

# Some Thoughts on Technology as Shadow

by Doug Tyler

*“Always when science tries to describe a “simple” life-process, the matter becomes complicated and difficult.”*  
—C.G. Jung

If you are reading this Newsletter I imagine (hope) you have put your phone down for a minute, are not simultaneously watching Netflix on some media platform, nor shopping Amazon for that next book, television, pressure washer, or other life “necessity.” Imagine too that you are likely in a minority at this moment, for we are awash in a sea of technological wonders—contributions from science in recent years that ostensibly simplify life. The sea is an apt image for our collective experience because we, in our ego experiences, are like corks bobbing in waves of relentless screen exposure for data and information...and connection to something. But what is this “something,” and what is the nature of our connection to “it”?

I have become curious about the effects of our burgeoning technology-driven lives, in part out of self-reflection and otherwise through being with others as we hurdle seemingly faster through life. As a part of my “life-process” this past year I have helped develop a new website—which took me into realms of existence I never before encountered. As we all know, the ability to reach practically any person or find the object de jour has fundamentally changed with the Internet, both in the ways we traditionally seek information, things, and people *and* how we communicate with each other. Technologies are now *the* tools to get one’s message, name, product, or service “out there;” they are the primary paths to becoming seen and known. It is now common to even see a preschooler’s development occur through using various devices. Technologies have become “necessary” tools for ego development (for individuals, companies, organizations, or institutions) by mirroring needs and desires in order to feel known and remembered. And very few of us reside outside the realm of this powerful influence. So what are we to make of this process by which the ego and its attendant aspirations become drawn into such a powerful archetypal force? We continuously hear about or experience the benefits and the ease of locating information and communicating with others. What is missing, however, is a dialogue about technology as shadow.

Technology derives from Greek as the study of an art or craft; however, this term has evolved to now refer to the “application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.” Truly our developing technologies are remarkable products of the spirit and imaginations of people who have listened to the inspiration bubbling up from within. Even Joseph Campbell,

shortly before his death, remarked that when one looked inside a computer, it was like seeing angels dancing on the hardware! Yet, as with all of life, when we become conscious of the shadow our technologies represent, we gain a more complete picture of our relationship with them and their effects on our lives.

As we move at an increasingly faster pace through life, unconsciously worshipping at the altar of productivity, we risk abandoning our relationship with the deeper psyche. C.G. Jung cautioned us regarding the “frightful regressions” we court in both our personal and collective lives when we do not take adequate time and make sufficient effort to soak in the meaningfulness of psyche’s unconscious offerings. In 1934, when speaking about images reflecting the individuation process and the need to honor the time required to allow unconscious images to infuse consciousness, he said:

*“The tempo of the development of consciousness through science and technology was too rapid and left the unconscious, which could no longer keep up with it, far behind, thereby forcing it into a defensive position which expresses itself in a universal will to destruction.” (CW 9i, ¶617)*

These are strong words, indeed, which, when applied to our lives today call us to become aware of the shadow embedded within our uses of emerging technologies. Jung is, of course, suggesting that we ignore our relationship with the unconscious at our own peril when we become consumed by willfully diverting psychic energy to primarily conscious and materialistic pursuits.

Ignoring the conscious—unconscious relationship is not the full picture, however. Not only do we risk losing touch with the bounty of unconscious wisdom, but we also grow increasingly estranged from each other. Our “relationship” with our devices, particularly our “smart” phones, usurps our relationships with loved ones and others we encounter daily. We commonly witness ourselves or others talking to one person while simultaneously texting or e-mailing someone else. This results in one of the consequences of fast-paced consciousness that Jung addressed. One’s psychic energy (reflected in personal behaviors) splinters into smaller shards, and we then bounce back and forth among objects competing for our attention. We become spread too thin and lose meaningful, relational experience. Connection in relationships now becomes a quantitative self-reference—how many people am I talking with, how many “friends” do I have, how many people “follow me,” etc. Typologically, we see our social personae adopting a more rigid extroverted thinking and sensate portrait at the expense of a loss of other functions. Feeling is often conscripted into service of an immediate ego desire, and imagination, that wondrous tool of intuition, is rendered passé. When unconscious to these shadow effects, our relationships become increasingly wider and shallower, again, often drafted into service for outward gain. Interpersonal relationships are reduced to transient moments of data sharing. We know very well, however, that meaningful relationships require a commitment of energy to process and better understand our lives, inwardly and outwardly. Yet, shadow-wise we often find ourselves seduced into a complex of quantitative and relational numbness.

