My generation would probably not object to being part cyborg. Slightly sarcastic, outwardly cynical, and privately optimistic, we go about our days hand in hand with the latest digital innovations. Inheritors of the legacy left by our parents, we are simultaneously terrified and hopeful for it. And, like naive children, we are all too eager to ignore the bad and focus on the good. Distracting ourselves with the new smart phone, we criticize, mock, and ignore the problems left by our forefathers. But we do not completely separate from them—how can we, when it's part of the world we live in? In fact, we try to fix each problem our own way: with social media, with our phones and gadgets. It's in this fixing where we go wrong. We replace relationships with connections, and wonder why the latter is not enough. We build mechanical marvels that, in the end, are used to replace our humanity. Living in our heads, we huddle behind the bright glare of screens, altering the world in a way that makes us no different from the robots we create. This is not good.

In this essay, I will attempt to answer this question: how do we balance the digital world with our physical one and, in doing so, address the human condition—our inherent loneliness. To this end, I will use Harlow et.al's "study of love" on rhesus macaques, the 2008 Disney Pixar movie WALL-E, and Stephen Schwartz's musical Pippin (Stanton). I mention a balancing
between these two worlds because it would be incorrect to say that the Internet is the source of all evil. At the end of the day, these technological wonders are tools. I emphasize this because that's all technology should be: a tool. Yet, we are identifying ourselves with the tool rather than with our humanity. We use these new devices to cover up our vulnerabilities and cut, paste, and delete parts of ourselves online for the sake of appearances. To be absolutely clear, I am not saying that the digital revolution is a horrible monstrosity of unimaginable peril that should be abhorred. I am saying that we are relying more on these programmed machines than on people. I am saying that in prioritizing the digital world above our physical one, we lose the ability to bond with others. I am saying that we are forgetting how to have a conversation (Turkle).

I am saying that, in response to these problems, we should hug more.

Now that I have given you fair warning, let us begin.

I wanted magic shows and miracles
Mirages to touch
I wanted such a little thing from life
I wanted so much.

-Pippin (Schwartz)

There's a large part of the Millennial generation that's a bit odd.

Here we are, inspired by stories (not our own). Our idols range from a high-functioning sociopath, to time-and-space travelling doctors; to a pair of demon-vanquishing brothers, all the way to the over-exaggerated mannerisms of anime characters. Look at these poor and raving souls who rant about the infinitesimally small details in a show! Gawk at the effort spent meticulously combing the Internet for that one GIF we somehow missed! We Instagram pictures of ice-cream and blog about "The Worst Cat." We spend our days writing Fanfiction, making
Vines, and Snapchatting. Clearly, time is a "big ball of wibbily-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff" that is largely ignored in favor of Netflix.¹ We are idealists behind a keyboard, seekers of knowledge, believers in happy endings. And while this is absolutely marvelous, it does present a number of problems. I said before that we were seekers of knowledge. This is a trait which has gotten a little out of hand, as us Millennials would rather fiddle with our tech than interact with people. Of course, we aren't the only ones who do this. Nowadays, it's rare to see anyone without a phone. But we fiddle with our devices more automatically than most. Observe any eighteen to twenty-nine year old in the streets and you'll probably see them tinkering with it at some point. Conversations dedicate a moment of silence for texting. Meals are accompanied with a glance at email. The average person spends ninety minutes a day staring at their phone, checking it around 110 times ("Mobile Statistics"; Woollaston). Odds are, they're probably spending a fraction of those ninety minutes on Facebook. This is most likely out of boredom, because no one needs to spend fifty-one minutes reading the petty ravings of narcissists and trolls with too much time on their hands (Conrad; Bennett). It is almost as if we can't stand not doing anything, even if it means playing Pokémon or reading poetry for hours at a time.

