

DISCON- NECTION



PRACTIC- ES

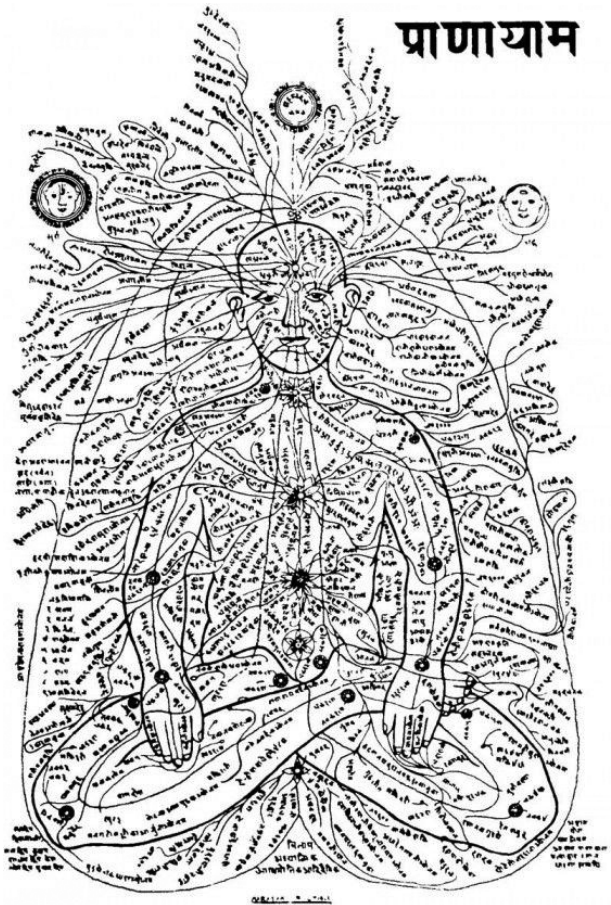
Patanjali is variously estimated to have lived between the 2nd century BCE to the 4th century CE. The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali are a collection of 196 sutras which synthesized and organized knowledge about yoga from older traditions.

The eight limbs of yoga include physical, ethical, meditative and spiritual recommendations and insights, which continue to resonate thousands of years later.

The exact historical record and provenance of the texts is not known and is perhaps not important. Rather than thinking of the sutras as a divine ancient text handed down once to be true as it is forever in the same form, I imagine the creators of the yogic practices as ancient researchers.

I imagine monks noticing that it feels good to stretch their bodies, and exploring this feeling further. Developing language and awareness about the practices and postures they were discovering based on direct experience, as it kaleidoscopically fragmented into a range of practices ranging from diet to breath to a map of sensations in the bodies.

प्राणायाम



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Creating your own
cybernetic Systems

**Constrained
by your own
systems**

**Empowered
by your own
systems**

NOT having
agency

having
agency

**Constrained by
societal systems**

**Using your
“Force of Will”**

NOT creating your own
cybernetic Systems

During the time most of this research was happening, there were no screens.

I believe that how we relate to our devices is not a simple question with an answer like “use moderation” or “all screens are evil”.

Screens can influence and mediate how we work, where we go, who we date, and how we communicate.

Instead of accepting the default narratives of how we are supposed to use our devices, there are better and stranger possibilities.

We all need to listen to our own bodies and their needs and their limits, and what works for one person may not work for another, but there are also practices that can be shared. When I am in certain yoga poses which I never would have thought of on my own I feel like I am using ancient technology.

We have only had screen-based devices for a short period of time and there are no established practices for nourishing ways to use these devices.

Over the past three years I've experimented with a range of different new ways of relating to my phone and to my computer, ranging from simple to radical.

For me this has become a form of mindfulness practice and research.

This zine is an offering of practices I found helpful, and an invitation to do your own research and see what works for you.

PRACTICE 1:

Morning
Airplane
Mode

I used to check my facebook feed on my phone as soon as I woke up in the morning.

I used to think of this as just part of my process of waking up — awake, but too tired to actually get up (this now strikes me as a relevant metaphor).

Three years ago, on somewhat of a whim as an experiment one day I made a commitment to get out of bed and meditate for 10 minutes every morning before checking my phone for one week. After the first day of doing this it was much more powerful than expected. After the ten minutes it felt like I had just had a cup of coffee but less jittery, more purely lucid.

This was the beginning of my serious interest in meditation and my interest in how I relate to my phone. So for me they have been connected since the beginning of my intentional practice.

Put your phone into Airplane Mode (or Do Not Disturb) before you go to sleep, and then complete some part of your morning routine before taking your phone out of airplane mode.

