Philosophy 105 Case Study

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FRIDAY

18h00

Read the case study description to my son Oliver and tried to explain it to him. He immediately rushed upstairs and started turning off the lights and unplugging things.

START

19h00

PUBLIC

First public announcement of my participation – if I Twitter it, I'll have to actually **do** it.

20h00

DREAD

Having some serious reservations about the idea – dread at the possibility of boredom, and worry about hassle of the practicalities. Talked to Oliver about starting at 16h00 and mentioned the issue of the controls on the stove in the kitchen possibly being digital; he immediately gets worried about not being able to eat.

SATURDAY

09h00

10h00

At the Farmer's Market. Discuss the plan with friends (trying to build up the social pressure to follow through). Oliver tells everyone he meets that we're "turning the power off" for the day; I try to set him straight, but the distinction between *power* and *technology* is lost on him. Still having some misgivings, but the enthusiasm of others for the project is working on me.

RESOLVE

11h00

In the parking lot at the Charlottetown Mall Oliver suddenly realizes that he won't be able to use his computer or his Nintendo DS and turns against the whole idea, stomping around in protest about "being dragged into my homework."

PANIC

12h00

The Dark Times Ahead (at 4:00 p.m.) EDIT

The first formal assignment for the Philosophy 105: Technology, Values & Science course I'm participating in this winter is a "case study" that requires abstaining from digital technology for 24 hours. While I'm not technically, as an unofficial interloper, required to carry this out, it

VERY PUBLIC

Post on my weblog, this means that, yes, **I'm doing it.**

13h00

Lunch at Tai Chi Gardens, and a long talk with the proprietors about how this is going to work: can we use the oven? lights? clocks? When I try to pay with my bank card, it refuses to work: an ominous portent! Makes me realize that I should get some cash before we start in case I need to buy anything.

14h00

15h00

Home. Unplug the TV, the cable box, DVR and the stereo. Power down the laptop and the iPod Touch. Cover the clock on the stove with a towel. Oliver spends his last hour on the Internet. I'd promised to make chocolate croissants today, so we spend our last minutes whipping them up.

UNPLUG

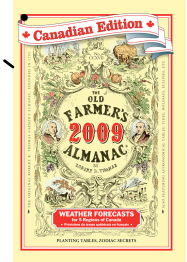
16h00

16h00

Call Catherine in Toronto to say good-bye for 24 hours. Change the outgoing message on the answering machine to tell people to call back on Sunday.

AND, GO...

MOONSET



17h00

SUNSET

Realizing that every single clock in the house is digital, so that now that they're all turned off or covered up we will have no idea when the experiment is *over*, we consult *The Old Farmer's Almanac* and look up the sunset (17h06), sunrise (07h43), moonset (16h31) and moonrise (07h29), thinking we can use these to get at least a rough idea of the time of day. **From this point on, all times are an educated guess.**

18h00

19h00

Use the fridge and the electric range to make supper and turn on electric lights. Have to draw the line somewhere, and these made the cut.

Feeling oddly calm without the need or opportunity to Twitter, turn on the radio or the television, answer the telephone.

20h00

Playing with Lego with Oliver. Reading the obituaries in the *Globe and Mail*. Stringing my guitar (bought the strings last year and never got around to it). Reading Oliver a bedtime story. Reading the rest of the *Globe*.

21h00

Other than the occasional urge to look up something in *Wikipedia* I'm not missing technology at all. I do notice, however, that every time I enter a room my eyes reflexively go to the clock to find out what time it is: the strangest part of the experience so far is feeling adrift in time.

22h00

Around what feels like 21h00 I take a stack of books upstairs to bed, read for about an hour, and then fall fast asleep.

23h00

SUNDAY

00h00

Thoughts on Day One — The biggest surprise for me was my dependence on *knowing the current time* to put my day in context: I didn't realize how often – 5 or 6 times an hour – I check the nearest clock.

Perhaps because I could no longer do this, Saturday evening felt unusually calm. And because everything distracting was turned off, it was unusually quiet.

I rather enjoyed this.

Without going so far as to suggest that I returned to a primitivist state, I also found it novel to eat when I was hungry and to go to bed when I was tired, rather than relying on the clock to tell me the "right" time to do these things.

After his protests earlier in the day, Oliver enthusiastically regained his interest in the project, and didn't comment once about not being able to use his computer, or watch television: he played with me, he played on his own, and generally seemed to be quite content.

DAY ONE

01h00

02h00

03h00

04h00

In the middle of the night I have a dream in which I secretly look for and find a generator to power a laptop so that I can use the Internet.

04h00

Wake up before sunrise and deduce it to be about 07h00. Oliver wakes up just after me and, as is his habit, goes downstairs to use the computer and is very distressed to find that it's turned off. He's angry again about my homework.

AWAKE

05h00

I have a shower (conscious of the many layers of technology, from pumping station to water heater, that make this possible) but do not shave, as my high-tech Braun shaver is obviously electronic. *I don't like not shaving* and this is perhaps the biggest annoyance of the day.

NOT SHAVING

06h00

07h00

MOONRISE
SUNRISE

As time goes on after sunrise I again lose track of what time of day it is, so, like Saturday, **from this point on, all times are an educated guess.**

08h00

Oliver and I talk about "what kids would have done in the old days" to pass the time and I suggest that he run a handwritten message around the corner to my brother. We write out the message and Oliver runs through the frigid morning and, unable to open my brother's screen door, leaves the message in the mailbox. An hour later we hear our front door open and shut and find the message returned. Oliver is on board again.

09h00

10h00

CHURCH
TRAFFIC
ON THE
STREET

I try to grind coffee beans in a manual brass Greek coffee grinder, a gift from a friend for times when the power goes out. I give up after 15 minutes as I make less than a half a teaspoon of coffee. I dig out the dregs from the electric grinder from Friday and then use the electric – but not digital – espresso make to make a cappuccino. This seems wrong somehow, but also necessary if I'm going to make it through the day.

11h00

The telephone rings. Twice in a row. I panic and check the caller-id but realize that I unplugged the phone so I panic again and dial *69 on the old-style phone. It was my mother-in-law. I decide not to call her back, hoping it's not an emergency.

12h00

Read the entire graphic novel *Burma Chronicles*. Hear crows outside. Play with Lego. Play a board game. Make lunch. Send Oliver back to my brother's with another note. Play half a game of *Junior Monopoly*.

13h00

As the sun gets lower in the sky I start to feel like I do at the end of a vacation: I know the end is near and it's hard to relax in the silent calm any longer. I'd be "clock watching" now if I had any clocks to watch.

14h00

SUN AT 45
DEGREES
IN THE SKY

For the last two hours Oliver's very antsy: he knows 16h00 is coming, and is very anxious to get back on the computer. I'm not anxious at all, other than my discomfort about not knowing what time it is, and sort of wish the project could continue.

15h00

The sun position suggests it might be time to check the clock, so we take the plunge and take the towel off the top of the stove: **it's 4:35 p.m.**

STOP

16h00