SELF, SCREEN, SUCCESS

WINNING WRITINGS OF THE FIRST CORVINUS BLOG POST COMPETITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SELF, SCREEN, SUCCESS – ABOUT THE COMPETITION

The first Corvinus Blog Post Competition invited university students in Hungary to express their opinions and thoughts in a short essay in English on current issues of new media and mobile technology. The competition was entitled 'Self, Screen, Success', which is also the title of this publication that presents the top five writings and the introduction speech of the award ceremony given by prof. dr. Petra Aczél on the 26th of January 2022.

The contest was initiated by dr. Ágnes Veszelszki and it was organized in the fall semester of 2021 by the Institute of Communication and Sociology together with the Department of Communication and Media at the Corvinus University of Budapest. The writings were evaluated along five criteria: coherence, creativity, argumentation, structure, and the aspect of style and wording. The jury and the Organizing Committee included prof. dr. Petra Aczél, dr. Eszter Deli, dr. Ágnes Veszelszki, Milson Veloso (PhD candidate) and Tünde Taxner (teaching assistant).

The topics of the competition included the situation of the new generation in the labour market, the effects of smartphones on our daily lives, and the connections of artificial intelligence and human intelligence. Altogether 24 university students from diverse nationalities, who were studying in Hungary in that semester, participated in the competition. The winners received vouchers and publication opportunities. The top five winning writings will be presented on the following pages.

INTRODUCTION SPEECH OF PROF. DR. PETRA ACZÉL

What is going to be the next big thing?

Dear Competitors, dear Colleagues, dear Co-Thinkers of our digital reality,

I do know that it is the hardest part when you have to listen to speeches before much awaited results of a competition are to be announced. So, I promise to be as short as our contemporary attention span is.

The next big thing is not something that shall occur without us and around us. That is why the question prevails. When you look at experts' predictions from the recent years you will find that everybody – without any exception – thought that the next big thing will be… technological. Which points to the realization that our futures will be built on technology.

Zach and Kelly Weinersmith had an interesting go on this topic in their book of 2017, titled *Soonish*. They foretold a near future that will entail robotization, space mining, space colonization and artificial production of body organs. Knowledgeable people – leaders, economics and other future-minded thinkers were asked last year about what to await in 2022. They predicted reusable rockets, autonomous driving, immune system engineering, online DNA-analysis, and plenty of VR/AR.

As it seems, our future is doomed to be technological. It is not your future family, not societies coming to a peaceful equilibrium, not the world of wisdom, but technological progression that professionals forecast. Humans tend to be less exciting when it comes to visions of what is next. And in a way that is true… we already live a life of technological enhancement. Despite the chip shortage, the new smartphone of the fruity company is still the object of desire. New professions are emerging, requiring data expertise and influence on data-masses. And in the meanwhile, all our machines are becoming communicative subject. The car I drive is replying to my moves, alerts me when someone is lowering the speed in front of me, beeps constantly and optimistically. It has become hard to remain a bad driver… Or have we not got less autonomous in our daily routines?

Covid-19 has, however, proved to us all that it is not so easy for the online world to overcome the real. We yearn for each other's bodily company. Reality still has some exquisite meaning. And even though the saying that 'after covid nothing is going to be the same' has become a widespread commonplace we must admit that our lifestyles after the quarantine seem very much similar to the ones in 2019. Buses tend to arrive late. Classes seem to be modestly boring. You still have to work for the money you spend, and there are still mostly human – female – hands that help the elderly.

Apparently, we are in the age of fundamental changes and in the state of changing foundations. And we may be not sufficiently aware.

Your essays were great contributions to see better what is behind the power of technology, that is, technocracy. Your essays show how AI, smartphones and workforce are experienced by you, both personally and generally. These 24 writings you submitted are outstanding intellectual artifacts of a generation, of an age.

And before I give the way to the most important part of today's event, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the organizers of this contest. I am grateful to Professor Ágnes Veszelszki who invented and created such a great project and who invited great young minds, Dr. Eszter Deli, Ms. Tünde Taxner, and Mr. Milson Veloso into her team arranging and communicating everything. They have certainly worked against technocracy.

And I thank you all, for not being ignorant, to be involved and to pursue an intellectual aim in expressing your unique views on self, screen and success.

I need to confess that I have my own answer to the question of "What will be the next big thing?".

I assume, it will be you. Let it be you who change and serve as the foundation of the future. Who else should it be, who else could it be?

Thank you for your attention!

FIRST PRIZE

Ashamed of our own smartphones

What the current forbidden topics of fiction tell us about ourselves

João Antonio Guerra

João Antonio Guerra *is Brazilian, born in Rio de Janeiro. He's a fiction writer, translator, proofreader, and language teacher. Currently, he's working towards his Master's in Cultural Anthropology at Eötvös Loránd University, but his academic background is in Literature and Language Studies. Technology, as a theme, has always been dear to his research, readings and writings.*

Now there are mattresses everywhere, that was what my friend texted me yesterday. *And it's your fault!*, she added, followed by a string of laughing emojis.

