

Manifesto

Kill The Smartphone

Scrollers!

When your smartphone finally draws its last breath, don't rush to replace your chains. Join the countless others who have already traded their digital shackles for the clarity of a dumbphone.

It's time to reclaim your attention—here are 10 reasons why:

1. Quit Therapy
2. Get properly lost and let Fortuna find *you*
3. Improve your sense of direction
4. Your battery will never die on you
5. Call your mum more often
6. More Reading
7. More Positive, Actionable News
8. More Boredom and Creativity
9. The Internet is not what it used to be
10. Resist the *QR-codification* of spaces of leisure

Conclusion

1. Quit Therapy

Feelings of angst, meaninglessness, or existential dread predate the smartphone, but the addictive “content” that keeps you compulsively checking the little black box is surely hurting your mental peace.

An acquaintance of mine used to work in a psychotherapy practice. New patients were only allowed to start therapy if they could prove that they had started working out regularly. Indeed, there is strong evidence that regular exercise improves overall well-being.

It is hard to look at the modern attention economy and believe it is psychologically neutral. So, surely we should apply the same logic to smartphone use?

Owning a smartphone means carrying a highly optimised attention-harvesting device everywhere you go. Avoiding social media on such a device - as users of screen-time apps, minimalist launchers, and app-blockers have found out - is practically impossible.

Ditching this device will be a boon for your mental health.

2. Get properly lost and let *Fortuna* find you

Getting lost is the best way to invite **Lady Fortuna** into your life. Having constant access to Google Maps is the best way to tell her not to bother you with her gifts.

Unplug for a bit and let yourself drift: a wrong turn, a chance encounter, a change of plans. These are the kinds of moments you never optimise for, but tend to remember decades later.



Lady Fortuna: Roman Goddess of Luck, Fortune or Fate

3. Improve your sense of direction

An obvious corollary to No. 2, but when you stop using Google Maps for everything you will be forced to exercise your atrophied internal GPS.

Have you ever moved to a new city and spent your first 3 months using Google Maps for your daily commute and trips to the grocery store? Have you ever suspected (and regretted) that it is quietly destroying your sense of direction? Ditching the smartphone forces you to pay more attention to your surroundings when you travel, which has benefits that go beyond navigation.

Yes, it requires you to be more prepared for trips. You may naively expect this to make them less spontaneous: after all, you can't just whip out your phone and navigate to a cool rave you just heard about. But in practice, the proliferation of optionality inevitably leads to decision fatigue: one of the quieter maladies of the modern attention economy.

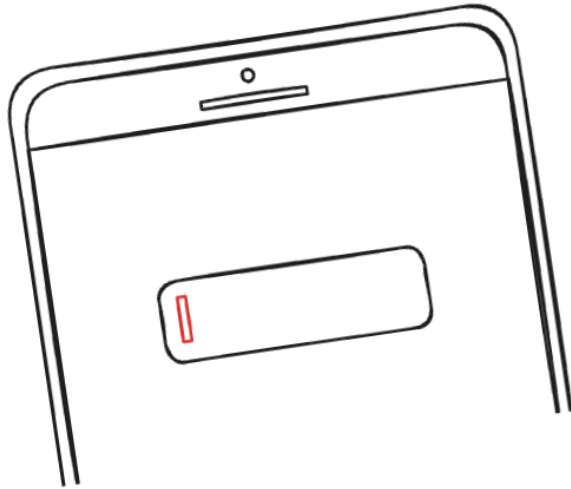
Like a child that has to choose between 50 kinds of candy, you don't become freer —you just become more tired.

When travelling, you may have to carry a small notebook with key metro stops for the cities you are passing through. If abroad, you may need to jot down a few useful phrases—like your grandfather did when he visited Paris in the 1960s. You will forget this sometimes and get properly lost (see 2). And every once in a while you'll have to put on a smile and ask a stranger for help. But so what?

4. Your battery will never die on you

When your battery lasts 7-8 hours, you feel vulnerable. The very anticipation of the battery dying on us makes us anxious. This is not because you particularly care about the voltage of the electrons in your pocket, but because you have come to rely on these electrons for the very basics of your social existence: buying a round of beers, finding that laundromat 5 minutes away, legally entering the tube station, and displaying your ticket for that ecstatic rave in an abandoned shoe factory on the outskirts of Utrecht. Ditching the smartphone will make you rediscover simple, offline alternatives for these social rituals: a wristwatch, a wallet, access to a printer, and a bit of forward planning. You will find a certain zen in knowing your social life is not dictated by the state of charge of a brittle piece of glass and aluminum spyware.

