

Moments of solitude in times of being ultra connected

A reflection upon Solitude

A reflection upon living in ultra connectedness

A reflection upon a balanced life with technology

A reflection upon creativity

A reflection on the self

A reflection in a black mirror <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> the black mirror is a metaphor for (like) our phones, TV etc. when they're turned off,

“ The creative person is constantly seeking to discover itself. To re-model it's own identity. And to find meaning in the universe by means of what it creates. It's most significant moments are those in which it attain some new insight or makes new discoveries ; and these moments are chiefly, in which it's alone. “  
( Anthony Storr )



Fig. 1.

## Tap – Swipe – Notes – Open

2 years ago.

2013

I can still remember the exact setting in which I saw the work.

I was walking in the hallways of the Rijksacademie when I heard the sound of ringing Buddhist bells. I slowly started to walk towards the room, when I entered I saw the crisp image of a 2K HD Video, 11 minutes long .

It was shown on a big sleek widescreen TV, which was placed almost in the middle of the room. What I saw was monks in orange robes standing in line, waiting for something.

I saw a lot of footage of tourist photographing the monks with smartphones. This is where it became interesting to me.

The work was carrying a certain tragic feeling for me, the image of the mindful Buddhist waiting in line to get rice served. And the contrast of the photographing tourist. It showed an everyday tragedy of the disconnected individual in the digital age. Something I could relate to because I was part of it.

'I am a monk. I am a tourist. Within the street I see the stage for every human conflict and negotiation. Specifically for this video I was interested in contrasting the Buddhist principles of mindfulness, meditation, removing yourself from time to the act of photography, grasping for permanence, embalming a moment. The last shot of my 2012 film Jack is a solitary figure passed out in a half-finished Buddhist temple in Footscray, Australia. This film is an oblique sequel.'<sup>2</sup>

### Western Digital, 2013

2K HD video, 11 minutes.

Camera and cut: Emile Zile

Sound designer: Carl Anderson

I immediately took out my phone and googled the artist name.

I found out he did some other performative YouTube videos, and a monologue directed at an unresponsive rock which are both painful and humorous portraits of networked loneliness. 'Zile goes beyond the archival and seeks to actively alter the way in which technology can shape human relations.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [Emilezile.com/selected-work/western-digital/](http://Emilezile.com/selected-work/western-digital/)

<sup>3</sup> RijksakademieOPEN 2013 guide Pg. 63

## CMD+T ( A new tab opens )

I'm in my mid 20's , with a continuous neon glow on my face.  
I have all the information I could ever dream of just one click away.  
I'm always up to date on all the events happening everywhere around  
the world, but It is impossible to keep up.  
I feel like It is moving faster than ever before. But towards what?

The evening is falling and I am in my bedroom streaming a movie.  
Eventually I start to feel a bit bored and open up another tab.  
Another view out of another window.

I'm scrolling down.

Endlessly.

down into a void.

## \* FB Notification sound \* ( Omg I just got 2 new followers )

We are living in a time where technology is enriching us as individuals.  
We are living in a time where we have access to a lot of information.  
We are living in a time where we are constantly connected.  
But something has been bothering me for a long time.  
I have been feeling a little overloaded lately, What effect is our  
relationship with this limitless interconnection having on our creativity,  
productivity and our sense of self?

## \*Email sound \*



Fig. 2.

*“Are you losing focus, becoming anxious? Having a sense of  
feeling Disconnected to it all? Then this is your MOMENT.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://inthemoment.io/>

I have been trying to find different ways to navigate this constant stream of information. The journey has uncovered a complex duality of both positive and negative, importantly raising awareness to the way we are using our devices.

As Sherry Turkle expresses in her book *Alone Together* “ new technologies allow us to dial down human contact.”<sup>5</sup> We are shutting down a voice inside of us, which is extremely important in our self development. Forever distracting/ distancing moment's of self reflection. We are everywhere except in the moment.