I am suggesting what Jung refers to as dangerous consequences resulting from a conscious-unconscious estrangement

---

**Doug Tyler** received a doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Tennessee and a diploma in Analytical Psychology from the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts. He is a member of the core training faculty of the Memphis-Atlanta Jung Seminar. He practices as an analyst in private practice in Knoxville, TN.



credit: Boston Globe

mirrors what occurs in person-to-person relationships when we do not devote adequate time and effort to take in each other. Relatedly, I am fond of Jung's essay on psychic energy, in which he emphasizes the value of rhythm in inner and interpersonal dialogue. Rhythm is an inner (feeling) experience of connection, and I suspect this is in large part what we seek through the amplification of our selves through technologies. However, when we divide our energies too thinly, our rhythmic experiences are interrupted and our connections weaken—akin to a psychic brownout. We risk becoming increasingly splintered than integrated.

An additional shadow element we encounter with technological advances is elevated inflation. The more one unconsciously engages in relationships technologically as a substitute for face-to-face dialogue, the more his or her psychic (or life) energies are channeled toward what the device can do (for me). We come to delight in the ease with which we can manage life. Notice how many cars now have video screens for children, how frequently parents pick up their children at school while talking on the phone, how industries make it easy for us to order whatever we want at a click (and then deliver it to our door!), and how the number of television channels and "platforms" to watch these channels has burgeoned! I am to be served. I command my device to do something for me, etc. From a shadow perspective, our devices mirror our ego desires, and our soul, our inner essence, is exiled to the unconscious. Robert Johnson, well known Jungian analyst and author, was fond of saying he regarded mechanical devices in dreams as suspect because these images suggested mechanical symbols were often being employed as inadequate, ego-directed proxies for the Self's intentions—clearly an inflationary state. That is, our devices were created by human beings for human beings, and when we infuse these "practical devices" with numinous qualities (I can't be without it!) an inflationary caution arises within the psyche. It is within such imbalance that we know

Icarus and his fate is alive and well! Perhaps our intoxication with the solar heights technologies offer suggests a hunger to get more out of our lives, more spirit that we unconsciously hope for but *see* in the device made for us, one that we control.

In a related matter, recent research suggests we encounter adverse effects in memory development when preoccupied with picture taking. We are much less likely to remember an event when we are so intent on taking pictures of the event—so that we can "re-member" it later. Apparently our excitement to take pictures can paradoxically create anxiety around capturing the event and, caught in an unconscious desire to hold onto the moment for future reflection, we sacrifice much of the immediate experience. Representation (a picture) is not experiential; it is a weak substitute...and provisional. Yet we often imagine capturing video images will somehow enhance our experience—the experience we did not fully have to begin with.

There is no doubt our lives are enhanced by powerful emerging technologies and that these developments reflect a level of influence consistent with archetypal meaning. Like most people, I love to use my remarkable devices; however, I am not less busy nor am I more productive because of them—although at times I think surely I must be! Rather, I think it wise to not forget, as Jung frequently emphasized, that when we become infatuated with one side of an archetypal presence we can expect the psyche to react in kind to correct the imbalance. Unless we become conscious of the shadow working within the uses of our technological wonders, we will grow increasingly estranged in our relationships with our selves, each other, and the psyche. A preoccupation with technology and its effects on consciousness will result in an unconscious undertow of sorts—dragging us out to sea, into a reckoning with the psyche's desires.