Again, this points to a particular problem. We're supposed to take over the world in the not-so-distant future. How is this supposed to happen? We don't like dealing with people most of the time; two-thirds of our age group say that "you can't be too careful [around others]" (Taylor, Keeter). Some of us couldn't form coherent sentences when Moriarty came back,² the Doctor regenerated, and Dean turned into a demon. Entitled, self-absorbed, narcissistic, and intelligent,

¹ I found the quote while browsing Pinterest, but it comes from the Doctor Who episode, Blink (Moffat). Paradoxes with creepy angel statues are cool.
² Er, spoilers! Also, for examples on incoherency, see nearly every single (Tumblr) meme about the hiatus (of Sherlock, mostly) and "Why Sherlock Needs to Come Back On Air Right Now," as well as the reactions to all the cliffhangers (search on YouTube "Sherlock—His Last Vow"). The shock, excitement, and boredom is exaggerated, but really, what did you expect from the admirers of a high-functioning sociopath?
we are very much like the eponymous character in the musical, *Pippin* (Sanburn; Schwartz). Just as he spends his time trying to find what will make him extraordinary, we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to discover our "corner of the sky"—usually by consulting the Internet (Schwartz: "Corner of the Sky"). We're even considered the "most socially awkward group in the history of humanity so far," with many questioning if we're even ready for the responsibility of ruling the world (Tepfenhart; Sanburn). This generation is beginning to look like the humans in the Disney Pixar movie, *WALL-E* (Stanton). 

Our overuse of technology has stunted our ability to cope with reality. In relying on it for everything—work, social interactions, love, reminders, music—we forget how to deal with people face to face. Cyber-bullying is an example of this shortcoming: a new name for an old occurrence. There are three main differences, however: it's completely anonymous, it can follow you home, and the evidence will forever be encoded on the Internet (Cheng; Couts). In a world overwhelmed by information and reluctant to get hurt, it is all too easy to hermit in your room and cuddle with the laptop. After all, you always know where you stand with your wifi.

In short, we have two problems. We depend on technology too much and we don't know how to deal with people. These issues stem from a rather curious source: our (supposed) intelligence (Horwath, Williamson). We think too much. People are unpredictable, after all. Isn't it better to utilize the collective knowledge of humanity in order to figure them out? As it is in science, it's easier to ask questions than conduct the experiment. It's easier to face a screen than a

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3 In re-watching *WALL-E*, I've found that many of the topics the movie touches on is becoming more relevant every day (Stanton). Besides the obvious warnings about global warming, consumerism, and corporatism, the dependence on technology was comical as well as terrifying. Humans, in the *Axiom*, can't even stand up by themselves. In relation to this essay, I focus mainly on the latter point as the Millennial generation has defined itself by its use of technology (Taylor, Keeter). As much as it would be fun to zip around in a hover-chair, I don't like the idea of staying in one my entire life. Also, while I don't talk about consumerism and corporatism too much, it is a topic that is almost inexorably tied with technology. An example: Apple products. Also, in *WALL-E*, Auto (the autopilot of the *Axiom*) can be seen as the future Siri which nearly killed WALL-E and doomed the humans aboard the *Axiom* to eternal space-travel (Stanton). This is not encouraging at all.
person. And that's the thing. As we begin to inherit the mistakes made by the previous
generation, we mock and dismiss them as someone else's problem. We procrastinate living in our
own world by obsessing over fictional ones. We marvel and cry over these fake lives that make
meaning in ours. Hiding behind a screen, we watch these characters who live in realities
somewhat like the one we live in. Though some involve time travel, demons, and dragons, each
of these stories have their own trials and tribulations—akin to real life, with one key difference:
we know that everything will be alright. We know that the Doctor and his companions will be
okay; Sherlock, John, and now Mary will have their own adventures; and Sam and Dean will
remain a family.4 Even when they end up a little more sad and broken at the end of the day, we
know they'll be fine. But that's the trap, isn't it? We know that they will be fine. But where does
that leave us? We, after all, exemplify the human condition of loneliness in every Facebook or
Twitter post. Poignantly, we alternate between desperately romanticizing our lives or relentlessly
criticizing them. In every quote and picture we upload on the Internet, we ask for an iota of
attention—of kindness—that will not hurt us.

4 Our optimism is exceptional (and always somewhat desperate) in this regard, because thinking of anything else is
not allowed (as though this changes anything). An example:

(Image taken from Google, posted on Tumblr)
So, what can we do about it?

I propose we hug more.

The reason I say this is simple. With the integration of social media in our daily lives, we have forgotten how to have a conversation. We are replacing relationships with connections, and they are not equivalent. In Sherry Turkle's TED talk, she recounts how children complain about their parents' fixation on their phones even as they are afflicted by the same compulsion to fiddle. She mentions the development of social robots, meant to reassure, designed to convey empathy, programmed to put on a show (Turkle). How can a machine ever hope to copy sentience, to be able to feel and care the same way humans do? And if we ever create sentient life, should it be used to cover our vulnerabilities? If the answer is yes, then we are one step closer to the reality shown in WALL-E (Stanton). In our helplessness, technology becomes our shock blanket. Our phones provide an escape from uncomfortable topics. Facebook gives us the instantaneous attention we crave. The digital innovations of the 21st century differ greatly from the discoveries of previous generation in that our handheld devices—the perpetual companions of the past decade—give us the control to edit ourselves. We can cut, paste, and delete what we want to present the "best" part of us (for that moment). We can even dictate exactly how much interaction we want with a person.