This has led me to question what solitude means for an artist now a days. Even when I think of 'real' solitude , I get this often romanticized image in my head. How different is this early cliché of solitude & how does it relate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

To investigate this I began to look at Henry David Thoreau, an American author, poet, philosopher and naturalist ; best know for his book *Walden* and for his reflections upon simple living in a natural environment. He built himself a little wooden shed, near to a beautiful pond surrounded by animals and plants, Where over a period of (?) years he would pass his time, observing life around him.

This romantic ideal is a place I could only dream of in this hyper modernized world, but in researching it I was forced to ask my self how would I actually feel should I find myself in that situation? *Would I become bored?*

I'm surrounded by a city landscape and with it the buzzes of the social demands of digital life. That is the habitat I have lived in my entire life, yet within it I feel this urge to living a solitary life. Is this nothing more than romantic refuge from the stresses of modernity?

Is this current way of living interfering with my creative ability's? Am I in need of the solitude I long for?

Are we comfortable with ourselves when we are alone, disconnected, or do we grab for our phones? Do you think it is possible to find a balanced way of living with all these new technologies? Or is it a waste of our time? Is solitude how we know it changing? Or do we not have the need for this anymore?

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<sup>5</sup> Sherry Turkle – *Alone Together* Why we expect more from technology and less from each other 2011 , pg.15

Sometimes I ask myself the question :  
Why don't just delete it all? Well I guess it isn't that easy.

\* ping \*  
( 1 new like )

I instantly get a feeling.  
A euphoric bliss.  
Which eventually fades in 1 min.  
'Stop fucking typing and look at me!'



Fig. 3



Just stop, Just ponder.  
Solitude / Loneliness

**“ Loneliness is the poverty of the self ; solitude is the richness of self. “**  
**May Sarton**

The internet has brought the potential to unite individuals all around the world.

It has made the world feel smaller, and gave us the possibility's to share the most minute details of our lives with one another.

But what about the connection with ourselves, Our inner voice?

It is hard to Imagine what our current society , would look like without our devices. What would we do? Everywhere I look , I see people looking down into their laps. Every solitary moment, for instance When I'm on some form of public transport the majority of the people are lit from below, that ever present neon glow; processing information rather than interacting with the moment they are in, I have started to question what are the benefits of being a human, what makes you different from technology?

Maybe it it isn't all that strange, maybe it is just a new way of being. But I can't help feeling we are forgetting something important

**“ But are we dumbin down for technology and the cost of living?”**

**Lil B – The age of information**

The Great Minds of ancient Greece were the first in the Western world who presented what could get achieved by living together, But it was also the Greeks who worked out a philosophical justification for living alone.

Plato was the first poet of solitude, for Plato the key to solitude is the condition in which we can think. He defines thought as an inner dialogue, It's that ability to reflect to be with oneself in an inner conversation. <sup>6</sup>

Plato showed us wonderful images of Socrates wrapped in that kind of contemplation on his way to a dinner party where he just stands on the porch for hours not going in, because he is so absorbed in his solitary thinking. We see in a way that solitude is modeled on society. Socrates could be intensely alone, but ultimately would come back into conversation with others. His solitude enriched his thought. <sup>7</sup>

Another example could be taken from Aristotle who understood that we are political animals that live in a polis. (Small city ) Human beings are social there practical reasoning has to do with the way the city and society conducts itself.

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<sup>6</sup> BBC Podcast In our time philosophy of solitude

<sup>7</sup> BBC Podcast In our time philosophy of solitude

But in his last book he starts hymning the life of study and contemplation. He said the highest part of the human soul has to be exercised, to do this one must wrap themselves into contemplation.<sup>8</sup>

Solitude and loneliness are two terms that still confuses a lot of people. The social need to connect with other human beings is one of the most basic. Having friends in our life is important, thus we relate being surrounded by people as something fundamentally positive.

Conversely being alone gets portrayed as something negative in our society, if you are alone then you must be lonely. I have come to understand that the ability to be alone is super important for self reflection and internal growth. Another basic need we have is solitude, the moments one *chooses* to take time apart for oneself. Solitude promotes insight<sup>9</sup>

If we look at the differences, loneliness is marked by a sense of isolation. You have the feeling that something is missing. Out of my own experience you can be with people but still feel lonely; missing meaningful connection.

