

Prometheus Unleashed – Life on the Screen: Durch schülerzentrierte Verfahren Aspekte des Themas „Science and Technology“ erörtern (S II)

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M 1 Prometheus Unleashed – Life on the Screen: Introduction

What would your life be without the Internet and your smartphone? Constantly, we produce a huge amount of data by using our computers and phones. Have you ever asked yourself, what happens to all the information that is being collected that way? Have you ever considered the possible consequences: identity theft, personal embarrassment, or companies making uncomfortable and unwelcome inferences about your preferences or behaviour?

Furthermore, there are people who would rather text than talk. Most relationships are a blend of online and off-line interactions. Courtships take place via text. And almost everyone has a story to tell in which they or a friend broke up a relationship by text or email.

In this unit, you will study the implication of what it means to live a life on the screen.

Advance Organiser

Work with a partner first. Then share your results with another pair.

1. Take a look at the two people in the picture.

- What is their attitude towards each other? Are they bored, absorbed, excited, worried, shy ...? Which adjective would you choose, and why?
- Do you think they are close friends? If not, why not?



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2. If this was a sequence from a movie, what kind would it be (e.g. love story, science fiction, documentary, adventure)? Write a brief outline of the plot.

3. Imagine and describe objects similar to the phones (i.e. with the same function):

- 50 years earlier
- 50 years later

Extra: Improvisation task for two students: Take your smartphones, face each other and mirror the body posture of the two persons in the photo above. Then play with your phones. At a given signal, you must freeze in the position you are currently in. Quickly imagine who you are, where you are and why you are there, and start speaking in character.

M 2 An extract from Sherry Turkle's *The Power of Talk in the Digital Age*

We talk all the time. We text and post and chat. Among family and friends, among colleagues and lovers, we turn to our phones instead of each other. In her non-fiction book, Sherry Turkle argues that this new mediated life has got us into trouble.

A. Approaching the text

- This is a photo taken outside a café in Seattle. Below, you find how some young people reacted to the café's sign. Spend a few minutes thinking about the reactions. Make notes, saying whether you agree or disagree, and what you think of the message.
 - "Why is it more acceptable when we sit in a café with a book or newspaper?"
 - "Believe it or not, people used to talk to each other face to face before they had cell phones."
 - "That is awesome! Wish more places were like this corner café."
 - "I'd go look for another café."
- Work in small groups. Discuss the point the café makes.



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"I'd rather text than talk"

These days, we want to be with each other but also elsewhere, connected to wherever else we want to be, because what we value most is control over where we put our attention. [...]

For many, a sentiment has become a litany, captured by the phrase "I'd rather text than talk." What people really mean is not only that they like to text but also that they don't like a certain kind of talk. They shy away from open-ended conversation. For most purposes, and sometimes even intimate ones, they would rather send a text message than hear a voice on the phone or be opposite someone face-to-face.

When I ask, "What's wrong with conversation?" answers are forthcoming. A young man in his senior year of high school makes things clear: "What's wrong with conversation? I'll tell you what's wrong with conversation! It takes place in real time and you can't control what you're going to say."

This reticence about conversation in "real time" is not confined to the young. Across generations, people struggle to control what feels like an endless stream of "incoming" information to assimilate and act on and interactions to manage. Handling things online feels like the beginnings of a solution: At least we can answer questions at our convenience and edit our responses to get them "right."

The anxiety about spontaneity and the desire to manage our time means that certain conversations tend to fall away. Most endangered: the kind in which you listen intently to another person and expect that he or she is listening to you; where a discussion can go off on a tangent and circle back; where something unexpected can be discovered about a person or an idea. And there are other losses: In person, we have access to the messages carried in the face, the voice, and the body. Online, we settle for simpler fare: We get our efficiency and our chance to edit, but we learn to ask questions that a return email can answer.

The idea that we are living moments of more and lives of less is supported by a recent study in which pairs of college-aged friends were asked to communicate in four different ways: face-

V

C. Understanding the text

1. Here are some inferences about the text. Mark those you agree with. Add some of your own, if you wish.

Inference: As you read a text, remember that to infer is to read between the lines, recognising the implied message.

- a) To be connected is most important for many.
- b) Some say, texting is more efficient than talking.
- c) Too much information is difficult to cope with.
- d) Interactions can be complicated.
- e) People hate unexpected situations.
- f) Emotional connections develop only in face-to-face communications.
- g) The use of social media makes you a better person.
- h) The author is against technology.

2. Talk about your choices with others.

D. Studying the text

1. Work with a partner.

- a) Analyse the author's intentions for writing the text.
- b) Complete the following chart by providing two examples from the excerpt that illustrate each of these intentions for writing.

Intention: Authors generally write to inform or explain, to express an opinion, to entertain, or to persuade readers to do or believe in something. When you determine an author's purpose for writing, you can better understand and interpret what you read.

Here are some more examples:

to argue – to instruct – to describe – to recall – to hypothesise – to criticise –
to narrate – to reconstruct – to prove

Intentions	Examples
to explain	1. ll. 4–7 2. ll. 17–23
to ...	1. ... 2. ...

