Phone Calls

Phone calls were always demanding. Fred remembered as a child his family's large, heavy black phone with the rotary dial. Fred remembered reading a newspaper column seventy years ago about what to do if someone phoned during your favourite TV programme, ***Gunsmoke***. Not answering was not an option–the phone might keep ringing. You had to answer. The advice was on how to keep the interruption short.

It took a long time before there were message machines and then the guilty choice of answering or letting the machine do it. When callers realized they left a message while he was at home, listening, they were upset. Fred had to apologize. With cell phones, Fred learned from his children it was impolite to directly phone. He should text. And response was expected. And now there was call display. Not only did he know who was calling, they knew he knew.

Phones remained demanding. Fred grew even more unhappy with the most recent upgrade when phone companies offered special implant chips. The phone rang inside one's head. One could answer without lifting a finger. There was still call display.

It was disconcerting, on a personal and societal level. Fred saw phones as having reached a new level of intrusion. Everything in a person's life was relentlessly interconnected. He saw it as the next stage in humanity's evolution. To communicate over distances, humanity began with drums, then writing, then burst through with the printing press. Now humanity had achieved an ultimate goal, anyone could communicate with anyone, just by thinking.

Humanity could focus on common goals.

To his surprise, in the next years humanity focussed not on improving the climate or pollution, not on more food or pure water. Instead, humanity focussed on better toilets.

Toilets could be very demanding.

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