I have also spoke with people who have benefited from this practice without sitting to meditate, but just eat breakfast before turning their phone on.

There is something about starting the day on your own time rather than in a reactive state of mind which carries into the rest of the day.

I also have enjoyed using an alarm clock that isn't my phone.

PRACTICE

2:

Ritual Phone
Pot

I realized that I enjoyed spending time in places where there was no service. I went to a few talks in a basement where there was no service and I noticed the feeling and attention I was giving.

To simulate a room without service in my own apartment, I put an empty pasta box on a table next to my front door and when I entered the apartment, I would put my phone into the box. I imagine more spaces and rooms where leaving your phone outside could be a suggestion similar to taking off your shoes. Particularly with sacred spaces and rituals I find the presence (and the resulting dis-presence) of phones to be jarring.

I have particularly enjoyed the feeling of putting my phone into a metal pot with a lid on it, both at home and in my work space, as a ritual and physical demarcator of time and space away from the phone.

I have also spoke with someone who enjoyed putting their phone in a Folger's Coffee Container which also has a nice symbolic lid.

Even if you don't use the phone pot everyday, having

a place to put the phone which represents you are not using it can create mental clarity about when you are and are not online. The interconnection between symbolic and physical space has been a recurring theme.

PRACTICE

3:

Phone Blocks

When I first used a dumb phone, I enjoyed the experience but at the time found it difficult to navigate without map applications. I wondered, “Is there a way I could have a phone that just offered texting, phone calls, and maps?”

There is a way to do this using parental restriction features on smart-phones. You can set your phone so that you can't install new applications and can't use a web browser.

Before enabling the above restrictions, install just the applications you really want, then ask a friend to be your Pin Daddy (or Pin Keeper if BDSM makes you uncomfortable) and child-block your phone using a pin that you don't know.

I also find this to be a nice ritual. The moment a friend enters the pin can be strangely beautiful — you should remind them to write the pin down somewhere so they don't forget. You can always text them if you really need the pin, but I found this social barrier prevents my lizard brain from sliding into old habits.

I often hear people ask why the block is necessary, and

why you wouldn't just delete the applications you don't want and not use the browser. To me it's not about necessity, rather there is a distinct feeling of not having something immediately accessible which feels different than choosing not to use it. Like being in the middle of the woods, compared with being in your room in a city with the door closed. Why I don't just use mental discipline to avoid apps also brings up questions like why libraries are quiet, and why we do different things in different rooms of the house.

Separate from any theory, I can say from personal experience of having my phone blocked for months that it continues to surprise me how I would reach to look at a feed, remember the block, and then do something else instead, even months after the block was first initiated.

These moments felt like a gift from my past self to my present self and affirmed my interest in re-designing my relationship to technology. I think of my mind/being not just as something in my head but as something embodied all around me, through settings, configurations, rituals and relationships. The cybernetics of mindfulness.

If you have a yoga mat in your room you are more likely to do yoga. If you have a nice place to read you are more likely to spend more time reading. If you have bananas in your kitchen you are more likely to eat them.

PRACTICE

4:

Dumb Phone

I used a child-blocked smart-phone for over a year but a part of me still wondered if I needed the smart-phone at all.

I bought a dumb phone and printed out a calendar. I decided I would try to leave my iPhone in my room and just leave the house with my dumb phone and I would mark each day on the calendar that I did this. Before I would leave the house I would make a small map with directions of where I needed to go on a piece of paper. I decided that I would collect these maps and make this part of a project, and that this would align my work with things I wanted to explore on my own.

I sent messages to my friends explaining to them what I was doing.

Even with all this intention, after three days, I felt very strong doubt come up. I worried that my friends would not want to deal with this system of communication and that they would abandon me. I worried that to use a flip-phone would make me fall out of society. I wondered if my research was worth fucking up my life.