**“ I like the idea of isolation, I like the idea of solitude. You can be connected and have a phone and still be lonely.”**

**Paul Theroux**

We have interactions with the natural, social and inner world.

Solitude is a state of choosing to be alone, without being lonely. It is a much more positive engagement with the self. We use it for reflection, inner search or growth or even enjoyment of something simple. It is a great opportunity to replenish ourselves, to be aware of our surroundings.

**\* Writing FB status update \***

**WHO AM I ?**

According to John Cowper Powy's who wrote the book *A Philosophy of Solitude*:

“Solitude is the necessary social, psychological, and intellectual state of the individual. It is social in pulling away from the life and tumult of the crowd”<sup>10</sup>“

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<sup>8</sup> BBC Podcast In our time philosophy of solitude

<sup>9</sup> Solitude , A return to the self – Anthony Storr Pg.33

<sup>10</sup> John Cowper Powy , Philosophy of solitude

<http://www.hermitary.com/bookreviews/powys.html>

It is psychological in the sense of identifying and pursuing a form of mind for the personal pursuit of solitude. And it is intellectual in offering a philosophy calling upon a variety of classic thinkers and using the tools of plain everyman logic.”<sup>11</sup>

Powy's also sees that the simplicity of mind and desire as a key to self-control and understanding. His elementalism is based on the solitude that is evoked by this self-knowledge, which allows a person to make and define a life for themselves based not upon the tempo and rhythms of the crowd and technology but unspoken wisdom that wells up from solitude itself.

self-knowledge , a sense of self, we create our identity by going into conversation with ourselves, we reflect on the things we do. We think and act independently. We are being guided by a voice in our head called the disembodied voice.

If we look at the moment when we grab our phones, what is happening to the mind and to the self? Why are we shutting down this important moment? Are we too anxious to spend time with ourselves?

#### **\* Vibration in my pocket**

**( Ah a call, I don't really like to make calls.. It wont be that important, I'll text them back later )**

“Gaps used to happen all the time. Now they're disappearing. You're eating lunch with a friend and they excuse themselves to the restroom. A gap. Now, you pull out your phone because being unstimulated makes you feel anxious. Waiting time in a line at the bank? Used to be a gap. Now it's an opportunity to send an email or a text.” – Joe kraus



Fig. 5

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<sup>11</sup> John Cowper Powy , Philosophy of solitude  
<http://www.hermitary.com/bookreviews/powys.html>

To turn off / on ,  
The effects.

' I want to be more than a face behind the screen . ' <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ryder Ripps - Alone Together trailer (2015) <http://alonetogether.network/>

**\* Gmail sound \***

Are you tired of feeling filled up, have you been busy all day?!  
Do you feel like you are consumed by all technology's?  
Then this one is for you!

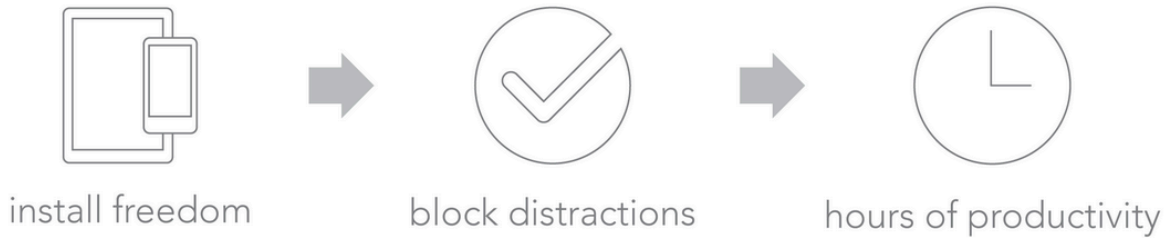


Fig. 6

I think this little piece of text in my inbox just sums it up right.  
More than ever I recognize this feeling of 'being busy'.  
I feel bombarded with information everyday more than I can take.  
I am shifting from the physical city landscapes into the digital ones.  
From my experience after taking a year off from my studies I can say that I felt like I was caved in by information. I constantly had information coming from different sources but found it harder to make work myself. Suddenly, I had a shorter attention span and found it difficult to keep my attention with just one project, instead I was just half in 5 projects. I had more digital demands then ever before, speaking with friends, they seemed to feel the same

**“ Hey How are You !? “**

**“ Busy ! “ , “ So busy “ , “ Crazy busy ! “**

Do we feel important when we are busy?

