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My iPad Day

GAVE UP MY IPAD last week. Not cheerfully, I might add, but with the maternal motivation that the iPad, loaded with the final season of *Lost*, might add a little something to my daughter's recovery from surgery.

It wasn't easy. My iPad was less than two months old but already a constant companion. Why so attached, so quickly? Living without it taught me how well the little techno-critter fit into my life as a college dean and writer.

iPad deprivation also gave new meaning to "going off the grid," which previously meant a period of time without e-mail or Web access. Now it included exile from e-reading, because I had seen the future—and it was beautiful. It also gave me a window on the future of e-readers. I've previously used a Kindle and iPhone for reading, but the iPad's brilliant three C's—consumption, collaboration, and creativity—open up new possibilities. (In the Middle Ages of media, when I was in cable and satellite television, we used to opine about content, community, and choice. I have no idea why C became the default tag for newfangled things, but I'll sing along.)

Let me take you through my day and show you why. You may have heard that the iPad is just another device for passive content consumption. Now there's a damning condemnation! Really, if that's all the iPad did, it would still be better than anything you've ever used before. That's because its combination of features are revolutionary not just individually, but in combination: tablet, touch screen, picture quality, battery life, the wonderful world of apps, and—how low-tech can you get?—the versatile Apple case.

An iPad day starts early. Like many New York City apartment dwellers, my brain is still half asleep until the newspapers arrive. If I'm ready for coffee before then, I fill the time by reading e-mail or a magazine, but I remain on alert for the satisfying "thunk" of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* hitting the door. I love that sound, but it's headed for the audio graveyard to join the hiss of a tape cassette rewinding.

Within three days, I was taking the iPad to breakfast. Then the unthinkable happened: The thunk had come and gone and I had not noticed.

The iPad reminds me how much I have always enjoyed combining reading and food. I grew up eating dinner alone (don't feel sorry for me, I loved it) and used a handy little metal stand to keep my library book away from the lamb chops. iPad updates that concept with the help of the Apple case, a 21st-century triumph of microfiber, homely but light and sturdy. The case folds into a triangle to lift the iPad into a great working position and voilà! It is parked at the perfect angle of repose for reading or writing. It's all in the tilt.



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Perhaps you are lucky enough not to attend a lot of meetings. The rest of us are too often captives or captors. Some meetings are good enough to justify notes for later action or reflection, and some are bad enough to make you long for distraction or escape. If you open a laptop, you barricade yourself behind a screen, which practically screams disassociation. The iPad, staying out of the line of sight, proclaims no such aggression.

Paying attention? You can use your finger to write notes (I like an app called Penultimate), or type them on a Word-compatible program, then e-mail or file them later. The peek-a-boo virtual keyboard is decent for slow touch-typing.

Seeking distraction? If you are too responsible to check e-mail or skim blogs or play Scrabble during the meeting, I bet you can convince yourself that you just need a minute to find out more about the subject at hand. I was just at a meeting that mentioned the artist Chris Burden and his "Urban Light" installation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Huh? A quick and discreet trip to the museum's Web site, and then I turned to my equally clueless neighbor to share my discoveries.

That took us from consumption to collaboration.

"Here, look!"

Imagine saying that 10 times a day, handing over an effective illustration of your point: an image, a bit of text, a graph, calendar, or newspaper. Of course, you can do that with e-mail or FTP transfer. But there are advantages to spontaneous, physical, face-to-face sharing that are constrained by the way the laptop requires someone to peer over your shoulder to stare at a common screen.

Try sharing an iPad. It connects you to your physical and intellectual surroundings, rather than alienating you. Assuming your collaborator returns the iPad, you have executed a very different kind of exchange, one that seems oddly democratic and intimate, the same way you might share an album of family photographs. Only now imagine a doctor and patient sharing an MRI, an accountant and client reviewing a balance sheet, a choreographer and dancer discussing a dance notation.

For more scholarly pursuits, I have found the iPad a great companion for visits to historical archives and research libraries, especially in combination with an iPhone camera. In a trip to Arizona, I did not have enough time to finish taking notes on the letters of Josephine Earp, third wife of Wyatt and the subject of my current research. I used my iPhone to capture some images for later study (with permission, of course). As a doctor's wife, I thought I was great at reading illegible handwriting, but sometimes I am stymied by Josephine's scrawl and her evident dislike of punctuation. I've tried scrutinizing large computer screens as well as hard copy, but the iPad's pinch-to-zoom technique is particularly suited to deciphering original documents.

"The iPad reminds me how much I enjoy combining reading and food. It is parked at the perfect angle."

JUST SO YOU DON'T THINK I'm on Apple's payroll, here are some things that the iPad does badly. Apparently, Steve Jobs loathes styluses. OK, Steve, I'm getting used to writing with my finger, but could you please compromise and show me a great transcription program, so that my cute little handwritten notebooks could be converted to searchable text. Please?