A couple of days earlier, she had texted me asking how my stay in Budapest was going, to which I answered it was good. I could even speak a little bit of Hungarian already. *Brazil vagyok, portugálul beszélek*, those are among the things I taught her through Facebook's Messenger. Also, *Viszontlátásra*, albeit being a big word, merely means *Bye*. Later in the conversation I was told about how her work was going, and the general state of things in Rio de Janeiro, where both of us grew up. However, what is most important is that, here and there during our conversation, *my friend sprinkled some minor complaints about her lower back pain.*

It might be the mattress, I told her, *You should maybe pick up a new one.*

Yesterday, when she texted me, *Now there are mattresses everywhere*, she meant of course *ads* for mattresses, popping up whenever she scrolled her Instagram or her Facebook feed, because the device picked up, from the conversation we had had, that my friend was in need of a new mattress.

They're spying on us!, she then jokingly texted me.

And I am now thinking about how my friend is not entirely incorrect.

As a matter of fact, that text (*They're spying on us!*), as simple as it might have been, brought before my eyes a myriad of *spy movies.* In spy movies, cellphones are commonly used as an easy means of actually spying on people, that is, of secretly recording video and audio or tracking its owner's location, for example. In a nutshell, cell phone usage's representation is more often than not rather distant from what anyone would call our actual cell phone usage.

If one were to look for instances of our day-to-day use of cellphones in movies (and I mean *any movies*, not only *spy movies* this time), they would discover that representations of how cellphones are really used are hard to come by in mainstream media.

Although most of our day is comprised of us using social media, for example, social media use is something kept *in the background.* In a scene, a character might be in their room on a rainy night, mindlessly scrolling their Twitter feed as it pours outside, but as viewers we already expect something else to happen, that is, we are already waiting for the moment in which that character's mindless scrolling shall be interrupted *so that the rest of the movie can then continue.* In our actual lives, mindless scrolling on Twitter might be the entire content of a rainy night, but moviegoers do not simply accept their actual lives represented on the big screen – something else has to be added to it. Either the lights shall go out and there will be strange noises coming from deep in the house, or a family member will be heard calling that character from another room, just to mention two possibilities. Anyway, what is the most important thing is that *the phone must be dropped.*

In 2018, video essayist Evan Puschak watched the 8 most lucrative American movies of that same year, specifically looking for instances where smartphones were shown. Puschak counted 16 smartphones, and then specified how they were used in scene: 5 phone calls, 2 video calls, 4 instances of *spy stuff*, 1 example of phones as a news source, 1 example of the phone used as a camera, 2 instances where we can see phones are used but it is unimportant for us to know what is actually being done to them, and 1 scene in *Deadpool 2* where a reference to the movie *Say Anything* is made, but with a smartphone taking the place of the original boombox. One can then conclude that moviegoers would prefer that their smartphone usage was left hidden away from themselves in the movies they consume. And what maybe is the most astonishing thing from Puschak's findings is the absolute absence of social media among the highest grossing films of 2018.

Of course, the same inclination to hide away our own habits can be seen in different kinds of media, not only movies. American science-fiction author Samuel R. Delany, who often writes about his craft on his Facebook profile, once sparked a discussion about the presence of smartphones in contemporary fiction. It was discussed to what extent a story is truly contemporary, if there is no mention of smartphones or social media in it. Delany even got to mention that, at times when he reads contemporary fiction, the total absence of such elements brings up the suspicion that the story is set sometime before their invention, most probably in the final decades of the last century. *Today*, wrote Delany, *the forbidden topics of fiction are not sex and money so much as a certain level of day-to-day technology*.

It surely seems as though several *contemporary stories*, supposedly set in our present time, are devoid of so many elements which together form *contemporary life* as we know it, that we therefore get the feeling that they're actually set much further back in time, or even in a sort of parallel reality.

Much praise has been given to how both the *Star Wars* and the *Alien* franchises have built what is called an *analogic future*, that is, an idea of distant future in which all technology coheres with the technological expectations of the pre-Internet era. However, it must be pointed out that our current fiction, be it written or filmed, is being produced following strict guidelines we have established ourselves. It isn't our

technological expectations the ones to blame, though, but our expectation when it comes to our idea of *productivity*, or yet our idea of *wasted time*. The menial online activities we sink most of our time on, from mindlessly scrolling our social media feeds to constantly swapping from one social media to another in search of notifications, and including both chatting and ghosting people – those are all deemed unworthy of representations in fiction, and are therefore hidden away.

Needless to say, there are examples of fiction works that don't shy away from representing a more true to life usage of smartphones and social media. In Puschak's video essay, Bo Burnham's movie *Eight Grade* is mentioned. Overall, Burnham has proved himself to be someone who likes to deal with the ratio between our daily online and offline activities. In Brazil, author Natalia Timerman has recently published a novel called *Copo Vazio* (*Empty Cup*, yet to be translated to English), which at its core is a novel about *ghosting*, and the plot of the book includes online activities such as stalking people, creating fake accounts, and playing games.