M 4 “Netland” – An extract from *The Circle* by Dave Eggers

In his novel *The Circle*, Eggers reminds the reader of how today’s visions of a digital utopia can lead to the datafication of our daily lives. When Mae Holland is hired for the powerful Internet company “The Circle”, she feels she has been given the opportunity of a lifetime. A sharp confrontation with her former friend Mercer reveals not everyone shares her enthusiasm.

A. Approaching the text

1. Work individually. The following sentences have been taken from the text you are going to study. Draw a table like the one below and put the sentences into one of the three columns.

- “Wait. You posted them where?”
- “That’s an incredible amount to get so quickly.”
- “We’re trying to enjoy a nice dinner.”
- “I didn’t give you permission to post a photo of my work.”
- “You think this is okay?”
- “You sound so ignorant.”
- “Do you realize how incredibly boring you’ve become?”

It expresses an agreement	It expresses a disagreement.	I am not certain.

2. Sit in small groups and explain to one another under which heading you placed each sentence.

“Netland”

[...] “Okay, I can’t stand it anymore. I posted that photo I took of your chandelier, Mercer, and people love it!” She beamed, and raised her glass. “That’s what we should toast.”

Mercer didn’t look amused.

“Wait. You posted them where?”

5 “That’s great, Mercer,” her father said, and raised his own glass.

Mercer’s glass was not raised. “Where’d you post them, Mae?”

“Everywhere relevant,” she said, “and the comments are amazing.” She searched her screen. “Just let me read the first one. And I quote: *Wow, that is gorgeous.* [...]”

Mercer had his palms on the table. “Stop. Please.”

10 “Why? You haven’t even heard the best part. On DesignMind, you already have 122 smiles. That’s an incredible amount to get so quickly. And they have a ranking there, and you’re in the top fifty for today. Actually, I know how you could raise that –” [...]

“Mae. Stop. Please stop.” Mercer was staring at her, his eyes small and round. “I don’t want to get loud here, in your parents’ home, but either you stop or I have to walk out.”

Kompetenzen

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler¹ können ...

- ... komplexe literarische und nicht literarische Textvorlagen sprachlich angemessen und kohärent analysieren und dabei wesentliche Punkte und relevante unterstützende Details hervorheben,
- ... Sachverhalte bezogen auf das Thema strukturiert darstellen und kommentieren,
- ... sich argumentativ mit unterschiedlichen Positionen auseinandersetzen,
- ... ihre Selbst- und Sozialkompetenz anwenden und
- ... aus ihren Lernerträgen eine reflektierte Synthese erstellen.

Niveau

11/12 (G8); 12/13 (G9)

Dauer

ca. 6–8 Unterrichtsstunden

Einbettung

Inhaltlich bietet sich eine Verknüpfung mit dem Thema „*Science and Technology*“ und seinen Unterpunkten „*Social Experience*“, „*Electronic Media*“ und „*New Worlds, New Horizons: Modern Utopias*“ an.

Minimalplan: Bei Zeitknappheit kann die Einheit auf den Einsatz der Materialien M 1, M 2 und M 4 reduziert werden. Der inhaltliche Schwerpunkt liegt dann auf dem Einfluss von Smartphones auf die Kommunikation.

Hinweise

Das **Internet** und die **Vielzahl digitaler Medien** sind aus unserem Alltag nicht mehr wegzudenken. Mit rasantem Tempo schreitet die technologische Entwicklung weiter voran und lässt sowohl die Verarbeitung von Daten durch Computer, Tablets und Smartphones als auch die **Kommunikation von Bildschirm zu Bildschirm** immer schneller und bequemer werden. Auch digitale Uhren oder Armbänder, die Körperfunktionen, wie die Pulsfrequenz, in die Cloud schicken, gehören häufig bereits zum Standard.

Neben diesen Innovationen, die darauf abzielen, den Alltag zu erleichtern, birgt die **digitale Welt** aber auch **Schwierigkeiten**: Wir lernen zuzuhören, wenn wir in persönlichen Gesprächen gänzlich präsent sind. Dort entwickeln wir die Fähigkeit zur Empathie. Dort erleben wir die Freude, gehört und verstanden zu werden. Doch immer mehr – vor allem junge – Menschen finden Wege, um **echte Gespräche zu vermeiden**. Aber woran liegt das eigentlich?

Die Unterrichtseinheit „Prometheus Unleashed – Life on the Screen“ ermöglicht Ihren Schülern, die Thematik zu analysieren, diese damit besser zu verstehen und womöglich das eigene Handeln zu überprüfen.

Schon im Titel der Einheit klingt dabei die Frage an, inwieweit der **digitale Fortschritt** – vergleichbar mit der sagenhaften Gestalt des Prometheus, der den Menschen das Feuer brachte – vielleicht schon dabei ist, sich zu verselbstständigen.

¹ Im weiteren Verlauf wird aus Gründen der besseren Lesbarkeit nur „Schüler“ verwendet.