No effort required: how technology should foster creativity

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'Inspiration is 99% perspiration'. 'Try, try and try again'. Even, at its perverted extreme, 'Arbeit macht frei'. All this idealisation of effort. Personally, I am the embodiment of the protestant work ethic. Graft, investment, the long view.

And yet. The whole purpose of civilisation, the visceral attraction of technology in particular, is that it lightens the load. It gratifies instantly. The intimate, personal, live stream of modern life demands that we achieve nirvana, or at least a cheap thrill, with a thumb swipe, a click, a like.

I have worked so hard. I will continue to put in the hours. But that means I am even more in need of media technology that reduces the effort to use it. I am now dedicated to celebrating that low joy from a high minded perspective.

Artificial intelligence, algorithmic automation and personalisation, the Internet of things, convergence, semantic search, robotics and every other kind of digital, electronic, mechanical device seeks to give us more for less work. But has it worked (or rather helped us to not work)?

In some ways you can say that the success has been startling. Think for example how Google's search has cut out the labour of libraries. We wallow in all the on-demand, multi-linear, voice activated channels we have to entertainment, information and other services.

Yet anyone who has struggled through recent media history, who has puzzled how to pre-record their DVD player, to filter their RSS feeds, to personalise their Facebook or create Twitter lists, knows that the abundance of technology often complicates rather than liberates our time.

Virtual Reality for example, offers an immersive, 360 degree view of the world. Yet certainly in its nascent phase

right now it is clunky, demanding, clumsy and quite tiring. It requires effort.

In the past the artist in her garrett, the craftsman at his lathe, the writer with her quill toiled, sweated and struggled with their tools to forge new delights, insights and pleasure. Surely now creativity should be liberated from the dull restraint of materiality?

Make It Easy

Learn to code and you own the digital world, they say. But I say let someone else do the coding but do it so I don't have to log on with a password and puzzle out how your 'intuitive' system works. Dear designer, please forget appearance or novelty. In this brave new world creativity should be untrammelled by the device or the need to understand how it works. Why is battery life so short? Why is load time so long?

I love technology. My writing about how it is transforming journalism has been described as utopian and optimistic. Yet I am puzzled at the continual failure of technologists to reduce effort while they create ever more powerful devices and programmes. Of course, this is largely cultural. When Twitter tried to make itself less cluttered people complained. I say, ignore those reactionaries who revel in toiling through a morass of messages. Give me my articles instantly.

But why do I implore the technologists and those who deploy their work to give us more freedom from effort? I am not lazy. In fact it is so that we can work harder at the things that gives us sustenance rather than just take up our time.

[And by the way, No Effort Required is the name of my new start up which will solve all these problems. VCs can contact me via @CharlieBeckett]