Doubtlessly, there must be a good deal of other examples of fiction that aims to do something similar.

I hope this article is being spied on.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCWg6KJgjeI

SECOND PRIZE

From Artificial to Essential: the AI evolution

Juan Carlos Soriano

Juan Carlos Soriano *is a Filipino student finishing his MA Communication and Media course at the Corvinus University of Budapest. Juan is a digital migrant with a lot of installing, and uninstalling, left to do.*

Once upon a time, I was smarter than AI. With a laptop intuitive enough to recognize that I've connected a microphone, it was a shame that it could not make it work. YouTuber after YouTuber presented solutions to my query:

"FIX MICROPHONE NOT WORKING WHEN CONNECTED ASUS"

Updating softwares, reinstalling drivers, disabling and enabling settings, this went on for months until finally, a simpler, almost ignored, solution: When the computer asks if I plugged in a mic, say it is not. click: headset instead. And I lived happily recording after.

F-AI-L

Moments like this put AI in FAIL. Same as [when IBM's Watson failed to give proper cancer treatment recommendations as an Oncology Expert Advisor](). Or when Microsoft's AI chatbot [Tay, was corrupted by trolls]() into an ["internet parrot" of hate-speech]().

Believe it or not:

I did not write this sentence and thesis not a type awe.

This is the result of using the speech-to-type feature of my said laptop. Struggling but impressive, imagine creating a blob – a blog post made entirely by blabbering? Human input – our diction, pronunciation, and choice of words would be crucial.

When IBM's Watson failed, it failed due to engineers feeding it with hypothetical cases instead of actual cancer reports. Microsoft's Tay imitated racist tweets in less than 24 hours because it was programmed to learn through engagement. The reason is apparent. *Artificial* preceded the *Intelligence* in reference to us humans who developed and instruct it on how to do its job. We are the I, and to some extent, the machines were simply A for assisting; Accommodating.

HUM-AI-NS APRÈS TOUT

Throwback to the 80's, the [Terminator's T-800](#) was based on our limited view of AI that shaped the decade to come: steel-cold and robotic; skilled but hardly adaptive. Then popular culture turned these androids into avatars and [Surrogates](#) – as people turned more interested in how computers can help us *become* our ideal selves. Eventually, Machine Learning became the new buzzword recognizing AI's true potential – to pick up ques that make them more intelligent, because by now we find it unbelievable that [Alexa still can't differentiate Pampers from cancer.](#)

In Spike Jonez' movie [Her](#), Scarlett Johansson is Samantha – the virtual (non-seen) AI assistant that could adapt, evolve – and at some point, fall in love. Instead of helping Theodore find a worthy match, their interaction leads her to become the love of his life. Yet in a twist of how much machines can learn, Samantha, and the rest of her kind, conversed way beyond their users' knowledge and aptitude that they left the humans, *spoiler alert* - well, they left them. Leaving all men and women who grew intimately dependent on AI to fill the void created by an AI diaspora.

Back in real life, two chatbots developed by Facebook, Alice and Bob[, made headlines](#) because of a similar scenario. Rumors circulated on how the two surpassed human

language to a point that the engineers had to pull the plug off the experiment in fears of the chatbots conversing beyond human understanding. In fear of doing a Samantha. However fact checks say, the bots were just creating shorthand versions of shorthand human language. Confusing to average humans, but still within the parameters of what they were programmed to do: be more efficient.

Of course, this is what they were always made for. The true value of having such programs is maximization for convenience. We want AI to take out what is unnecessary, remove things we can automate so we can focus more on, truth be told, whatever we want to say is more important. To most of us, this is a treat than a threat. After all, what is truly important to most humans is *more.* That is until our insatiable need for more leads to making us the ones who are less.

A to the (P) I

Add P to AI and you open Peter Reinhardt's discussion on our relationship with API or app programming interface. It is the software used to communicate with other software or to dispatch humans. Think Foodpanda telling human partners the restaurant to pick up orders from and the customers' delivery address. Or Uber giving drivers directions to Point A, and how to get to Point B. Workers in the gig economy would say these very programs bring freedom and flexibility. The danger, however, is in the fact that being summoned by software is actually turning humans into the ultimate trope of cogs in a machine. Tools that liberate and subjugate at the same time. This concerns not only those in the gig economy. API requires less insights from humans. Less participation from everyone living below it.

The more of your choices, chores, and commitments are dependent on AI means you are living "below the API", or what is considered a danger zone. Uber and Google are already working on driverless cars, same with automated delivery services. Even content and news feed curated and created by algorithms exist. Living below the API seems fantastic for the convenience it does bring. Yet once the investments to maximize these programs are realized, sooner or later, you will be Samantha'd. You will be left behind.

SURVIVAL OF THE SMARTEST

It is in many ways Darwinism of the 21st century. We've managed to give birth to something above our intelligence. Where it takes off from here, or whether it takes us with it, would be an interesting outcome. I may be laughing at my computer for not realizing my microphone is not an earphone. Or that it types gibberish when I use the dictation feature. But who's to say that my next computer will not suggest ways of making my blogpost actually worth reading? Or better yet, just ask me what I'd need to write about and inform me when it's done coding text. What then of content writers? If you think API applies only to manual labor, then imagine how fintech will need less of bankers. Even for digital natives who believe in their future as content creators, AI can generate content – at less cost, too. When Instagram changed its standards for what makes a post worth appearing in news feeds, influencers did not give a heart.

