

The Smartphone Society

The automobile was in many respects the defining commodity of the twentieth century. Its importance didn't stem from technological virtuosity or the sophistication of the assembly line, but rather from an ability to reflect and shape society. The ways in which we produced, consumed, used, and regulated automobiles were a window into twentieth-century capitalism itself – a glimpse into how the social, political, and economic intersected and collided.

Today, in a period characterized by financialization and globalization, where “information” is king, the idea of any commodity defining an era might seem quaint. But commodities are no less important today, and people's relationships to them remain central to understanding society. If the automobile was fundamental to grasping the last century, the smartphone is the defining commodity of our era.

People today spend a lot of time on their phones. They check them constantly throughout the day and keep them close to their bodies. They sleep next to them, bring them to the bathroom, and stare at them while they walk, eat, study, work, wait, and drive. Twenty percent of young adults [even admit](#) to checking their phones during sex.

What does it mean that people seem to have a phone in their hand or pocket everywhere they go, all day long? To make sense of our purported collective phone addiction, we should follow the advice of [Harry Braverman](#), and examine the “machine on the one side and social relations on the other, and the manner in which these two come together in society.”

Hand Machines

Apple insiders refer to FoxConn's assembly city in Shenzhen as Mordor – J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth hellhole. As a spate

of suicides in 2010 tragically [revealed](#), the moniker is only a slight exaggeration of the factories in which young Chinese workers assemble iPhones. Apple's supply chain links colonies of software engineers with hundreds of component suppliers in North America, Europe, and East Asia – Gorilla Glass from Kentucky, motion coprocessors from the Netherlands, camera chips from Taiwan, and transmit modules from Costa Rica funnel into dozens of assembly plants in China.

Capitalism's simultaneously creative and destructive tendencies spur constant changes in global production networks, and within these networks, new configurations of corporate and state power. In the old days, producer-driven supply chains, exemplified by industries like auto and steel, were dominant. People like [Lee Iacocca](#) and Boeing legend [Bill Allen](#) decided what to make, where to make it, and how much to sell it for.

But as the economic and political contradictions of the postwar boom heightened in the 1960s and '70s, more and more countries in the Global South adopted export-oriented strategies to achieve their development goals. A new type of supply chain emerged (particularly in light industries like apparel, toys, and electronics) in which retailers, rather than manufacturers, held the reins. In these buyer-driven models, companies like Nike, Liz Claiborne, and Walmart design goods, name their price to manufacturers, and often own little more in the way of production than their lucrative brands.

Power and governance are located at multiple points in the smartphone chain, and production and design are deeply integrated at the global scale. But the new configurations of power tend to reinforce existing wealth hierarchies: poor and middle-income countries try desperately to move into more lucrative nodes through infrastructure development and trade deals, but upgrading opportunities are few and far between, and the global nature of production makes struggles by workers to improve conditions and wages extremely difficult.

Congolese coltan miners are separated from Nokia executives by more than an ocean – they are divided by history and politics, by their country’s relationship to finance, and by decades-old development barriers, many of which are rooted in colonialism.

The smartphone value chain is a useful map of global exploitation, trade politics, uneven development, and logistical prowess, but the deeper significance of the device lies elsewhere. To discover the more subtle shifts in accumulation that are illustrated and facilitated by the smartphone, we must turn from the process by which people use machines to create phones to the process by which we use the phone itself as a machine.

Considering the phone as a machine is, in some respects, immediately intuitive. Indeed, the Chinese word for mobile phone is *shouji*, or “hand machine.” People often use their hand machines as they would any other tool, particularly in the workplace. Neoliberal demands for flexible, mobile, networked workers make them essential.

Smartphones extend the workplace in space and time. Emails can be answered at breakfast, specs reviewed on the train home, and the next day’s meetings verified before lights out. The Internet becomes the place of work, with the office just a dot on the vast map of possible workspaces.

The extension of the working day through smartphones has become so ubiquitous and pernicious that labor groups are fighting back. In France, unions and tech businesses signed an agreement in April 2014 [recognizing](#) 250,000 tech workers’ “right to disconnect” after a day’s work, and Germany is currently contemplating legislation that would prohibit after-work emails and phone calls. German Labor Minister Andrea Nahles [told](#) a German newspaper that it is “indisputable that there is a connection between permanent availability and psychological diseases.”