Turkle describes this new trend in social interactions as the "Goldilocks Effect: not too close, not too far, just right." Of course, this isn't anything new. Email is only the electronic version of the original paper mail. Texting is merely a sneakier way to pass notes in class. But the issue with these new things is that they are beginning to take over our old priorities. In adapting to a digital world, we are forgetting how to survive in our non-digital one. We don't know how to deal with others and, in avoiding them, we become lonely. A factor leading to our
seclusion is this new ability to edit ourselves. We are confusing what we edit for the whole truth. We craft a perfect image of ourselves, and when that image turns out flawed, we lose trust in its maker—us. This is kind of ironic, actually, because do we not program robots to be what we aren't? We are literally encoding the perfect human, and yet is it not human to err? We are sacrificing (messy and imperfect) relationships—our (unpredictable) humanity—for (clean and polished) connections. This concern will probably dog my generation our whole lives, especially those born in the 1990s, because we were raised with the Internet. We grew up with a phone in our pocket, a computer in the room, and wifi in the house. It is to the point where "[we] would rather text than talk," Turkle notes. And this is not good.

However, I am not saying that the digital revolution is an evil and vicious thing which should never have been developed. In fact, it is a wonderful tool that continues to change the world. Look at the Internet, for instance. The collective and ever-expanding knowledge of humanity is at our fingertips, all 200 petabytes of it ("Do You Know How Big The Internet Really Is?"). How cool is that? YouTube is filled with videos teaching people languages, how to draw, paint, and scrapbook, among other applications. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp allow us to communicate with people all over the world. FanFiction, DeviantArt, and Tumblr are places where users can express their obsessions and passions through stories, pictures, and posts. Connecting with others has never been so easy. But the paradox of having a thousand friends and being alone is real. We are confusing conversation and connectivity, and in doing so, we are becoming more and more isolated (Turkle). Put another way, we delude ourselves into thinking that the contacts we have on a website are the same as having real friends. Just because you have a person on LinkedIn doesn't mean you know them. I know people who have over a thousand "friends" on Facebook, but only interact with maybe twenty of
them on a good month. Comparatively, monkeys can have a maximum social group of fifty other individuals that they know well (Cohen). Because of language, humans push this value to 150. Again, I sincerely doubt many people keep in touch with fifty friends, let alone intimately know 150 of them. Technology is a wonderful tool, and I emphasize the word because that it's all it should be; a tool. Yet, "we expect more from [our phones] and less from each other" (Turkle). If this continues, in about millennia, we might be confined to hover-chairs and robots tending to our every whim (Stanton). Our descendants would be even more socially inept and turn to their phones for guidance—the exact opposite of what we should do. This places us back to my initial question: what can we do to balance the digital world with our physical one and, in doing so, adapt to the epidemic of loneliness?

Once more, in answer, I say we hug more.

Hugging is a way to show affection while getting used to people. It allows for social development, which is what we need. After all, books and video games can only teach us so much about being human. In the next section, I will explain further why hugging (among other forms of social interaction) is so wonderful.

A HUMAN PASSENGER

[Is] sitting, reclined, in the chair.
He is large, round and soft—like a big baby.
Wears a red, BNL jumpsuit.
The chair seems to be steering itself.
Guided by floor lines, just like the robots.
Speaker headrests block his peripheral vision.
A HOLOGRAPHIC SCREEN floats inches in front of his face.
He converses with a SECOND PASSENGER on screen:

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5 This is not to detract from games with stories that explore our humanity (eg. Last Of Us, Fallout, Assassin’s Creed, To The Moon, Far Cry, Final Fantasy, Grand Theft Auto, Metal Gear Solid, and BioShock, to name a few). I’m just saying that we can’t replace our own experiences with simulations. Also, it's somewhat illegal to assassinate people you don't like, so games shouldn't always be emulated in every way.
PASSENGER #1: Well, I've been in my cabin all morning so let's hover over to the driving range and hit a few virtual balls into space.

