



Smarter than you think

Over the summer I read Canadian science and technology writer Clive Thompson's *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds for the Better*. It's one of the best books I have read about the connection between thought and technology.

Human beings are inherently conservative. Our natural reaction is to fear the new and unfamiliar. Much of it has to do with our survival genes. Throughout history we had to be wary of dangers lurking behind the corner, or a tree, as the case might be.

Greek philosopher Socrates was skeptical about writing. He thought it would kill the Greek tradition of oral debate and dialectics. The church feared the printing press would interfere with its monopoly of interpreting scripture. Today, authoritarian regimes are doing their best to try to prevent the internet revolution.

Thompson believes that technology is changing the way we think. It pushes us towards new forms of behaviour, moving away from traditional ways of thinking and doing things. Technology has actually produced new human intelligence - we learn more and retain information for longer.

Every new tool shapes the way we think and what we think about. The printed word enlarged our stores of knowledge. Newspapers made the world smaller. The telegraph made it even smaller. Television brought it into our homes. The internet brought it into our hands. Google Glass will bring into our brains.

Thompson talks of three major shifts: infinite memory, dot connecting and explosive publishing. We rarely record things anymore - smartphones, hard drives and memory sticks do it for us. The tools make it easier for us to find connections between everything - pictures are linked to events, people and news. They encourage more communication and publishing.

Blogs, chats, Twitter, Facebook and the like have increased the flow of information. People write more than ever before.

And we all know that writing is one of the best ways of developing the brain. It forces us to articulate, to think.

Google Glass, the wearable computer, is probably the most striking example of how modern technology is changing the way we think. It will allow us to wear spectacles that are like a second brain.

As the world flashes by we wear our glasses (or contact lenses) and take notes effortlessly with a tiny keyboard in our hand. We can record and search for information effortlessly. Remember that meeting two years ago? No, I don't either, but with a simple search I can recall what happened.

All of this might sound scary, but is it really? I don't think so. I think it sounds exciting. We are getting a transactive memory with the computer as our super-smart companion that expands our world.

So, don't reject the new. Embrace it. I am an immigrant to the world of information technology. My children are digital natives, they have grown up with technology. It's their way of communicating, their way of thinking. I, on the other hand, am having a hard time keeping up, but I shall do my best. Now where is my smartphone? ●

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