I'm living with this feeling of being constantly Busy, but I wonder what I am really busy with, Am I not just busy thinking that I am busy?

**CMD+T - CMD+T - CMD+T - CMD+T - CMD+T - CMD+T -**

13 Freedom App <https://freedom.to/>

Fig. 7

Does technology truly allow me to multitask, all these tabs open certainly make me feel like I am busy, but how is this busy-ness reflecting on my productivity? For me technology seems to be creating a culture of distraction. It's becoming more and more difficult for me to focus or pay attention to what's important.

## **Buzzz** (...Invited you to play candycrush)

Different brain studies have shown that we are not made for multitasking , our devices maybe make us think we are but what the brain does is trying to switch attention between two tasks. It makes us in fact less efficient in what we do.

'We're radically over-developing the parts of quick thinking, distractible brain and letting the long-form-thinking, creative, contemplative, solitude-seeking, thought-consolidating pieces of our brain atrophy by not using them  
- joe kraus

Technology increases the idea we should multitask. So what are we losing as a result of this? We are losing the ability to take time for something , to indulge ourselves in a book or a play. <sup>14</sup> I know this because every time I tried reading a book, I also would be on my phone or reading something else on the internet. I just couldn't get myself to sit down and enjoy reading. I have found taking more time plays an important role in creativity and insight, our ability for logic and reasoning



Fig. 8

I can almost say it made me a little anxious about things. I felt like I had to keep up, afraid I maybe missed something.. It made me feel exhausted.

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<sup>14</sup> The Guardian - <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jan/18/modern-world-bad-for-brain-daniel-j-levitin-organized-mind-information-overload> ( 18 jan. 2015 )

‘ Thirty years ago, travel agents made our airline and rail reservations, salespeople helped us find what we were looking for in shops and professional typists or secretaries helped busy people with their correspondence. Now we do most of those things ourselves. We are doing the jobs of 10 different people while still trying to keep up with our lives, our children and parents, our friends , our careers, our hobbies, and our favorite TV shows’.<sup>15</sup>

Next to multitasking what happens is a lot of micro decision making. This is probably one of the most difficult things of our time, at least for me it is. I always have the feeling I am drowning in choices and options and possibilities. Which brings more confusion to my thought process, my head feels like its over floating sometimes, however when I find myself in a creative act or performing music I am lost in a moment. I am completely taken by what I am doing, my attention is fixed.

I have found my creativity thrives in gap times, moments of insight. You won't get this when you are bombarded by information. You're blocking these moments and shutting down the disembodied voice of the self. You are connected but have you lost a true connection with yourself?

I am an individual , I can act and think independently of all other individuals. While this seems so obvious from my point of view the modern idea of individuality was replaced long ago. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century people have more than one way of being. We are able to move fluidly in and out of different contexts, cultures and ideas, we think and behave differently in relation to others. The modern person is a hybrid. They have many understanding of themselves.<sup>16</sup> Their self – and their identity – are not fixed, but continually shifting.

The old romanticized ideal of solitude has not been lost, however it has changed. We need to move and develop a different way of thinking for we have moved from solid times to more liquid times.

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<sup>15</sup> The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jan/18/modern-world-bad-for-brain-daniel-j-levitin-organized-mind-information-overload> ( 18 Jan. 2015 ).