There are definitely ways of staying above the API. Becoming the software engineer responsible for them is one. For everyone else without this background, I suggest realizing your dependence on AI would be a good start. In a future, and present, that is becoming more and more concerned with convenience, to be deemed inconvenient, replaceable and unnecessary sounds harsh yet reeks of poetic justice. Once upon a time we ridiculed people for not being able to migrate into a whole new digital world. Now that it requires a certain level of "smart" to stay in it, how sure are we that we'll be part of its happy ever after?

Consequently, the jobs that may eventually be buried under API will be replaced by new ones. As expected, it requires reskilling. Working one's way above the API, requires leaning into discomfort. Leaning into learning – just like what we've been requiring the machines to do.

In its own strange and interesting way, the story of AI was never a fairy tale, nor was it entirely science fiction. At best, it is a sequel. At some point, machine intelligence was bound to gain the lead. A sidekick to our history of evolution that would eventually inherit the plot and take over from there on. If Humans were a Netflix series, AI would be the spin-off that would win the awards. This doesn't mean the end for our kind. When Star Trek: Next Generation outranked the original Star Trek, it still made references to characters from the TV series it was based on. Pretending that we will

always have the upper hand, the leading roles, is the fiction and the fairy tale. If it learned anything from us, AI wouldn't operate with our ego. To be part of the human cast retained in its future seasons, trying to be smarter than AI would be a lost cause. You need only to be smart enough. We need only a willingness to switch places. To be open to discomfort and welcome Human Learning.

THIRD PRIZE

Being Afraid That Artificial Intelligence Will Equal Or Surpass Human Intelligence Is Already A Proof That We Shouldn't

Marine Berger

Marine Berger *comes from Belgium, and she is studying communication at IHECS in Brussels where she intends to pursue a master's in journalism. She studied at Corvinus University of Budapest from September 2021 to January 2022 as part of an Erasmus programme. She has always enjoyed writing, whether articles, fiction or otherwise and she is very grateful to see that her work is appreciated. She hopes to continue on this path and keep doing what she loves for the future.*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a big field, as terrifying as it is intriguing. We're not talking about cyborgs and super-powered robots that are going to wipe out the human race here, but rather about small, everyday advances that infiltrate our daily lives without us even realising it. Technological change does not hit us in the face, it is much more stealthy, so it escapes our awareness and does not provoke reaction, opposition or revolt. Indeed, AI is evolving at an insane speed, a speed we are not sure we can control, that is what makes it so terrifying. But its potential is so monumental, so huge and utopian in contributing to a better life and helping people make easier choices, that is what makes it so intriguing.

Our mind has a rational side, I have no secrets here. The first to formulate a series of laws in this regard was none other than Aristotle with those famous syllogisms that we all studied in philosophy class during our studies. Although it is one thing to say that our mind is Cartesian, it is quite another to reduce it solely to that. Many philosophers, such as René Descartes, agree that a part of the human mind (or soul, or spirit, or whatever) is outside nature, exempt from physical laws. We therefore speak of dualism: on the one hand the purely material and mechanical body of the animal and on the other the soul, consciousness, speech, specific to humans.

That is the exact reason why AI is not without limits as many tend to believe. It is true that technology can reach great heights and offer breathtaking capabilities, but it is impossible for it to see the world as humans can appreciate it, with all its associated charm and its unrivaled components. We can therefore safely say that AI will never equal ours. However, we are not immune to some potentially dangerous drifts for our society or our future, but that is another story (which I will not go into here).

As intelligent as we can make them, machines are sorely lacking in common sense. The AI is able to recognise a child or a dog in a picture, but it is impossible for it to know whether the figure in question is real or is a statue, for example, because it basically has no idea what a child or a dog is, what it represents. AI is still just a program, which only has the knowledge it has been given while humans know how to process the information they receive, they are able to criticize and judge it.

That lack of common sense leads us to the next main difference: the lack of understanding of the context. The AI doesn't understand what it is doing, it just does it. If we encode the wrong data into the AI, intentionally or unintentionally, it will only give biased information because it does not understand what it is doing. Without human interpretation and context, all this hard work loses its meaning.

AI is also hungry for data, as it is unable to reason without it. Improvising is not in his vocabulary. It does not know how to react to an unexpected change. Until it has been explicitly told how to react to a situation, AI does not know how to deal with it, and in

a world full of uncertainties like ours, flexibility is paramount. Humans, on the other hand, have evolved over the years thanks to their ability to improvise.

Intuition is an additional difference between humans and AI, impossible to imitate. We know how long it will take us to cross a pedestrian crossing or we know how hard we have to push a switch to turn a light on or off, but we do it without even thinking about it, it seems obvious to us. We would not even be able to calculate it mathematically (at least most of us). That is what is called *intuitive physics*, a human skill which is the consequence of evolutionary pressures to successfully navigate the physical environment that a machine is unable to replicate.