PASSENGER #2 (ON SCREEN): Nah, we did that yesterday. I don't want to do that.

PASSENGER #1: Well then what do you want to do?

ON WALL-E

He looks over his shoulder.
Passenger #2 is floating right next to them.
Isolated in his own hover chair.
Also in a red jumpsuit. Also a big baby.

PASSENGER #2: I don't know. Something.

Both humans are totally unaware of the other's presence.
They all exit the hallway.

- A scene in WALL-E (Stanton: script from IMSDb)

Imagine a world where you were taken from your mother and raised by an inanimate object.

This is what Harry Harlow, an American psychologist, did to rhesus macaque monkeys in his "study of love" (Harlow et.al; PETA). Calling this part of the experiment the "pit of despair," he studied what would happen if baby macaques were placed in partial and total isolation (Wiki: "Pit of Despair"; Harlow et.al 90). They lived in separate cages, but could see and communicate with each other. All were too far away for any kind of physical contact (Harlow et.al 91). Over a thirty-two-week period, the controls interacted with three other groups of monkeys who have experienced three months, six months, and twelve months of total isolation (respectively), before being placed in total isolation themselves for half a year. The three-month segregates showed the most dramatic symptoms—autistic self-clutching and rocking—of the four groups. One of them even refused to eat and died five days later. Those monkeys were fortunate: they were able to
adapt to normal social patterns in a couple of weeks (Harlow et.al 92). The six-month isolates never fully recovered and the twelve-month primates were terminated after a mere ten weeks of social testing (Harlow et.al 94). If they continued, the control pairs for that particular batch of monkeys would've killed them anyway.

This is what happens if we are deprived of social contact.

Granted, this happened to monkeys. Monkeys aren't people, no matter how closely related we are to them. But even though they aren't exactly like us, a human baby and a young chimpanzee have many things in common. We learn at the same rate; we are physically similar; we even have the same reflex reactions. Stroke a baby's palm, and it will grasp your finger. This is a throwback to when we were apes: young primates would hold on to their mother's fur so that she didn't have to carry her young (Human Ape). These similarities are why Harlow chose to experiment on macaques rather than rats, which was—and still is—the norm in the 1960s. This also underlines why social interaction is so important: humans and apes are social creatures. As shown in this heinous experiment, when you isolate such a being from any form of social contact early enough, you will break them.

Unfortunately, nowadays the art of interaction is becoming an industry. According to an article by the Huffington Post, there is now a chair specifically designed to hug you (Moye). Dubbed the "tranquility chair," this chair-with-a-face was created for the elderly to "cure" loneliness with hugs, a "listening" ear, and nostalgic music for $419. This is what it looks like:

...
Frankly, I prefer a pet. The lady being "hugged" looks vaguely unsure of her decision to be encircled by arms that look like cushioned roller coaster safety bars. Another article by The Guardian agrees, stating that people should just visit their grandparents instead of giving them this thing (Hanson). Furthermore, this mannequin is (physical) proof of our loneliness and our incompetence in dealing with it. How terrible it must be, to be old and have nothing but this mildly disturbing chair for comfort. Clearly, we value efficiency over our grandparents since visiting takes time and effort which could be spent doing something "productive." What would happen in the future when we are old, wrinkled, and forgotten? I wouldn't want this greeting me in the morning. This is a prime example of us expecting more from technology than from ourselves (Turkle). It is a poor substitute for a living, breathing, human. At least the robots in WALL-E were charming—this is downright creepy (Stanton). It would be kinder and (financially) better to hug your grandparents instead of buying a robot to do it for you.