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.shiftingthinking.org/?page\\_id=61](http://www.shiftingthinking.org/?page_id=61)



## Stillness

“ So if we’re living in a moment when you can be in seven different places at once, and you can have seven different conversations at once on a back channel here, on a phone here, on a laptop, how do we have stillness? How threatened is it? How do we regain it? “ Sherry Turkle<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://niemanreports.org/articles/digital-demands-the-challenges-of-constant-connectivity/>

## CTRL – ALT – DELETE

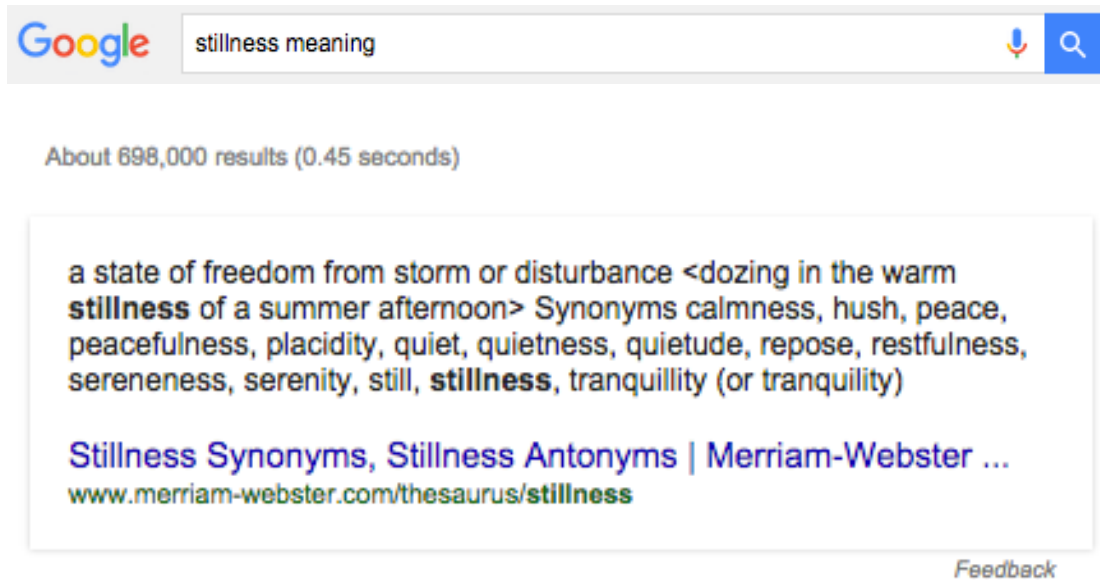


Fig. 9

Being still, quieting the mind and doing nothing. Simply being. This is one of the most difficult things to do in our media driven lives, we are always on , and over-communicated. If you are living in the city you know there is noise everywhere, it's barely silence. This works draining for our mental state of being, which then works negative to our physical way of being.

Abba Poeman once mentioned “ If you are silent, you will have peace wherever you live. “ <sup>18</sup>

Cmd key, F10 mutes

It's importance to maintain perspective in life. If i don't make time to be still, I will be constantly influenced by hundreds of little voices with big demands. Another reason why it's good to have stillness is staying connected with the true self. People who realize their creative potential are constantly bridging the gap between inner & outer world. <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In the heart of the desert : The spirituality of the desert fathers and mothers Pg.72

<sup>19</sup> Solitude a return to the self – Anthony Storr , Pg.69 ( The hunger of imagination )

Solitude and stillness are the key to a calm and clear mind. The capacity to be alone is a valuable resource , imagination is more highly developed in human being than any other creature.<sup>20</sup>

We have to figure out how we can find a balance between solitude, stillness and technology. Think about it's importance and figure out what it all means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and reinvent it the way it works best for you. Experiment with letting technology interfere in your life. It's here to stay.

These practices and solutions are all about slowing down and emptying the mind, while the digital revolution is speeding up our lives and filling our heads with vast quantities of information.

"If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is," Jobs told Isaacson. "If you try to calm it, it only makes things worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to hear more subtle things — that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before. It's a discipline; you have to practice it."

“ Steve jobs”



Fig. 10

We should look at technology as an extension of our body parts , our mind. It is like an external brain. Which we have to take care of, to make sure it stay's organized and clear.

The idea is to train our attention and mind, to create a certain quality of mind.