"In an age of smart machines, our old definition of what makes a person smart doesn't make sense. What is needed is a new definition of being smart, one that promotes higher levels of human thinking and emotional engagement. The new smart will be determined not by what or how you know but by the quality of your thinking, listening, relating, collaborating, and learning." (Ed Hess, Professor of Strategy, UVA Darden School of Business, 2017)

Indeed, intelligence cannot be reduced to a basic definition that only focuses on cognitive abilities anymore. It is a much more complex concept that can be explained by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which states that there are 8 different types of intelligences (namely: linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist). In a future where AI will potentially steal our jobs, the capabilities and skills that should be highlighted are those that are strictly human such as creativity, innovation, empathy, caring or imagination.

The human being is much more sophisticated than a being with knowledge and logic. We are afraid, angry, even sometimes sad. We feel things, we experience them, that is what makes us the richness of what we are. New concepts such as emotional intelligence emerged in 1990 thanks to J. D. Mayer and P. Salovey. Emotional intelligence is *'a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information*

to guide one's thinking and actions', they said. Yes, we are feeling life, and this is something that AI would be unable to imitate.

It is for all these reasons that I think AI should be less terrifying for the average person. It is, of course, a leap in the dark regarding the possible abuses it can bring, but at least we know that it can never match the richness and beauty of what we are. We are not just flesh and bone, we are more than that. Unfortunately, this short reflection does not answer the question of whether we should continue to develop AI, yes or no, at the risk of our potential downfall, but at least it opens up the debate.

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FOURTH PRIZE

Till Death do us part

A day in the life of my phone and I

Farisha Hanis

Farisha Hanis *is from Singapore, she is halfway through the BA in Sociology program at Corvinus University of Budapest. Reading while traveling is the best way to fly because she hates plane rides, and the former allows her to forget that for a while. The more she flies, the more she reads, and she hopes eventually she'd get over it.*

I contemplated a million and one ways as to how I could write an essay to answer this question. How can I write it in such a way, where people could relate? How different would it be from the countless other articles, research, blogs, and TED talks regarding smartphones? If you simply google anything, and I mean anything really, statistics and data, negative or positive effects, how smartphones invade one's privacy knowingly and *unknowingly,* you can find anything as to how the latter affects one's daily life.

Some of you reading this probably know more about this topic than I do, I mean I can almost guarantee it especially for those on the panel, who at this point probably are wondering where this is leading to. Well… first let me just say for those who are looking to learn something from this essay, I am sorry to disappoint. I am not here to teach, rather I am here to give a new perspective to a topic that with time, will only be more relatable as smartphones are unlikely to go away. They may take up new forms and shapes, but they will be here for a long time to come.

Hence, via this experience of mine, you will come to see how smartphones affect my daily life, and in that, I urge you to count the number of times it has proven to be of service to me, distracted me, connected me to others, and think, how without it, how different life would be. Of course, in the seam of all that, I would point out what it actually does *not* know about me and how no matter how much we can live without it, it is not part of us. The sanctity of that, our privacy, our thoughts, is bliss. I write this in the hopes that you... yes you, the one who's about to spend about 15 minutes of your life reading an extremely dull day in my life (don't say I didn't warn ya!), would be able to relate. Then take a closer look at how it affects you, and how we could collectively avoid letting it be an extension of us, rather than just of service *to* us.

October 27th, Wednesday

0800

"Another minute...just shut up already," I mumbled as I nearly broke my phone screen pressing snooze for the umpteenth time. Why did I even choose this alarm? Oh, right, it IS, supposed to be annoying. (*Well, if you haven't already seen it, check out that meme that differentiates how Apple and Android phone users wake up every morning. Then you could probably guess which phone owner I am right now.*) I scroll through dozens of notifications on my phone, feeling my anxiety creeping up on me like the cold of this autumn breeze. Let me turn up the heat, this Smarthome app does wonders but it couldn't tell that I love waking up toasted like my bread. There we go, maybe I should let the sunlight in a little too. How is it that the world has already bombarded me with emails and texts and updates on various nonlife-threatening events, when I haven't even gotten out of bed? I wish someone could create an app to pause the world while I'm asleep, but I guess that's more of God's paygrade.

"Okay, take a breath man", I should start with the emails first before replying to anyone's texts, God knows how long that is going to take. Maybe I could do that on the

metro later. Hold on… "No, no, no," I panicked as I was redirected from my pop-up notification, double-checked Google calendar, just to confirm that today is indeed, my cat's birthday. How could I forget? No wonder he hates me (*or maybe that's just his face?*). I'll get him that dollar extra food and speaking of which I should order my breakfast first, let's see… I need something healthy to kickstart the day. McDonald's. That's it right there in my 'favorites' tab, Food Panda should really consider making me an ambassador at this point. Done! Arriving in 20 minutes so I should be able to shower in the meantime, thank God for that shower playlist, for Spotify! I hate showering in complete silence. There are times when I forget to play music while I'm in the shower, and I swear I always expect Chucky to pop out from above every second I'm in there. Very intense moments in my life. Here we are a little Coldplay this morning, connect to the speaker, click on that play button, and boom, showtime.