This analog existence was known and loved by our parents and grandparents, until they - God help them - decided to all buy smartphones too.



Smart phone: Dumb Choice?

5. Call your mum more often

Everyone knows that person. Either they're bedridden, ageing, sick, bored, or they simply miss you. Having a dumbphone in your pocket means that a spare 15 minutes is more likely to end up as a wholesome catchup, rather than scrolling through Joe Rogan clips. Either way, those are 15 minutes you won't get back.

6. More Reading

If you think that having 24/7 access to the internet is making you read fewer physical books, you are probably right. If you think this may be a problem, you know what to do

7. More Positive, Actionable News

Offline News tends to be actionable. It is either positive, neutral, or mildly negative:

1. "Sammie broke his arm in Chamonix"
2. "Anne and Seb are getting married!"
3. "Happy Hour at your favourite oyster bar is now between 6:30pm and 7:30pm"
4. "There's a salsa social at the bowling alley this Friday"

On the other hand, online news is generally un-actionable, and invariably depressing:

1. "Joint USA-Israeli strike kills a hundred or so school-age girls"
2. "Why you will be poorer than your parents"
3. "Microplastics are making you infertile"
4. "Ten ways to make your LinkedIn profile AI-ready"

Ditching the smartphone means you'll have less of the latter, and more of the former

8. More Boredom and Creativity

Remember that creative and fun thing you did when you were 9? You may have learned all the flags by heart, or made a musical about talking barnacles. You may have gotten really good at conkers or yo-yo-ing. Maybe you staged a DIY fashion show in your back-

yard, or built a tree house in a bush (a bush-house, anyone?). The enabling factor was time and boredom. Ditching the smartphone will give you both back in heaps

9. The Internet is not what it used to be

Whatever reasons there may have been to be perennially online in 2012 or 2015 must be critically reviewed in 2026. The internet has changed a lot in the last 10 years. It has become more predatory, less information-dense, and more “enshittified”, a process whose mechanism was vividly explained by Cory Doctorow.

10. Resist the *QR-codification* of spaces of leisure

With enough time and boredom I hope to one day write a full treatise arguing for the criminalisation of QR codes in spaces of leisure, such as bars, cafés, pubs, cinemas and the like. But I will give a brief sketch:

On a hot summer day in our favourite lakeside *brasserie*, the only thing standing between my dad and a chicken caesar salad with two lemonades were 10 consecutive finger taps in a janky HTML form on a laggy 3G connection. After getting frustrated with his inability to bend the form to his will, he looked at me in quiet resignation and said: “Am I really getting that old?”

No, dad, you are not getting *that* old. The indignity you suffered on your day off from work is due to a choice that society has collectively made. That older people don’t protest vocally against the “QR-codification” of spaces of leisure is probably due to their fear of being found out that they lack “21st century skills”.

But what are these “skills” exactly, and why do I possess them whereas my dad does not? There is nothing virtuous about my ability to bend janky HTML forms to *my* will. The skills that I possess were picked up from video games, dodging ads on porn and illegal streaming sites, and avoiding sneaky surcharges on cheap airlines’ Kafkaesque websites. These “21st century skills”, craved by the old and abused by the young, are simply a coping strategy for surviving our vile little corner of late capitalism.

They are nothing to be proud of, and not something we should encourage.

QR codes, while admired by software engineers for being fast and fault-tolerant when they work, in practice just mean the replacement of a 10 second conversation with 10 taps in a confusing, badly designed HTML form. When used in places of leisure they represent a **subtle perversion of the social contract**. QR codes may be clever, but putting them in spaces of leisure is, to use a term familiar to software engineers, is an “anti-pattern”, and bad for accessibility.

Ditching the smartphone makes you a quiet but powerful ally against the *QR-codification* of spaces of leisure.

Conclusion

You may ask why I wrote this manifesto. I will respond earnestly.

In any group whose members have been slamming two bricks against their testicles for years under the impression that this is “simply how life works”, the first person to notice that it is, in fact, optional, has a minor obligation to do some gentle proselytising.

You cannot buy your freedom with a new Android launcher, nor with a screen-time app, no matter how strict. Kill the smartphone.

Utrecht, 4 May 2026