**Who’s Zoomin’ Who?**

David Pérez

As many people, out of necessity, embrace apps like Zoom and other digital media in order to connect, communicate, and earn a living, I find myself resisting the wave, not wanting to even like it. So far, I've had three meetings with friends and family on Zoom, and while it was nice to see familiar and loving faces, overall it left a bad aftertaste in my mouth, depressed even. I wondered if I was trading one health crisis for another, getting increasingly used to—and even happy with—having less physical contact with my fellow human being; living in a virtual world ruled by algorithms, glued to an electronic screen, hooked on speed.

Again, I know that because of COVID, millions of people now depend on maximizing these types of apps for their bread-and-butter, and only for the grace does my income situation enable me to opt-out. Nonetheless, it's a real question: Is our being forced to spend more time online potentially another health hazard? To quote that 1985 Aretha Franklin song: "Who's Zoomin' Who?"

Health concerns notwithstanding, perhaps my resistance and discomfort about the growing reliance on the digital world come from the Luddite Might-Wannabe inside me, fed over the years by my job at Op Cit Bookshop in Taos, New Mexico. Formerly known as Moby Dickens, the store has been operating in the same location for over 30 years as a time machine to the past, some might say an ancient past.

Our Point of Sales (POS) system still runs on MS-Dos, the precursor to Windows built-in 1977 and too old to be linked to the Internet. The computer monitor is a CRT with green lettering and the keyboard functions with F keys. We also use an Okidata Dot Matrix Printer. The only thing missing is Pong.

Alas, we do have a laptop with a Wi-Fi connection, which allows us to order inventory from distributors like Ingram, as well as checking emails and doing research on bookstore-related news. But by and large Op Cit operates very old school. We even use index cards and scrap paper to take special orders and leave each other notes.

When customers, a steady mix of locals and tourists, discover how low-tech we are, they invariably respond with something like, "Oh my God, that's so awesome!" Many of them wonder how such an old operating system could have lasted this long. We wonder the same thing.

And here's the thing: The majority of folks who get delighted at our old tech ways are young people. In addition to amazement, they constantly thank us for "keeping it slow and simple;" for showing that one need to succumb to a high-tech paradigm that insists faster and newer is always better.

Personally, the Op Cit experience has caused me to examine just what it is that I truly need. As science author Nicholas Carr wrote in *The Glass Cage: Automation and Us* (W.W. Norton 1994): "We assume that anyone who rejects a new tool in favor of an older one is guilty of nostalgia, of making choices sentimentally rather than rationally. But the real sentimental fallacy is the assumption that the new thing is always better. What makes a one tool superior to another has nothing to do with how new it is. What matters is how it enlarges or diminishes us, how it shapes our experiences with nature and culture and one another."

Writer and reporter, David Sax, makes a similar point in *The Revenge of Analog* (Public Affairs 2016), a stirring and detailed book that shows how youth are at the forefront of getting unplugged from a relentlessly digitized world. Sax writes: "There's an argument that the world has fundamentally changed, and we should just get used to it. That the amount of time spent on computers, smartphones and so forth is because the young love it, it's their way of communication. To deny that is to deny reality. Moreover, the technology is good; it is liberating and has opened vast new frontiers."

The book shows how it's the exact opposite. It is the younger generation that has become less enamored with digital technology, and warier of its effects. Sax explains: "These were the teenagers and twentysomethings out buying turntables, film cameras, and novels in paperback. They were the students who told me how they would rather be constrained by the borders of a page than the limits of word processors."

All this is manna for my soul. And while I'm a long way from becoming a Neo-Luddite and smashing some machines, I do feel the human race would be best served by taking pause of any "new normal" that involves becoming more dependent on a digitized, super-speed world. Of course, we do what we have to do. Yet, that's part of the issue, isn't it? What is it we have to do?