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<sup>20</sup> Solitude a return to the self – Anthony Storr , Pg. 62 ( The hunger of imagination )

And how to create a more calm and organized mind than with mindfulness exercises. Which are showing us that it's about slowing down, in a speedy time, and helps us emptying the mind. It allows us to experience the moment and what we are doing.

This is where there might be conflict for some people when it comes to technology.

Because our technology has a stamp on it, for not being there in the moment, because people might share their experiences somewhere different than in real life. But that in fact has to do with our ways of using those devices.

Since I started noticing that the technology was making more use of me , I started to think and look for solutions. Since then until now my relationship towards technology has changed for the positives. Because we are not just living with technology, I believe they can help us making living more at ease.

As with many trends Silicon valley introduced us to the mix of mindfulness and tech. They have seen it is an important element to nurture creativity and production. Google for example has a mindfulness-based training program. It's called search inside yourself <sup>21</sup>, it's created by Chade – Meng Tan. Showing people how to get the best out of themselves while doing less. Letting them find an inner capacity to create.

We can call this digital therapy to stimulate our creativity.

They are there to help relieve the stress and distractions

According to Andy Pudicombe the founder of headspace a meditation app for the iphone :

“Forty-seven per cent of our life is spent lost in thought. Distracted!”

**Tap – Swipe – Notes**

**Enlightment, solitude and mindfulness on the smartphone.**

**- Save.**

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/technology/google-course-asks-employees-to-take-a-deep-breath.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>



Fig. 11

## Conclusion

Are we trapped? Are we victims of some sense of our time?

The answer is no because we have the ability to transcend from it all.

But we need to become aware of that technology can help us provide with different ways of solitude to nurture our minds and creativity.

We have seen that the capacity to be alone is a valuable resource for us human beings .

Looking at the state of the world today I think we are in deep need of self reflection. To have the ability to reflect upon situations and the world we are living in. We need our moments to replenish and refresh. To discover ourselves. We have seen that this has been an important element through history, for men and society.

We need to help young people grow, explore, develop and use their multiple identities so they can easily emphasize and understand situations. For that we have to keep a critical self reflection in mind.

“ Critical thinking is a desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order ; and hatred for every kind if imposture “ Francis Bacon ( 1605 )

The point which I'm trying to get clear is taking care of our minds, teaching ourselves thought processes, especially to children. To not let them become a generation of task oriented mindless office drones. Some examples, solving simple or more complex problems of one's own.

Developing our critical thinking and problem solving skills, which are crucial for creativity.

I started to look closer to my relationship with technology and it's devices. How can technology help us to live a more fuller , creative and mindful life. We need to make progress.

We are becoming more aware on how to use our new technology.

The more and more everything get's technologized the more need we feel to return to the 'real'. The human element.

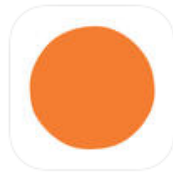
We need to reinvent solitude with the technologies that can assist us with this. For me there are different phases of solitudes, the fact is that we have to make people more aware of this. Everyone has creative potential, but you have to train it just like anything else.

We are all spending so much money on our appearance, cars and other things. And if that car breaks down we take it to the garage. But we should think the same way as for our minds. We take care of our body, but we should do the same with our minds. I think we can use technology to get into a solitary state of mind, which eventually can help us with boosting our thought process and creativity. Imagination is more highly developed in human beings than in any other creature, and this is what makes us different from technology.



Mindfulness  
Meditation -...  
Health & Fitness

22



Headspace:  
Meditation...  
Health & Fitness

23



Moment - Track  
how much you...  
Health & Fitness

24



Freedom -  
Reduce...  
Productivity

25

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<sup>22</sup> App. store – Mindfulness mediation –

<sup>23</sup> App. Store - Headspace meditation

<sup>24</sup> App. Store – Moment track how much you use your phone

<sup>25</sup> App. Store – Freedom reduce productivity

"The creative process continues throughout life. No creator is ever satisfied with what he has done. New problems constantly occur which compel him to seek new solutions." Anthony Storr



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Figure 4. Source unknown – own collection 2015

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