Smartphones have also facilitated the creation of new types of work and new ways of accessing labor markets. In the “marketplace for odd jobs,” companies like [TaskRabbit](#) and [Postmates](#) have built their business models by tapping into the “distributed workforce” through smartphones.

TaskRabbit connects people who would prefer to avoid the drudgery of doing their own chores with people desperate enough to do piecework odd jobs for pay. Those who want chores done, like the laundry or cleanup after their kid’s birthday party, link up with “taskers” using TaskRabbit’s mobile app.

Taskers are expected to continuously monitor their phones for potential jobs (response time determines who gets a job); consumers can order or cancel a tasker on the go; and upon successfully completing the chore, the contractor can be paid directly through the phone.

Postmates – the darling of the gig economy – is an up-and-comer in the business world, especially after Spark Capital pumped \$16 million into it earlier this year. Postmates tracks its “couriers” in cities like Boston, San Francisco, and New York using a mobile app on their iPhones as they hustle to deliver artisanal tacos and sugar-free vanilla lattes to homes and offices. When a new job comes in, the app routes it to the closest courier, who must respond immediately and complete the task within an hour to get paid.

The couriers, who are not recognized employees of Postmates, are less enthusiastic than Spark. They get \$3.75 per delivery plus tips, and because they’re classified as independent contractors, are not protected by minimum wage laws.

In this way, our hand machines fit seamlessly into the modern world of work. The smartphone facilitates contingent employment models and self-exploitation by linking workers to capitalists without the fixed costs and emotional investment of more traditional employment relations.

Selves for Sale

Erving Goffman, an influential American sociologist, [was interested](#) in the self and how individuals produce and perform their selves through social interaction. By his own admission, [Goffman](#) was a bit Shakespearean – for him “all the world is a stage.” He argued that social interactions can be thought of as performances, and that people’s performances vary depending on their audience.

We enact these “front-stage” performances for people – acquaintances, coworkers, judgmental relatives – that we want to impress. Front-stage performances give the appearance that our actions “maintain and embody certain standards.” They convince the audience that we really are who we say we are: a responsible, intelligent, moral human being.

But front-stage performances can be shaky and are often undermined by mistakes – people put their foot in their mouth, they misread social cues, they have a piece of spinach lodged in their teeth, or they get caught in a lie. Goffman was fascinated by how hard we work to perfect and maintain our front-stage performances and how often we fail at them.

Smartphones are a godsend for the dramaturgical aspects of life. They enable us to manage the impressions we make on others with control-freak precision. Instead of talking to each other, we can send text messages, planning our witticisms and avoidance strategies in advance. We can display our impeccable taste on Pinterest, superior parenting skills on CafeMom, and burgeoning artistic talents on Instagram, all in real time.

New York magazine recently ran [a piece](#) about the four most desirable people in New York City according to OKCupid. These individuals have crafted such attractive dating profiles that they are pummeled with attention and racy requests – their phones ping continually with messages from potential

paramours. Tom, one of the chosen four, regularly tweaks his profile, subbing in new photos, and rewording his self-description. He has even used OKCupid's MyBestFace profile-optimizing service.

Tom says all this effort is necessary in our present "culture of likes." Tom considers his OKCupid profile to be "an extension of himself": "I want it to look good and clean so, like, I make it do crunches and shit."

The incredible reach of social media and people's rapid adoption of it to produce and perform their selves are engendering the emergence of new technologically mediated rituals of interaction. Smartphones are now central to the way we "generate, maintain, repair, and renew as well as . . . contest or resist relationships."

Take texting rituals, which, with all their complex, unwritten rules, now play a commanding role in the relationship dynamics of most young adults. One need not deal in toxic nostalgia to admit that new, technologically mediated rituals are displacing or radically altering older conventions.

