

MODERN TIMES

By: Erik Lewin

"I want to talk to people, hear their voices, be in their living presence. Feel the natural world."

MY SMARTPHONE must be smart – it's managed to take over my entire life. I'm a shadow of a man without it by my side. Believe me, I'm not that easy a mark; it's that the iPhone is practically a Rhodes Scholar. It's always two steps ahead, slyly using alerts and buzzers to coax me into doing its bidding. My iPhone commands: update this system! Download this app! Answer this text! And an insatiable amount of new ways to do all of the above, of which I'm perpetually behind. My smartphone has taken the place of my cat as my most needy pet. I regularly feed it with battery juice, clean out its crappy data, and rub it tenderly in the palm of my hand.

In fact, social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter & Facebook act like a human catnip, irresistibly capturing our attention. I must pull the car over to "like" my friend's pronouncement that it has come time to shave his armpits. While I'm online, I'll be sure to scroll

through a feed of photos of friends of friends of a friend's mailman for the next three hours, until I'm awoken from this daydream by yet another notification that demands my attention.

Actually, the more attention I give to social media, the less attention I have left to nourish. It's like I'm feeding my mind Snickers bars and expecting it to run a marathon; the attention span gets shorter and drains more quickly. I realized all this time online was lost to healthier pursuits, like reading well-written work (not like this article).

Also, it takes plenty of time to discern what these ridiculous hashtags and emojis mean. Hieroglyphics and caveman drawings are back! We've evolved over millenia to express complex thoughts and feelings, but it's now imperative to express oneself using dog ears and eggplants.

Humanity has built stunning cathedrals, architecture, and great

monuments, like Michelangelo's David, but today, we offer Waze & Dropbox. These are the virtual wonders of the new world. The machines have truly taken over!

I yearn for art that is curated and carefully made, deeply felt work, shared only when ready, along with intelligent discourse between well-meaning people of differing views.

These are the elements that can make a sophisticated society thrive. But in an era habituated to answers from a touch screen, bickering over two-bit headlines and endless selfies are the standard.

I want to talk to people, hear their voices, be in their living presence. Feel the natural world. There are all these spare moments in a day – I don't want to miss them anymore. They are all we ever have.

I put the phone down, and wake up. **REAL**

