation. We need to think critically if we are to understand and address the challenges ahead; we need to stop the lies,

distortions and manipulations, the false divisions created by an *elite of thinkers* of a *mass of followers*. We all have capacity for critical thinking: we need everybody's potential to succeed. The net and social media changed the nature of manipulation, reaching younger, more vulnerable subjects, making it more difficult to spot lies and more attractive and addictive to follow them and yet manipulation of information has been with us long before these technologies emerged and have been part and parcel of a Media managed by and for the rich and powerful. Whoever has power to decide what information is to be shared, it also has power to shape reality for the rest.

The emergence of social media, however, affected readership so much that most papers can no longer live from ads and news. Alternative models focused on recruiting members emerged and most are still in the hands of the very rich. In the UK Tortoise Media focus is on younger *recruits*, their target group pays membership fees lower than the rest, and on *slow news* -not less manipulated. Still, Tortoise could not exist without financial support from Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. The *billionaires' media* promotes their agenda and improves their public image: Laurene Powell Jobs (Steve Jobs' widow) owns the Atlantic, Mark Benioff (Salesforce) Time magazine, Jeff Bezos (Amazon) the Washington Post; and, in Canada the richest family (Thomson) owns the Globe and Mail. (5)

Lies, distortions and manipulation worked well with interventions from outside disguised as *native born*. The head of the Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), Srdja Popovic, headed as a student the movement Otpor! He was responsible for the toppling of Yugoslavian president Slobodan Milosevic. Popovic's links to Stratfor, Muneer Satter (ex-Goldman Sachs banker) and proof that he was being paid by the US (through then Ambassador Anthony McFaul) was made public only thanks to Wikileaks and Julian Assange and emails hacked from Stratfor. CANVAS has been accused of *exporting revolutions* to target countries and considered a terrorist organization by the United Arab Emirates. Its work effective at bringing down *dictators disliked by the US* -in former Yugoslavia, Ukraine (2003) and Egypt (2011) and it is currently involved in Belarus and Venezuela. Milosevic, who always denied being guilty of war crimes, died in jail in 2006 from a heart attack -denied of preventive surgery. A few people even think of him today without labeling him a *war criminal*. Still, in 2017, the UN War Crime Tribunal in The Hague, found him not guilty of war crimes. Assange, in jail at Belmarsh, is being judged for making public the truth. He faces life if sent to the US. Lives and countries destroyed while the culprits of crimes make money and careers from their bad deeds -teaching at Harvard, John Hopkins, Columbia, Georgetown and publishing books. (6, 7)

Awakening: Not all is bad about the Net...

Commenting on the documentary "Social Dilemma," Jonathan Cook raises points embedded in it, not always explicit. Yes, we are increasingly aware of how social media affects the lives of our children made to feel bad enough to resort to suicide and self-harming. Yes, the creators of these platforms (Google, Facebook, Twitter plus), participants in this documentary, are aware they created evil and publicly repent of making children addicted and pliable to corporations -they have children too. Yes, things are not going to get better, to maximize predictions and make more money out of us, these giants must gradually grind down our individuality turning us into archetypes and making it easier to have us exploited and plundered by advertisers. These corporations are the richest in the history of humanity because they trade in human futures. Eventually, governments and politicians increasingly closer to them will be better positioned to manipulate our thinking, control what we do and

dictate the political discourse faster and better than before (8).

And yet, Cook argues, if the applications in our phones can satisfy our craving for material comfort and security they can also contribute to our understanding of the world and our place in it: *"Phones have made it possible for ordinary people to film and share scenes once witnessed by only a handful of disbelieved passers-by. We can all see for ourselves a white police officer dispassionately kneeling on the neck of a black man for nine minutes, while the victim cries out he cannot breathe, until he expires. And we can then judge the values and priorities of our leaders when they decide to do as little as possible to prevent such incidents occurring again."* The net has a platform that allows disillusioned former Silicon Valley execs to blow the whistle on what the Mark Zuckerbergs are up to, he says, but it also allowed US army private Chelsea Manning to expose war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and national security tech insider Edward Snowden to reveal the way we are being secretly espied by our governments. He adds: *These new social media corporations are not less billionaire-owned, no less power-hungry, not less manipulative than the old media corporations. The AI algorithms they are rapidly refining are being used - under the rubric of "fake news" - to drive out this new marketplace in whistleblowing, in citizen journalism, in dissident ideas.* (8)

The seeds of neo-liberalism were planted early, when the *civilized, industrialized west* decided, he explains, *its mission was to conquer and subdue the natural world, and embraced an ideology obsessed about money, turning people into objects to be exploited.* What I see is a bunch of people trapped in a business model, an economic incentive, shareholder pressure that makes it almost impossible to do something else, a Social Dilemma participant tells us. We live in a world in which a tree or a whale are worth more dead than alive, he adds, as our economy works this way and corporations go unregulated, they continue to destroy trees and whales and to mine the earth and pull oil even though it means destroying the planet. Such short-term thinking, he adds, is based on this religion of profit no matter what. Eventually, he thinks, we will wake up and see that now we are *it*, we are the tree, the whale and our attention is being mined: we are more profitable when staring at an ad than when living our life in a rich way. (8)

Social Dilemma focus is social media corporations, and yet, as Cook argues, all corporations (Amazon, Exxon, Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Goldman Sachs and thousands more) follow this religion of profit at any cost. Social media hides, distorts, manipulates information but it could also be a platform for truth, he says. Social Dilemma presents us concerns about these platforms from inside, from the people who developed them providing us with an opportunity to see the psychopathic face behind the benign, pleasant mask. Indirectly, it helps us see the pathology of the system behind them, the system forcing these creepy corporations on us. (8)

We have become overtaxed by trying to decipher reality from the lies, distortions and manipulations coming from *all the Media*. We phase increasing inequality -in the developed and developing world, which makes our meeting basic needs requiring an increasing greater effort. Not so for billionaires: Jeff Bezos saw its fortune increase to \$ 200 billion this year (less than 1% of this amount equals the whole health budget of Ethiopia with 10.5 million people). After 2008's economic meltdown most people suffered and yet for billionaires their wealth increased, it doubled between 2008-2018, increasing by \$900 billion. (9) Are we able to bring down this system, a system promoting and sustaining antisocial corporations and their lies, manipulations, distortions? And what about the psychopathic elite controlling our world, obsessed with money? We face challenging times of pandemic, and

environmental, economic and financial collapse and resource depletion. Our only option is to build a more humane society, a system capable of dealing with the crises ahead, of ending abuse and exploitation of both -humans and nature. We need to create a new society and to do so we need to lift the fog that blocks our understanding of what needs to change and how to do it so we are all able to live a good life, a deep life, a more humane life: a life in sync with nature.

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Notes

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