Digitally maintaining, generating, and contesting relationships through smartphones is somewhat different from using phones to complete tasks associated with wage work. Individuals don't get paid a wage for their Tinder profile or for uploading photos of their weekend adventures on Snapchat, but the selves and the rituals they produce are certainly for sale. Regardless of intention, when a person uses their smartphone to connect with people and the imagined digital community, the output of their labor of love is increasingly likely to be sold as a commodity.

Companies like Facebook are pioneers in the enclosure and sale of digital selves. [In 2013](#), Facebook had 945 million users who accessed the site through their smartphones. It made 89 percent of its revenue that year from advertising, half of

which came from mobile advertising. Its entire architecture is designed to guide the mobile production of selves through a platform that makes those selves salable.

That's why it instituted its "real names" policy: "pretending to be anything or anyone isn't allowed." Facebook needs users to use legal names so it can easily match corporeal selves with digital selves, because data produced by and connected to an actual human is more profitable.

Users of the dating site OKCupid agree to a similar exchange: "data for a date." Third-party companies sit in the background of the site, scooping up users' photos, political and religious views, and even the David Foster Wallace novels they profess to love. The data are then sold to advertisers, who create targeted, personalized ads.

The pool of people who have access to OKCupid's data is remarkably large – OkCupid, along with other companies like Match and Tinder, is owned by IAC/InterActiveCorp, the sixth-largest online network in the world. Crafting a self on OKCupid may or may not yield love, but it definitely yields corporate profits.

Awareness is spreading that our digital selves are now commodities. New School professor [Laurel Ptak](#) recently published a manifesto called "[Wages for Facebook](#)" and in March 2014, Paul Budnitz and Todd Berger created [Ello](#), a fleetingly popular Facebook alternative.

Ello proclaims: "We believe a social network can be a tool for empowerment. Not a tool to deceive, coerce, and manipulate – but a place to connect, create, and celebrate life. You are not a product." Ello promises not to sell your data to third-party advertisers, at least for now. It reserves the right to do so in the future.

However, discussions of the peddling of digital selves by gray-market data companies and Silicon Valley giants are

usually separate from conversations about increasingly exploitative working conditions or the burgeoning market for precarious, degrading work. But these are not separate phenomena – they are intricately linked, all pieces in the puzzle of modern capitalism.

iCommodify

Capital must reproduce itself and generate new sources of profit over time and space. It must constantly create and reinforce the separation between wage laborers and owners of capital, increase the value it extracts from workers, and colonize new spheres of social life to create commodities. The system, and the relationships that comprise it, are constantly in motion.

The expansion and reproduction of capital in everyday life and the colonization of new spheres of social life by capital are not always obvious. Thinking about the smartphone helps us put the pieces together because the device itself facilitates and undergirds new models of accumulation.

The evolution of work over the past three decades has been characterized by a number of trends – the lengthening of the workday and workweek, the decline of real wages, the reduction or elimination of non-wage protections from the market (like fixed pensions or health and safety regulations), the proliferation of part-time work, and the decline of unions.

At the same time, norms regarding the organization of work have also shifted. Temporary, project-oriented employment models are proliferating. Employers are no longer expected to provide job security or regular hours, and employees no longer expect those things.

But the degradation of work is not a given. Increasing exploitation and immiseration are tendencies, not fixed outcomes ordained by the rules of capitalism. They are the result of battles lost by workers and won by capitalists.

The ubiquitous use of smartphones to extend the workday and expand the market for shit jobs is a result of the weakness of both workers and working-class movements. The compulsion and willingness of increasing numbers of workers to engage with their employers through their phones normalizes and justifies the use of smartphones as a tool of exploitation, and solidifies constant availability as a requirement for earning a wage.

Apart from the Great Recession, corporate profit rates have steadily climbed since the late eighties, and not only as a result of capital (and the state) rolling back the gains of the labor movement. The reach of global markets has widened and deepened, and the development of new commodities has grown apace.

The expansion and reproduction of capital is dependent on the development of these new commodities, many of which emerge from capital's incessant drive to enclose new spheres of social life for profit, or as political economist [Massimo De Angelis](#) says, to "put [these spheres] to work for [capital's] priorities and drives."

The smartphone is central to this process. It provides a physical mechanism to allow constant access to our digital selves and opens a nearly uncharted frontier of commodification.