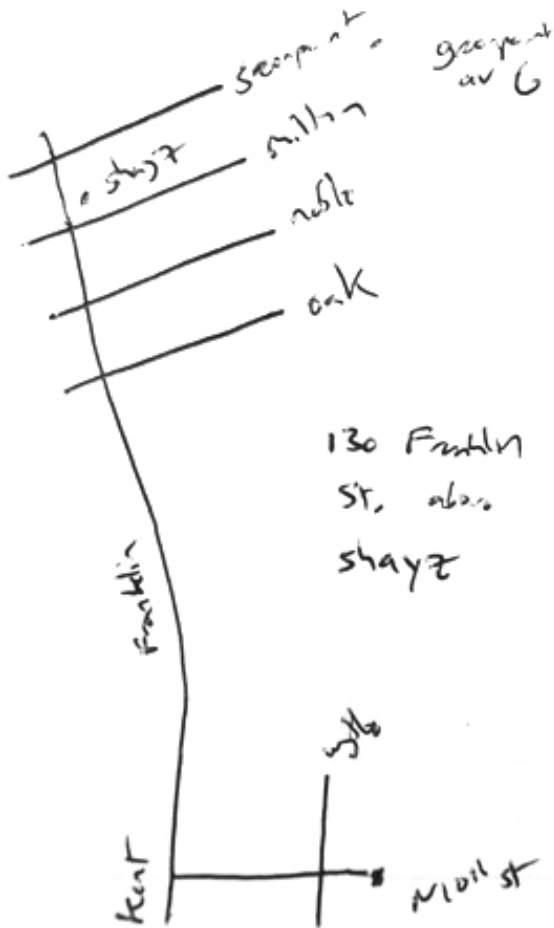
That night, I was on the way to a friend's birthday

party with just my dumb phone, and she texted me to tell me that they were still there (before she said they might change locations). We had been messaging before over Telegram, and this small unexpected action counter-acted my doubt — affirming that at least in this one instance people could understand, and those who wanted to try to communicate me in this new way could. She told me it wasn't that complicated. I was reminded that there are some people who respect different ways of being and that these are also the people I want to be friends with.

I re-committed to the dumb phone.

In the three months since then, I kept a journal of different things that happened and thoughts that came up relating to not having a smart phone. I've had a couple other moments of doubt, but mostly have found it really nice and over-time forgot that this isn't always what I did.

Now when I make a map before I leave the house, I don't think "I'm making a map", I just think "these are the directions I need to get there". It doesn't feel like an inconvenience, my sense of time just re-adjusts to



include five minutes for map-making before I leave the house.

Interestingly, once I've made the map I hardly ever have to look at it — something about writing down the directions makes me remember them. My sense of direction has also gotten much much better over the past four months — perhaps the biggest concrete outcome of this project is a better memory of subway and bus lines in Berlin.

It makes navigation feel alive, and like a form of play. I also look at my dumb phone and think about how I only have positive feelings towards it, and the only noises it makes are when people I care about are trying to reach me.

If you use a dumb phone, there are some objects that I found complement it well:

- a watch with a timer
- a mini-notebook and pencil (for writing directions and taking notes)
- an actual map of the city you live in (a fallback in case you fall off of your directions)

I think with many ascetic practices, when you are using something regularly it's hard to imagine living without it, but once you have gone without something for a long enough period of time it stops feeling like going without and just feels like going.

PRACTICE

5:

Low-

Frequency

Communi-
cation

92.3 FM isn't a less well-connected radio station than 95.5 FM, although it definitely communicates its signal at a lower frequency. This can also be seen as a metaphor for how we communicate with other people. Communicating care can happen at many different frequencies.

If you just get rid of your smart-phone and don't tell anyone and don't respond to people's messages they will think you are ignoring them. But if you tell friends that you are interested in digital minimalism because of it's psychological and mindful benefits and you want to be more present, many people will understand. I occasionally find this difficult because currently instant-response is the societal norm, but there are lots of other bad societal norms too.

Instead of re-creating a disney movie, a romantic partner once told me they wanted to have a DIY relationship, and I continue to be influenced by this.

ROOMS IN A HOUSE

If you watch television for 8 hours in a row, you might feel that you watched too much television. You would have a feeling that you wanted to get up and go do something else.

Smart-phones specifically, unlike any other previous screen, are located on the body and taken everywhere. Without a conscious disconnection practice, there is no getting up and walking away.

The infinite scrollable feed is also a good metaphor for capitalism in general. A UX designed to maximize consumption with no limit. Is more always better? Is more features all together always the best option? Instead of seamlessly switching between anything at anytime, what would technology look like if it felt more like rooms in a house with some walking in between spaces?

This is an ongoing research project. Disconnection practices can take many forms and I hope some of these ideas can be helpful.

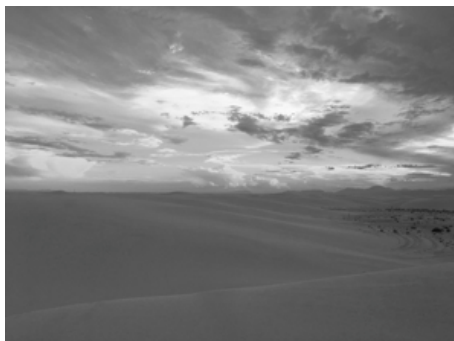
This zine was created by Max Fowler and Catherine Schmidt as part of The Disconnection Shop, an installation for Transmediale Vorspiel 2019 curated by Petja Ivanova.

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