

On Being Friends with Our Computers: An Invocation for Soft Tech

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YOUR COMPUTER IS NOT YOUR FRIEND.

It was brought to life, and in the same moment, long since designed for death.

Over time, you get to know parts of it, here and there. It certainly knows you, in ways both more precise than you would comfortably prefer and more crude than you likely think. It makes a spectacle out of your best and worst, but cares not for the humanness in between.

It clings to you, physically and psychologically. In the early hours, it glares white and bright at you, having shattered through the primitive limitations of melanin and circadian rhythms.

But it is not yours, not really. It runs advertising beautifully, and, only as an occasional side effect, the content you mean to access. It lends you an omnipresent voice, but only through mouthpieces shaped by others.

YOUR COMPUTER IS NOT YOUR FRIEND. BUT IT COULD BE.

Let us hand-make our websites. Gift-wrap *<i>* in *<p>*aragraphs in *<div>*isions in full-*<body>*'d documents. Stitch together pages with the blue thread of the anchor link underline. Become acquainted with the material feel of placing pixels on a screen, and in doing so, remember what pen and paper in the hands of every person does for power and culture.

Let us tend to our digital gardens, growing sustenance in the form of conversation and connection, in plots just big enough for our communities. Intimacy and trust over suspicion and misinformation; “buy nothing” gift economies over locked cabinets. Let us cultivate abundance but pull back from the toxin of excess.

Let us stretch open our arms wider every day, that those who have never had our access be able

to share equally in it. Let us remember that neutrality has never been inherent to the creation, development, and distribution of technology.

Let us attend to the material of our Cloud. There are crystals in our screens and rare metals in our disks. Copper, lead, gold, polymer, and silicon, are excavated from the earth and disposed, eventually, somewhere. Let us be aware where “somewhere” is, and let the place and people of this somewhere be considered with the utmost care and understanding.

Let us reclaim the right to maintenance and repair. (Those early cooks were onto something when they made cast iron pans to last.)

Let us cripple the Algorithm. Tame it, declaw it, neuter it, and we may yet wrest ourselves out of its grasp. Lest we forget, we were the ones who wrote it, in service to the corporation, and we are the ones who fall under its probing, in disservice only to ourselves.

Let us breathe, just for a moment. Even a blank feed has a texture.

Let us understand that technology is not, in truth, about technology, but rather the world of people who make it and use it and have it forced upon them. And let this be not a diatribe against technology, but rather a plea born out of tender love for its precious complexity and capacity.

Softness is a feeling, a philosophy, a covenant, a process, a promise, a way of holding each other in our thoughts as we make these tools for each other. Against unfeeling logic, thoughtless utility, and stratified competition, let us cling desperately to kindness and beauty and care. Let our computers be friends with us, let us be friends with our computers, and above all, let us value softness as a mechanism of the highest value.