I do carry a laptop from time to time. In fact, I came very late to Apple worship. My first Mac is only a few years old. Even after I bought an iPhone, I carried a BlackBerry for months afterward, convinced that I could never give up its more reliable e-mail and accurate keyboard. But I was won over by the iPhone's other talents, from its great way with audiobooks to the functional feast of the App store. I still find PC's far easier for presentations. Keynote on the iPad is an unreliable replacement for PowerPoint, and Macs are cranky with unfamiliar projectors, so for an important presentation, I pull out my good old ThinkPad, circa 2002. Also, if I need to type for any extended time, I prefer a laptop. The Apple faithful will rush to point out that I could use a wireless keyboard and a dock to hold the iPad upright, but at that point, surely it's just easier to bring in a real computer—oops, I mean a laptop.

It is a mixed blessing that the iPad doesn't multitask. If I want to check Ancestry.com to see where Josephine Earp shows up in the 1880 census (she's in San Francisco), and then send the image of the census page to Evernote, my favorite note-taking software, I can't easily shift back and forth, or shrink the windows, as I would on any computer. Still, it is not always a disadvantage to have to do one thing at a time, especially if you're someone like me who clutters up the screen with 10 open programs.

The iPad does have some groundbreaking techniques for integrating and manipulating images and text together in documents using Pages and Keynote, and any casual doodler will be inspired by SketchBook Pro. There are some remarkable apps for performing music, used most memorably by Lang Lang, who played an iPad piano encore with the Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra, in San Francisco.

My day always begins with the newspaper, and my day always ends with a book. If you're wondering about the iPad as an e-reader, the short answer is: Kindle shmindle. Aside from occasional vertigo when the iPad screen adjusts to a new position, I love reading at night with the vivid screen. And I rejoice in Amazon's agnostic support of the iPad, allowing me to read any Kindle book on my device. That's important because, at this early stage in its life, Apple's iBook application has a pathetic selection of books. iBook has all the same adjustable fonts and annotation tools as the Kindle app, and some of the same faults—you still miss the sense of where you are in the physical book. But iBook offers some consolation prizes. Page turning requires only an elegant swipe of the finger (no need to lick that finger, either!), not the disruptive click and momentary blackout of the Kindle. An unobtrusive slide rule on the bottom of the page enables you to move back and forth. A standout feature for scholarly readers is the ability to search the complete text by word, name, or phrase: instant concordance!

If you want to see the shape of books to come, take a look at the special iPad versions of *Alice in Wonderland* or *Miss Spider's Tea Party*. Even better, give one of those to a child and watch her explore its beautiful pages, turning it instinctively to make things move and speak.

Won't something new and improved come along soon? It always does. E-reading on the iPad has stimulated my imagination about new frontiers for all kinds of publishing, including textbooks and scholarly books. My wish list? Better annotation tools and integration of multimedia—images, maps, audio, video, links to related reading. The ability to deconstruct books and then reassemble them as digital course packs easily and legally, either by selling through an authorized distributor or on electronic library reserve. Tags, so that readers can identify relevant other books, not simply by title but down to the atomic level of each page. WorldCat, which connects you to the collections and services of more than 10,000 libraries worldwide, and Amazon already help to capture many of those connections, but they stop at the front door of the book.

Those are relatively mechanical improvements. More adventure-some, and undoubtedly horrifying to some, would be spicing up the solitary reading experience with optional collaborative opportunities. An e-book could have a guest list, kind of like an old-fashioned library book that still has the signatures and dates written by people who read it. Does anyone *not* look at those cards? I bought a second-hand copy of *The Earp Papers*, by Donald Chaput, discarded from the Flowing Wells High School library in Tucson—no wonder they discarded it, when it had only two readers in nearly 20 years, the last reader in 1963. Provenance is a charming dimension of reading history, but e-books can help us overcome some of the challenges of diminishing storage space and vanishing book budgets. A digital format could create a "guest list" and also an affinity group that shares recommendations and annotations set according to your personal preferences. Say, show me recommendations from anyone who has read and loved *Middlemarch*, *The Diamond Age*, and *Angle of Repose*.

Reading networks—which could be groups of students or informal book groups of friends or online assemblies of strangers—could be created around a given book that is being read simultaneously. We might even add a layer of social networking in real time: Among my friends, who's reading what I'm reading?

As an author whose agent is always reminding me that e-publishing is not my friend, I hope that the future pricing of e-books balances the needs of the student and consumer with the creator, publisher, and distributor. When the retail pie is so small to begin with, those slices are going to send us all to bed mighty hungry. As long as I am gazing into a crystal ball, what about variable pricing to give the reader the option to buy one copy, or 10 copies to share?

A Web-enabled market where the recommender has incentive to sell multiple copies? Or take a leaf from the music business, which is experimenting with new models that allow for legal reselling that protects copyright owners as well as content distributors. You "buy" digital music, and while an authorized distributor manages the electronic distribution, you can promote it, market it, review it, and get a commission every time you sell a copy. Book marketing has always been a word-of-mouth activity, and readers would represent books they have loved.

This just in: an e-mail from Federal Express that my daughter's iPad is about to arrive. Not a minute too soon, as I have really missed mine, and she's feeling fine. Size matters: The iPad is not too big, not too small, but just right for high-quality content consumption of text, video, and images. By connecting rather than alienating in a public setting, it is a great catalyst for collaboration.

As for whether the iPod hits the third high C?

Look, it's only a device. You bring the creativity.

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