

## Reversing the Flow of Internet Expansion

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Why would you want to contract when you can expand? Internet activity is supposed to be a positive act of self-expansion. We fill up the internet with our lives. Growth has defined the internet up until the present moment. It is a conquest that seeks more users, more followers, more hits, increases in speed, increases in storage space, and the acquisition of new and better methods to manage and sustain an ever-expanding quantity of data. Keeping pace with this growth has become required participation for a normal person living according to the customs of our time. A sort of millennial manifest destiny, the growth of the internet is widely considered good evolution for humanity. But if the internet is expanding, something else must be contracting because of that expansion.

The tricky thing about expansion is that it comes with a lot of heat. Few environmentalists are willing to accept my revolutionary new theory: the warming of the internet is another sign of climate change :) Fast and ruthless growth results in uncomfortably hot psychic environments. Excessive sharing between inefficient devices fills the atmosphere with toxic gasses. Friction between competing technologies further heats up exchanges. By heat I mean speed and pressure. People love warm weather - more of us live in hot climates than freezing ones, and good luck trying to convince your friend who loves hot weather to move to a cold city. Fully radiant at all times, blinding yet distant as an alien star, the internet can be a harsh place to live.

One reason the internet is so hard to relate to is because it does not contract itself. Human biomass goes through phases of growth, but the body is self-softening. Cells weaken and shrink in number, contracting towards death. When Gmail first came out Google promised such vast space available on their internet that old emails no longer needed to be deleted. Users could just chuck more data on top of the pile, stacking the tower ever higher. Other websites followed suit, encouraging users to avoid letting go by archiving instead. This would be like a human body growing new cells without any old cells dying. Such growth cannot be sustained. It is an example of expansion run wild. Since the internet is about growth, the culture of the internet does not value loss. This is why I feel there is such a strong sense of diffusion on the internet today and so little cohesion. Cohesion comes about through contraction, not expansion.

Expansion is warming while contraction is cooling. Cooling is difficult to come by in the current technological climate. Any technologies that impede or reverse the expansion of the internet are likely to be considered negative or ignored. "Planned obsolescence" is not real contraction, it is a trick that promotes further expansion. Device manufacturers often push one model into extinction so they can expand the next model more quickly. Where excessive expansion threatens the earth, methods of environmental conservation arise. In ecological conservation the plentiful is passed over or diminished so that the rare can be protected and revered. But the internet has a strange influence on conservation: internet rituals gravitate towards increasing the already plentiful. Rather than diminish what is plentiful, what is plentiful on the internet is exalted,

shared, multiplied, made viral. Rarity is quickly restored to the commonplace by retweet, remix, or reflection. Complex algorithms that conserve every bit and byte of a video stream are engineered to erupt that same stream through as many devices as possible. Everything online is geared towards growth. People proudly exclaim "I'm blowing up." What can be done to cool and calm the perceived negative effects of living in an explosion?

The explosion of the personality into multiple internet selves has opened up many people, including myself, to a lot of heartache. Self-dissipation becomes self-dissatisfaction. I spent years scattering myself into personality fragments on many different websites until I couldn't locate my whole self anywhere. These personality fragments became deeply embedded into distant servers. I felt that my persona had expanded out beyond my reach or control. The internet can contain that expanded personality, but that personality belongs to the internet and is not a part of your own body. You cannot possibly be ready to back up who you are on the internet with your own body because that internet self is not your body - it's the internet's body. It takes work to accept that your personality is actually your own body. It takes language, all your senses, the repeated use of conceptual tools, teachers, rituals, failures, and some serious discipline to grow the self that is limited to your body. With any growth comes the possibility of dysfunction through dissipation. Our challenge today is to gather up those internet fragments and align them into a whole individual.

In my own life, I found that I was losing too much energy out onto the external internet to do effective internal work. So I took down my website and all my profiles and began contracting my internet use. At first I felt something akin to death. I felt dead to the world without my internet presence. I was in the underworld. It was like an encounter with evil, a meeting with extinction. But what a wonderful release it was! I felt like I was letting go of so much I had been holding onto, like a big sigh. It was a sigh of relief. It was my own way of reversing the flow, turning clockwise into counter-clockwise.

When you are focused on contraction you stay quiet. You stay hidden. Reversing the flow means not relaying or reflecting information but absorbing and retaining it, turning outflow into inflow. When you do not comment you are contracting. When you do not link you are contracting. When you do not reply you are contracting. When you delete you are contracting. Patterns of unchecked expansion become reversed. When you search the internet you expand. When you create a profile you expand. When you share you expand. When you update you expand. When you contract you rest. Don't you want to rest? Turn inwards to rest and the internet can do that much less. It cools down a little.

Contraction can be dangerously self-limiting. If you take it too far you sink into the bog. But expansion can be dangerously grandiose. If you take expansion too far you crash and burn. This crash and burn syndrome is now relevant in debates about "the right to be forgotten." Haunted by their most foolish years, people are beginning to fight for internet contraction. A push for contraction can also be seen in the rise of so-called "slow movements" across other disciplines. But contraction is more than just moving slowly - it means active decline. Every time you breathe out, pushing the diaphragm upwards to empty your lungs, you accept decline. I love to hold out. I love decline as much as I love growth. And I do not want to force the expansion of my life through external technologies. Unforced contraction means yielding to decline. If the word

"contraction" is off-putting, consider it more like pruning blossoms at the end of a season so that the new flowers have a place to grow. Yes they are blossoms, but they have had their time and are finished.

Some scientists believe that even the domain of the woolly mammoth should expand again through the test tube. This is evidence that humanity has a hard time accepting decline. Forced contraction is seen as an undesirable "evil" while forced expansion is seen as "progress." Fear of extinction as "evil" comes from over-reliance on the linear viewpoint. The concept of extinction belongs entirely to the "timeline" and not the "time circle." Timeline interfaces of the social internet limit users to a linear perspective. Facebook's linear timeline has extended into the heart of a billion households, holding disproportionate authority over public and private activities. Restriction to a linear perspective makes for an unimaginative people who are fearful of data loss and dependent upon constant forward updates to make sense of the world. A cyclical timeline pulses without extinction.

The social rituals of the internet have succeeded in expanding our outer life, but what is contracting is our inner life. The result is a disconnection from a solid, unified self. Some people may not see a problem with self-expansion through the internet, but problems are easily buried under fast change. I believe that an expansion-

obsessed culture - over-reliant on technology - is in danger of either self-sterilising or blowing itself up. At its current pace, the internet will exhaust itself and collapse. In its place will be some kind of internet black hole. Enjoy the expansion while it's around. Relish the ability to see so far, be thankful for expansion's conveniences. Contracting internet use now will help the internet to continue.

To close this text with a spirit of positive expansion, I will share some instructions from a crystallography website. Crystallisation, a magnificent form of cohesion, comes about through just the right balance of temperature:

<http://www.iycr2014.org/participate/crystal-growing-competition/info-for-newcomers/how-to-grow>

## **How to Grow Crystals**

The idea is to grow a single crystal, not a bunch of crystals. You will first need to grow a small perfect crystal (your seed crystal) around which you will later grow a large crystal. It is therefore essential to avoid excessive rapid growth, which encourages the formation of multiple crystals instead of a single crystal.

### **FAQ: Why did my crystal shrink or disappear?**

If your crystal shrank or disappeared, it was because the surrounding solution became undersaturated and the crystal material went back into solution. Undersaturation may occur when the temperature of a saturated solution increases, even by only a few degrees, depending upon the solute. (This is why temperature control is so important.)