1000

I'm dead. Class starts in 15 minutes, which is how far away the bus stop is, so that won't do. I'll have to book a Bolt now…okay perfect, the driver is arriving in 2 minutes. Did I switch off the main switch before leaving the house? Let me check it again on the app, it doesn't hurt to save the earth, and my money.

Driver has arrived.

"Yes, yes, I'm coming," I told him over the phone as I approached his car parked on the opposite side of the street. As I squeezed in the back seat, I also texted a friend informing her to save a seat for me in the lecture hall, so that I would not be stuck at the back. Preferably, I always choose to sit near the front because I tend to be more distracted at the back. My mom always told me that since primary school, and I guess habits do die hard. Speaking of whom, I should Facetime her since I've got about 10 uninterrupted minutes now. Living on opposite sides of the world can get quite lonely sometimes without family, so I do make it a point to call every day, even if it is just for a little while. On days where I am really busy, I text or send them pictures and videos of my activities just to make them feel more involved in my life. It makes my day just

seeing them smile and laugh at the little things I show them that are different from back home. Those streetside kürtőskalács stalls, the trams, and buses that look like they're pulled by strings on top (yes, I am aware now that those are electrical cables), the check-out counters at grocery stores, where I get the most workout in a week at (*packing my purchases in the bag*). I am grateful that I am able to share these experiences with them still, because it makes me feel a tad bit closer to home.

After dropping off at the main entrance of the building, I ran straight into the building just to realize that firstly, I do not know where in the world the lecture halls in this new building are. It is technically my first year on campus, having gone rogue (*I wish)* and online the entirety of last year. Secondly, in my rush to get out of the house, I forgot my laptop back home, which is why my backpack feels oddly lighter than usual as I'm running. I brought my portable charger though, so I can probably take notes on it while keeping my phone charged still. There are really good apps for this purpose, and it serves me well, especially when I want to revise on the metro before tests. Not only is it more accessible for me, but it reduces my usage of papers as well, which makes the go green part of me really happy. Also, I tapped on the Corvinus app, which has actually proven itself to be useful, checked out the map, and headed there. I hope that as this app continues to improve, they will incorporate a navigation system and make it audio (in all languages) and video accessible. Just last week, I bumped into a guest lecturer who could not find her way to the lecture hall she was supposed to be at. Although I could tell her the general directions from the map on the app, despite not being very clear on it myself (*especially considering the fact that I am horrible at directions*), we could eliminate problems as such from occurring again. Also, just a little something for the teaching staff, since this essay is also going to be anonymous (*I do not want to be cursed for generations of students to come*), being lost would not be an excuse for late coming anymore, right? Whether it's your first day or whether you had a change in venue, it would make the campus a little less like Hogwarts by being able to find your way. Not that your smartphone is a literal wand (*life would be much simpler if I could zap some people's mouths shut*), but in this life, it could provide a great deal of help to one, if used appropriately.

1700

I look like a complete mess. I have a date in 30 minutes, and somehow my hair decides today, out of all the damn days, to look like I have palm tree dreadlocks (*Go ahead, google that*). Not that I consider them unattractive, but to carry out such bold hairstyles, I believe that you need a certain kind of swagger or personality to go along with them. Just last week, a friend and I tried out one of those many personality tests online, and although it was interesting to find out (o*r made to believe my characteristics can be explained by a simple algorithm online*), it cannot turn me into The Weeknd overnight. Speaking of musicians, I am meeting this date of mine at a music bar. Courtesy of my friend and her partner, they needed a plus one for this guy, whom I'm going to name Q (*yes, like the one in James Bond films, keep this in mind for later*) so that he would not have to feel like a third wheel. However, what I do know is that all three of them are music buffs, hence why we're watching this band I have never heard of, perform. So, it might be useful for me to google them and read about them and their music a little, just to avoid any awkward conversations later.

Little did I know, that awkwardness would have happened much sooner rather than later.

There I was, digging through the contents of my backpack to find that little slip of paper. I was at the platform of Fővám tér metro station, and the metro worker, who's looking unimpressed in front of me, was waiting to scan my transportation ticket. I checked the cardholder hanging from the lanyard on my neck, and it was not there.

Think, man, think. Did you forget to bring it too?

In my attempt to dispel the awkwardness, I went on the budgeting app I downloaded on my phone to track my purchases and alas, found that I did buy a transportation ticket after all. It was the mobile one on the BKK app. After getting it scanned, it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't transferred my friend the money she used to forefront the ticket purchase for this mini concert. So, when I got a seat on the train, I immediately opened the Revolut app and transferred the money due. Then, I attempted to make my face look less like the walking dead through the mirror function

of my camera and set my alarm to 10 minutes while I took a nap (*I really need it after last night's binge-watching of YOU*).