Individuals don't get paid in wages for creating and maintaining digital selves – they get paid in the satisfaction of participating in rituals, and the control afforded them over their social interactions. They get paid in the feeling of floating in the vast virtual connectivity, even as their hand machines mediate social bonds, helping people imagine togetherness while keeping them separate as distinct productive entities. The voluntary nature of these new rituals does not make them any less important, or less profitable for capital.

Braverman said that “the capitalist finds in [the] infinitely malleable character of human labor the essential resource for the expansion of his capital.” The last thirty years of innovation demonstrate the truth of this statement, and the phone has emerged as one of the primary mechanisms to activate, access, and channel the malleability of human labor.

Smartphones ensure that we are producing for more and more of our waking lives. They erase the boundary between work and leisure. Employers now have nearly unlimited access to their employees, and increasingly, holding even a low-paid, precarious job hinges on the ability to be always available and ready to work. At the same time, smartphones provide people constant mobile access to the digital commons and its gauzy ethos of connectivity, but only in exchange for their digital selves.

Smartphones blur the line between production and consumption, between the social and the economic, between the pre-capitalist and the capitalist, ensuring that whether one uses their phone for work or pleasure, the outcome is increasingly the same – profit for capitalists.

Does the arrival of the smartphone signify the [Debordian](#) moment in which the commodity has completed its “colonization of social life”? Is it true that not only is our relationship to commodities plain to see, but that “commodities are now *all* that there is to see?”

This might seem a bit heavy-handed. Accessing social networks and digital connectivity through mobile phones undoubtedly has liberatory elements. Smartphones can help battle anomie and promote a sense of ambient awareness, while at the same time making it easier for people to generate and maintain real relationships.

A shared connection through digital selves can also nourish resistance to the existing hierarchy of power whose internal

mechanisms isolate and silence individuals. It's impossible to imagine the protests sparked by Ferguson and police brutality without smartphones and social media. And ultimately, most people are not yet compelled to use smartphones for work, and they certainly aren't required to perform their selves through technology. Most could throw their phones into the sea tomorrow if they wished.

But they won't. People love their hand machines. Communicating primarily through smartphones is fast becoming an accepted norm, and more and more rituals are becoming technologically mediated. Constant connection to the networks and information we call cyberspace is becoming central to identity. Why this is happening is a labyrinthine speculation.

Is it, as media and technology expert Ken Hillis [suggests](#), simply another way to "stave off the Void and the meaningless of existence?" Or, as novelist and professor [Roxane Gay](#) recently pondered, does our ability to manipulate our digital avatars provide a balm for our deep sense of impotence in the face of injustice and hate?

Or – as tech guru Amber Case [wonders](#) – are we all turning into cyborgs?

Probably not – but it depends on how you define cyborg. If a cyborg is a human who uses a piece of technology or a machine to restore lost functions or enhance her capacities and knowledge, then people have been cyborgs for a long time, and using a smartphone is no different than using a prosthetic arm, driving a car, or working on an assembly line.

If you define a cyborg society as one in which human relationships are mediated and shaped by technology, then our society certainly seems to meet this criterion, and our phones play a starring role. But our relationships and rituals have long been mediated by technology. The rise of massive urban centers – hubs of connectivity and innovation – would not have

been possible without railroads and cars.

Machines, technology, networks, and information do not drive or organize society – people do. We make things and use things according to the existing web of social, economic, and political relationships and the balance of power.

The smartphone, and the way it shapes and reflects existing social relations, is no more metaphysical than the Ford Rangers that once rolled off the assembly line in Edison, New Jersey. The smartphone is both a machine and a commodity. Its production is a map of global power, logistics, and exploitation. Its use shapes and reflects the perpetual confrontation between the totalizing drives of capital and the resistance of the rest of us.

In the present moment, the need for capitalists to exploit and commodify is strengthened by the ways in which smartphones are produced and consumed, but capital's gains are never secure and unassailable. They must be renewed and defended at every step. We have the power to contest and deny capital's gains, and we should. Perhaps our phones will come in handy along the way.

Is God Or Satan The Good Guy?

