

I'm basically a sixteen year old baby boomer. Although I'm a teenager, I act like a grandparent. I don't get memes, I can't text with my thumbs and the only social media I know how to use is gmail. To me, the internet has always been a place to get information, like an info desk. Info desks are useful but I wouldn't want to spend heaps of time at one. That's not to say that I don't use any media, I watch the news, I read books, I enjoy films. I just prefer getting news through the television and radio, reading books that are on paper, and I don't have Netflix or any other streaming thing so all the films I watch are either broadcast on linear television or are part of my parents extensive DVD collection. I guess I live in what grownups refer to as 'the real world.' Which has worked well for me in the past, as it's where grownups think teenagers should be living. But then Covid 19 happened.

On Monday the twenty third of March 2020, I learned that the country would be going into lockdown. School would be over Google Meet, my friends were on Google Hangouts, and in April The Listener was discontinued so I even had to find the TV schedule online. Outside it was silent. there were no cars in the streets, but there were people there, I'd see them, and they'd see me. There'd be a nod from across the road, to acknowledge each other's presence, but none of those people were really present. They were like ghosts; belonging to another world. Because what happened when the nation went into lockdown is that life was sucked from the streets and uploaded to the cloud.

So I set up my computer on my desk, bookmarked my classes, and left this world for the next. It definitely wasn't the first time I had encountered the internet but I guess you could say that I'd only ever been there on holiday. I didn't know the place anywhere near as well as most teenagers and I almost needed a phrasebook. The way I write messages is with correct capitalisation and punctuation. In the language of the internet this makes it sound really serious, like you're mad at someone. My friends have other ways of writing. If something is written using CAPITAL LETTERS then that is equivalent to yelling. If there are OnLY SoMe CAPitAl LeTtERs then it is not serious and I think it may be some form of sarcasm. There were also abbreviations which can usually be worked out using context and guesswork.

The online world doesn't obey the same rules as the 'real' world. In the real world, if you aren't within about four metres of someone it's very difficult to talk to them. In the online world you could talk to someone on the moon. That's impressive but it's also a bit claustrophobic because everyone is everywhere. Social distancing doesn't exist. Time doesn't exist either, days merge together because the scenery stays the same. It's a weird world and I don't like it there. Unfortunately the tables had turned, it used to be that kids not paying attention in real world classes were on their phones, in the online world. Now I was meant to be in class in the online world and I'd find myself being distracted by things in the real world, like a cup of hot chocolate or a warm fire. If I closed my computer then I was being antisocial. If I didn't watch the one o'clock press briefing with Jacinda Adern then I wasn't paying attention to what was going on.

In lockdown, media was not a distraction, far from it, the real world was the distraction but it wasn't distracting enough. News reports showed rising death tolls, mass graves and overflowing morgues. The virus threatened to become a part of everyday life, the

future was blurry and uncertain. It was honestly like something out of a film. The sort of thing I used to enjoy sitting down to watch. Films are fun to view from a distance as they give you a break from the mundanity of everyday life. It is not fun, however, to live in a film. I watched Titanic and ended up crying because it reminded me of how brief life is. So many of the people there knew they were going to die, but don't we all know we're going to die? If we weren't in the middle of a real crisis then that might have just been an interesting thing to think about, and then I could go back to my maths homework. Instead it just reinforced the general fear that came with the pandemic. That I could very well be killed by either Covid 19 or the following chaos, and if that didn't kill me something else would. There were hundreds of thousands of people slowly dying all over the world, fighting for every breath. The Titanic only killed 1500. I spent a sleepless night thinking about how insignificant life is. I figured that we're all just drawings in the sand, hoping that the next wave isn't that one that will wash us away. A perfectly suitable metaphor that should be kept firmly in the media, while I stay firmly in my reality.

With once familiar forms of media being so scary I turned to the real world to take my mind off it. But the real world looked abandoned and gave me a feeling that I shouldn't be there. The real world belonged to the trees and the birds, I was an intruder. So I returned to the online world and watched stand up comedy on YouTube, I then discovered a YouTube channel called Crash Course which had entertaining videos full of interesting information, a show I enjoyed called taskmaster had started a thing called hometasking, where people sent in video submissions and got to be part of the show. I may not be a digital native, I felt more like a refugee, but I have come to appreciate the unique civilisation that exists on the internet and social media. All the same, I am glad that life has been downloaded back into the now bustling streets. I prefer interacting with people irl (the digital way to say 'in real life'), which is not to say that the online world is inferior in any way. In fact, I think grown ups are wrong, the internet is a perfectly reasonable place for teenagers to spend large amounts of their time. Online media is not a distraction, it's a world, a universe even, and a very useful one at that.