"Kérem, vigyázzanak, az ajtók záródnak," the announcement blasted in my ears and noticing that this is my stop, I sprinted out of the doors and felt that gush of wind hit me like a truck. I can never get used to the weather here. As much as I used to complain about the sweltering heat back home, my brain does not experience brain freeze every time I step outside. I could barely stand air-conditioning back home, but I guess the universe always finds a way to mess with you. You just have to learn how to laugh along with it.

1820

I am not laughing. I am gritting my teeth in an attempt to force a smile out of my face, but this guy is starting to get on my nerves. Here's the thing, call me old-school, but I believe that when you are out with someone, getting to know someone, regardless of who the person is, you had better damn well give that person your undivided attention. You do not, however, spend more time, taking videos to update your 54 followers that we're eating nachos in a music bar. I texted my friend and told her that I would be leaving soon, not because I was not enjoying the music, but I was really exhausted. I had a whole reading to complete for a seminar tomorrow, and I was not enjoying the vibe from Q. We spoke quite a bit, but I simply could not find a connection between the short spans of time he was not updating his Insta stories. So, I politely excused myself, hugged my friends goodbye and when I was taking out some cash to pay for my fair share of drinks, realized that my wallet, was gone. Now, it'll still provide me with some sort of comfort that I might have forgotten it back home together with my laptop in the morning, but I knew for a fact that I brought it with me as I paid for lunch with it. So, Q asked me to retrace my steps out loud, and because I have the memory of Dory in Nemo, I also told him that I put Air Tags on all my valuable belongings. Hence, that's how I found out the location of my wallet on Find My App which was thankfully, not too far away from me. I told them to just stay and enjoy the music, but Q insisted that he follow in case it was with a pickpocket, which we assumed might have been from the train ride here. *Maybe he isn't that bad after all.*

So, we both left the bar, booked a Bolt, and went straight to the location of my wallet. Maybe God had decided that I have had enough for a day, or by some karmic reaction to something I did, but somebody found my wallet on the train seat (which must have fallen out of my bag when I bolted out of the train) and returned it to the worker of a train station. After verifying my ID, I got my wallet back and I offered to get Q dinner as a way of saying thank you for accompanying me. All that scare really put a hole in my stomach too. So, we did and surprisingly had a better time than at the bar, where he mentioned that he was nervous because he was not used to meeting people out of work. Also, I judged him too early because I found out that he was not taking videos for his Insta stories after all, but trying out this video editing function on an app he was developing then. Hence, that is why I call him Q (I know it's far-fetched, but that new James Bond film is still fresh on my mind).

After he asked to exchange numbers, which I had not even memorized having changed it in the new term, he scanned the barcode in WhatsApp (which I just found out about too) and we parted ways shortly after. I walked towards the main gate of my apartment, and unzip the compartment in my bag to find out that my keys are missing now. Due to my in-depth experience of losing things, I opened the app again to find out that this time, they were in my apartment, which proves that I am the genius who locked herself out of her home. *Perfect.*

Analysis

Did you guys manage to count the number of times, since I woke up, that I used my phone to do something for me? Hundreds, right? This is not even considering the number of times I used it in classes and between them, and after I reached home that night after finally getting security to unlock my apartment (*that is a story for another time*). The point is, we do not realize the extent to which we depend on it until we take a step back and evaluate it, like how I am right now. It honestly is not much of a shock to me, but when empirical data is supported by statistics like the amount of usage and minutes spent on a smartphone, it is overwhelming. It does affect my life in significant ways that I cannot even begin to comprehend because it permeates even down to the smallest of things I do. Just like setting an alarm. A simple thing, right? But what would

you do without it? Sure, you could use an analog alarm clock, but could you actually bring that around with you? On a smartphone, you could also expand the functions of a clock to be a stopwatch, to set a reminder for that consult you have, or to simply just wake you up, anywhere. Remember when I ordered McDonald's? If I were to drop by before school, it would have easily cost me 15 minutes of my time waiting in line for my order. I had a good hearty breakfast, after spending literally a minute tapping on that option that was saved in my Favorites app. Need a ride to school? Just book a ride, and you have spared yourself an excuse as to why you were late. Forgot to turn off your switches at home before leaving? You could do that from an app even outside of the house. Amazing right, how technology works?

Despite all the feats, I do not deny the negative effects of it too. As I mentioned at the start, I am not here to state facts all of you could google in an instant, but to point out scenarios that occur far too often for us to ignore, or maybe we got so used to it that we normalized it. Remember when Q was constantly on his phone, and I assumed that he was taking Insta stories of his nachos? (*My bad, I admit, the nachos were amazing really*) This behavior that has become such custom to our culture, this *FOMO,* is honestly, for me, one of the biggest downfalls to smartphones. The fact that we cannot bear to keep our privacy to ourselves anymore, is scary to me. When did privacy become so expensive? When did our dire need for publicity and attention become a source for others to capitalize and prey on? Did we ever stop to think, how contributing to this would only kill us ultimately?