Lets look at Christian mythology. Who is this "God" character, and who is this "Satan" guy? Lets look at it with a little bit of a critical eye. The first thing we need to remember is that the victors write the history books. So, you've got to look at the Bible as a piece of propaganda for the winning side. Of course the book that God wrote is going to make him the protagonist. But, even his own complete control over the

message isn't enough to cover up his defects. Sort of like North Korean propaganda. It might control the message, but it still doesn't make Kim Jong Un look good.

First off, God apparently created everything. He created Tyrannosaurus Rex, which had arms too short to masturbate. Then, he created us, with arms long enough to play with our genitals, and hands that are pretty damn well suited to it. He gave us the capacity to feel pleasure, and he gave us the desire to chase it. He gave us a thirst for knowledge. He gave us a lot of great stuff.

But, he demanded that we not use any of it. Oh, and he demanded that we love him.

Doesn't that sound a little bit twisted to you?

This God character sounds more like the psychological profile you'd get if you went to a high school, found the meanest 16 year old cheerleader, and told her that she had absolute power. Imagine if Saddam Hussein could shoot lightning out of his eyes.

But, its even sicker than that.

God creates a "tree of knowledge." He makes us totally ignorant. He then plants the tree of knowledge where? Is it a thousand miles from the Garden of Eden? Nope. Does it have a fence around it? Nope. It is right smack in the middle of the paradise he made for us. He then says, *"you can eat all this shit, pears, durians, blackberries, anything! But I will fuck your shit up if you eat this fruit that cures your ignorance."*

He watches us all the time, like the NSA. Oh yeah, he's watching. Like the Elf on the Shelf and Dick Cheney.

Oh, and he DEMANDS that we love him. If you don't love me, I'll burn your ass forever and ever. That sounds more like a stalker than an omniscient being worthy of being praised or

worshipped. At best, he's just got a sick sense of humor. But, "love me or I burn you" is just totally crazy.

On the other hand, we have this Satan guy.



Satan likes us. Satan doesn't mind if we enjoy ourselves. Satan doesn't care if we love him or not. He's there if we want him. Oh, and he suggests that maybe, just maybe, we ought to come out of the shadows of ignorance and eat from the tree of knowledge. From what I can tell from the mythology, Satan doesn't watch us unless we request it. Opt-in surveillance, free will, enjoy yourself, and don't be ignorant.

Does that sound like the **bad guy** to you?

Satan sounds more like Prometheus than the Cylon lord. It sounds like he gave us the gift of rational thought. It is because of him that we can question and reason. Meanwhile, God wanted to keep that from us. What a dick.

The whole Jesus thing doesn't help his case any. God "sends his only son" to Earth. But, if you read the text, what really happened is he came to Earth and knocked up a married woman. So he cuckolds poor Joseph, then Joseph is stuck raising this other guy's son. Then, God figures he can kill Jesus FOR US? That doesn't even make any frigging sense.

If you read between the lines, God came to Earth like so many gods before him, and wanted to get him some mortal trim. He screws Mary, knocks her up, and it takes him 33 years to figure out how the hell to clean up this mess.

Meanwhile, does Satan have any such acts on his record?

Nope.

In fact, Satan showed up in the garden of Eden, and had all this power of suggestion. There's the hottest chick in the world standing there. Well, the ONLY chick, I guess, but whatever. Eve is there, naked and completely ignorant. Does Satan take advantage and fuck her? No. Hell, the word "rape" doesn't even exist yet, so he could have conned her, forced her, whatever. Instead, he gives her a gift that allows her to engage in freedom of thought.

In more modern times, when Satan comes to earth, he shows up at the crossroads in Mississippi and makes someone into a great musician. Or he plays in a heavy metal band. Or he whispers in our ear, "go ahead and jerk off watching that donkey show – if you want to."

God commits genocide at Sodom and Gomorrah. He floods the whole world, because he isn't quite happy with how his creations are kissing his ass, or not doing so. He is the one who casts souls into the eternal pit of hell. Satan seems to just hang out there making the best of it. And how did Satan get there? Oh, just by rebelling against a despot. Sounds like Nelson Mandela and Thomas Jefferson were "satanists" too – at least in spirit.