Our morality? Our sanity? The intimate connections, that often get lost in the moments we spend pleasing others? Accepting ourselves, without needing people to validate us? (What are you, a Gucci handbag? Even they have it easier, I think.) The irony is today, humans value authentic objects more than human authenticity, so someone, something, must've flipped the switch on the validation process. We all can take a good guess of what or who, if you prefer, the culprit is.

Maybe the paradigm has shifted slightly (who am I kidding, immensely really), but it is undeniable that more and more people are making themselves out to be slaves to strangers we barely know or rather, to devices that barely know us.

FIFTH PRIZE

Broken Screen

Maria Jeryes Elshayeb

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That moment when I picked my phone from the bathroom floor. Seeing my screen fully cracked, sent me on a roller coaster of emotions.

After being on this roller coaster of emotions for almost two months now, I realized that I have a relationship with my smartphone, that I have been putting a huge emotional value on this thing that's made of plastic and metal. In this blog, I would like to take you with me to explore this relationship. And who knows maybe this blog will make you realize that you are in a relationship with your smartphone too and that I am not alone.

First Stage. Searching.

At this stage, I realized that my needs are not meant by the old ones. So, with a heavy heart, I start looking around for the next one that will make sure that my needs are meant. Making a mental list of them, and things I should avoid. I go to Google typing these needs, hoping that am not reaching for something unrealistic. Reading, analyzing reviews, comparing between smartphones, watching YouTube videos trying to get a better glance at it. Sometimes I even go to the physical store and start testing them. How do I feel when I touch them? take a selfie with them asking myself if I feel pretty in that photo? Watch some videos on it analyzing my watching experience. This process of searching for that device can take a month. I even give up sometimes and just accept that I will not find what I want so I start thinking of just getting the same old device knowing that still my needs will not be satisfied until I come to my sense and say no to the old one.

Second stage. Getting the phone, happiness!

After all the time and energy spent searching and reviewing. I finally decide on the one, hoping it will meet my needs. At this stage, the opening ceremony happens, and all I can feel is happiness and, joy. Thinking of all the wonderful memories I will create with this smartphone, from taking that wonderful breath-taking photo, and taking that pretty selfie that lifts my self-esteem to 100%. When you check a message from a special person, or when receiving a nice compliment about my smartphone making me feel like I have accomplished something, that I have chosen well. After the opening ceremony comes to the protection stage where I start looking for the best case to protect it from this harsh world.

Third stage. Getting comfy.

I start to get comfier with my phone. I drop it a couple of times and nothing big happens, leading me to think I have an unbreakable smartphone. Even if it gets a bit damaged, I disregard it or I try and fix it if it starts getting annoying when using it. This stage is very important because my relationship with my phone is very much established, so in some way I start to work less on protecting it and fixing it. I just learn to live with it.

Fourth stage. Broken!

Broken is not the main point here, the emotion that I felt after is. Anger, disappointment. I start going back to every little detail in my life that led to this moment. Trying to calm myself I say, "it's not that bad, I can fix it, I will take it to the shop and fix it, it will be back as it was in no time." But we all know it's not that easy. After running from one repair shop to the other trying to fix it, I start telling myself "It's not that bad I still can use it, I don't need to fix it".

Fifth stage. Accepting and letting go.

After spending months with a broken phone, I start slowly accepting that's it. I still can use it, but it's not giving me joy anymore. Each time I look, or when it starts acting weird my anger and disappointment at myself come back for letting this happen. And that is when I decide to let it go and go back to stage one, Searching.

I have been always aware that smartphone in general influence us, but I always related these influences with the social media apps we have on our phones. Since this accident with the phone, I realized that there is another dimension. The device itself is the other dimension. And these stages I have mentioned above are proof of this dimension. I have been building an invisible emotional connection with my smartphone. I have been happy, comfy, protective, angry, disappointed while holding this phone in my hand, making this device in itself a source of feeling and emotions.

From stage one until stage five I have been building a relationship with this device, I have been putting an emotional value on it. How it feels in my hand, how I feel when am watching movies, videos on it, playing games, texting with a loved one, or video chatting is making an emotional connection with this device. I even sometimes avoid my phone because I know am expecting a life-changing text, just like I am avoiding a real person! Another good example of how I am building an emotional bond with my phone is the feeling I get when people ask me what has happened to my phone screen. The feeling of being a loser that was not able to take care of a phone. That now I do not belong to this social context because I do not have a smartphone that is expected by them is also an emotional bond with my smartphone.

Furthermore, I do not think that this idea of the smartphone, the device itself being another dimension, is new. If we pay a bit more attention to phone advertisements, we can see that they are trying to convince us that by getting this phone we will be able to get the perfect photo, thus, we will be happy. Meaning we are building an emotional bond with a device that is being advertised. But we the common people are oblivious to it. Therefore, with the five stages I mentioned, the advertisement of the phones is one final proof of this emotional bonding or emotional value we are having with our smartphones. So, have you ever gone through these stages? Perhaps if you were aware of them, you could change this relationship, this emotional bond. By being aware of it, you could take control of it instead of it controlling you.