Not that I advocate worshipping anyone or anything, but if you're going to buy in to christian mythology, you might want to reconsider which of the characters is actually the good guy.

Apple Watch – Nobody Needs It

The dream of a five year old.

On Monday March 9, 2015, Apple finalized and solidified the release plans for the Apple Watch, telling customers to get ready to line up for the wearable device on April 24. But for what is this new gadget good for? Nothing! The Apple Watch is expensive, it is bad taste and infantile.

Everything was great, but now it gets even better. After about an hour the Apple event runs at towards its peak: Tim Cook, CEO of Apple since Steve Jobs is no longer with us, has told us a lot about the Apple Watch, this latest product from Apple, which will change everything again. Cook tries visibly to sound thrilled to awaken enthusiasm, he looks enthusiastic, you get the feeling now something really great is coming.

“You can even with the built-in receiver and microphone ...”, says Cook, “you can receive calls with your watch! This is something I wanted to do since I was five years old! We finally made it this far!” Is this guy serious? But the stupids in the audience are eating up every word.

Well, finally, we came that far. A five year old wants to become fire and garbage man, astronaut or perhaps Dino researchers, but after a few years this will fade. And that’s a good thing.

In the eighties, an early evening program, the US series “Knight Rider” was on TV with David Hasselhoff. Whenever he got into trouble, he could lift his watch to his mouth and summoned his talking miracle car “KITT” .

The consumers of this in retrospect amazingly stupid TV series are now around 40 years old, exactly Apple’s target group for the watch: Technology Affine, professionals who want to act as

much as possible youthful and they are ready to invest in expensive gadgets of questionable usefulness.

Will they spend money to be cool like David Hasselhoff? Are they excited to lift their wrist to finally talk to their watch: "KITT, get me out of here"?

That's not cool, that's an invasion

Apple's gadgets targeted in the past the child in the man, and the author of this text scraped in the past together enough money to get the latest Apple stuff: From the Apple IIc, the Newton, who looked like a tricorder from "Star Trek" and could (more bad than good) recognize handwriting, to the iPod, perhaps the first product ever that held everything it promised. I never bought an iPhone. I always thought that the price for the gadget itself and the price for the service was nothing other than rape and robbery.

The Apple Watch has been for decades the first product innovation from Cupertino, which does not cause any cravings to own it. For over a decade, the mobile industry has given us the habit not to wear watches, now suddenly we should buckle on this chunky piece – and still carry an iPhone with us?

Every call, every breaking news, every annoying prompt should now be physically permanently attached to our bodies? That's not cool, that's an invasion.

While the iPhone was a revolutionary reinvention of the phone that it has enriched so many features that its main function, making phone calls, faded into the background, the Apple Watch acts as a dilution of what we know so far as the concept of a watch.

An Apple Watch is not timeless

A high quality watch is timeless, it lasts practically

forever, making it a classic heirloom. The Apple Watch, however, is probably in a few years out of date, because it is then replaced by the next version. While the conventional wristwatch will not change its original appearance in a hundred years, Apple's Watch is customizable according to your taste and mood you can have time shown with flowers, numbers or Mickey Mouse. Everybody cross-bred with a chimp will love it.

A watch is the style statement of an adult human. The adaptability of the product, commonly a feature of modern technology, is explicitly not allowed. With the Apple Watch, however, the design turns into a childish arbitrariness.

Maybe that's why Cook refers to the dream of a Five Year Old.

P.S.: Despite my distain for the Apple Watch, I am sure it will be a bestseller. There are just so many morons in this country.

Samsung Ad Injections Perfectly Illustrate Why I Want My 'Smart' TV To Be As Dumb As Possible

Samsung has been doing a great job this week illustrating why consumers should want their televisions to be as dumb as technologically possible. The company took heat for much of

the week after its privacy policy revealed Samsung smart TVs have been collecting and analyzing user living room conversations in order to improve voice recognition technology. While that's fairly common for voice recognition tech, the idea of living room gear that spies on you has been something cable operators have been patenting for years. And while Samsung has [changed its privacy policy language](#) to more clearly illustrate what it's doing, the fact that smart TV security is [relatively awful](#) has many people quite justly concerned about smart TVs becoming another poorly-guarded repository for consumer data.

But it's something else stupid that Samsung did this week that got less press attention, but that I actually find far more troubling. Numerous Samsung smart TV users around the world this week stated that the company has [started injecting ads into content being watched on third-party devices and services](#). For example, some users found that when streaming video content from PC to the living room using Plex, they suddenly were faced with a large ad for Pepsi that actually originated from their Samsung TV:

"Reports for the unwelcome ad interruption [first surfaced on a Subreddit dedicated to Plex](#), the media center app that is available on a variety of connected devices, including Samsung smart TVs. Plex users typically use the app to stream local content from their computer or a network-attached storage drive to their TV, which is why many were very surprised to see an online video ad being inserted into their videos. A Plex spokesperson assured me that the company has nothing to do with the ad in question."

Now Samsung hasn't responded yet to this particular issue, and you'd have to think that the company accidentally enabled some kind of trial ad injection technology, since anything else would be idiotic brand seppuku (in fact it does appear like it has been [working with Yahoo](#) on just this kind of technology).

Still, users say the ads have them rushing to disable the smart portion of Samsung TVs, whether that's by [using a third party solution](#) or [digging into the bowels of the TV's settings to refuse Samsung's end user agreement](#). And that raises an important point: many consumers (myself included) want their TV to be as slack-jawed, glassy-eyed, dumb and dim-witted as possible.

Like broadband ISPs and net neutrality, Samsung clearly just can't help itself, and is eager to use its position as a television maker to ham-fistedly inject itself into a multi-billion dollar emerging Internet video market. But that runs in stark contrast to the fact that most people just want their television (whether it's 720p or 4K) to **simply be a dumb monitor** they *hook smart devices of their choice up to*. Just like people want their broadband ISPs to get out of the way and provide a quality dumb pipe, many people just want a traditional, dumb television to do a great job displaying the signals sent to it and nothing more.

Dumb TVs just make more sense for most users: many people own televisions for ten years, and the streaming hardware embedded in these sets quickly becomes irrelevant even with updated firmware. Dumb TVs, with less sophisticated internals, should also be cheaper to buy. And if you're any kind of respectable audiophile, you've got game consoles and devices like Roku hooked into a receiver and a decent 5.1 (or above) system, making the set's internals redundant. Swapping out a crop of the latest and greatest (not to mention relatively cheap) Rokus or Chromecasts every few years just makes more sense for most of us.

Last I saw, [around 50%](#) of people who buy connected TVs aren't using the connected portion of the set. Yet if you [peruse the latest sets](#) (especially the ongoing standards minefield that is 4K or UHD) you'll find that buying a dumb television is getting increasingly more difficult. I won't even get into the problems with HDCP 2.2 DRM stifling 4K growth and confusing

the hell out of consumers on the bleeding edge, as that's [another article entirely](#).

Bottom line: I want my pipes dumb, my TVs dumber, and **my choice** of a full variety of intelligent devices and services without bull-headed companies stumbling drunkenly into my line of sight. Samsung's clumsy week simply couldn't have illustrated the growing need for dim-witted television sets any better.

[Thankfulness ...](#)

As I sit here in my apartment in Montrose, California on my first Thanksgiving together with my wife Rosa here in Montrose, I am struck by how truly lucky I am. I have a job that provides me with everything to have a comfortable life. My job challenges me and grows my skill-set daily – and I work with some truly brilliant people who help me strive to become even better. I am working for a company with a lot of passion and soul – a company dwarfed in size by our competitors. I am very lucky to have a strong, wonderful wife that understands and appreciates the work I do, and is incredibly supportive.

After years of fighting, I am still involved in a legal battle with the United States government about my status in the United States. It is going very well. The government was not able to break me. I have won every battle with the United States government and I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Since one year the government is dragging its feet, delaying my case after I beat them at the [United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit](#). I will file in 2015 a “Writ

of [Mandamus](#)” to force the government to proceed in my case and render a judgment in my favor.

All considered I am doing well and I expect to do even better in 2015.

I am humbled to have been given all these things, and for them, and so much more, I am thankful.

What are you thankful for?