Yet, that's what we're doing. In the name of progress, we prioritize knowledge over compassion. We are replacing companionship with hugging chairs, confusing conversation with connections, substituting the Internet for real life. None of these things are equivalent to each other. In confusing what we want with what we are, we create a gap between what is real and
what is not. When we realize this space, we echo the macaques in Harlow's "study of love." However, instead of tearing out our hair, we blog against the world; in lieu of rocking back and forth, we Facebook our compatriots and plot revenge (Harlow et.al 92). As we huddle close to our laptop, we succeed in becoming lonely. Out of fear of getting hurt, we hermit in our rooms and create our own cushioned cages. We act like these impoverished primates because humanity isn't always a clean, pretty, predictable, or kind entity. Unlike the poor monkey that starved itself in despair, we starve ourselves for the perfect figure. We communicate through the bars of our gilded cage, but don't go and actually meet other face-to-face. We are unsatisfied with what we are because it is inevitably flawed in some way, shape, or form. It is a flawed legacy we are creating, and this is why we relish this digital revolution. We can edit ourselves, and isn't that a terrifying process? With the wonder of the Internet, we can change anything. We can rectify any flaw in seconds, Photoshop away all imperfections with the click of a button. But the magic of instant gratification is simply not a thing in real life. You can't just decide to lose fifty pounds in a week—it's not healthy, not to mention impossible. We will never reach the idealized version of ourselves, not really, because it is an abstract, ever-changing thing. So, instead of working towards impossibilities, we should accept who we are. Once we do this, dealing with people won't be so bad. After all, we all have our own imperfections, our own vulnerabilities. Hugging others won't fix all of our problems, but it will make them more bearable and infinitely more enjoyable. To be blunt, it's a hell of a lot better than going at them alone.
Our lives are not only ours.
-Hang Hsien (Kay 628)

Near the end of River of Stars, Ren Daiyan has to choose between regaining Kitai’s "rivers and mountains" or surrendering the victory already in his grasp and go back to his emperor (Kay 576-583). Any other person would've disobeyed; he didn't. He went back and was incarcerated for his loyalty (591). But his actions allowed the coming generations to never know the "blood and war and famine and fire" that plagued the previous dynasties. Hang Hsien, one of the main characters, tells Daiyan the above quote: "this peace, this surrender of so much, is hard as death, but it is not children and old men dying. Our lives are not only ours" (628).

It's tales like these that teach us about ourselves.

Every generation was raised with stories. Mine started with fairy-tales, like Rapunzel, and fables, like The Hare and the Tortoise. We grew up with Disney movies such as Mulan, Lion King, and Pixar chronicles like Toy Story, Monster's Inc., and WALL-E. Nowadays, we gallivant around time and space with the Doctor, hunt demons with Dean and Sam Winchester, and run through the streets of London with Sherlock and John. We romanticize the world with these sagas. Too many times, I read the wish that Gandalf would take us on an adventure or a Hogwarts letter would find us. We wait for the day we become the heroes of our own story, complete with someone to save, forgetting that there are far more important things to do than envision our own glory. We forget that we have lives that command our attention and work that needs completing. There are people to help, time to give, and dues to pay before we’re allowed to dream. We are beginning to realize that "our lives are not only ours" and we are shaping a legacy that will be criticized, mocked, and ignored—and doesn't that sound familiar? When we
immerse ourselves in the stories of these fictional characters, wishing we can be more like them, we forget that we are what we recognize. It's why we are so fascinated with these tales of fancy, of bravery, loss, and adventure. Each of the characters would be remembered. Who wouldn't want that? Just as the protagonist in these stories changed their world, we desire to leave a mark on our own. It is unfortunate that the reality we live in is selective in that regard. But again, the only way we will be able to live is to compromise. And that's okay.

As I said in the beginning of the essay, the Millennia! generation is an odd one. We are idealists behind a keyboard; seekers of knowledge; and believers in happy endings. We were born with a phone in our pocket, a computer in the room, and wifi in the house. "[We] would rather text than talk," and this is a problem that will (probably) haunt us for a while (Turkle). Until robots develop sentience like WALL-E, all we have is ourselves, and not even Siri or the hugging chair can save us from that reality (Stanton; Hanson; Moye). But maybe that's not so bad. Humans have been solving our own problems and taking care of each other for an extremely long time. It's only in the recent century that the idea of having robots cater to our every need is even viable. If Turkle's TED talk is of any indication, we are beginning to find the balance between technology and our own lives. This is good, because we can't replace human relationships. They are messy, unpredictable, annoying, and necessary. So, we should get used to people, in all their chaotic, unedited glory. Adapt to the ever-changing circumstance that is life, and hug each other when it gets too much. As Pippin realizes at the end of the play, "[he] is not a river [nor] a giant bird that soars to the sea" (Schwartz). This is a reference to the idealistic belief he had at the beginning of the play: he thought he was extraordinary and meant for something more than "commonplace, ordinary pursuits" (Schwartz: "Corner of The Sky," "Extraordinary"). Yet, the power he killed for was tainted, as he couldn't be anything but a tyrant. The glory he
sought in his youth was marred by the reality of war. The perfect woman he searched for was a fleeting image, an abstract thought. The only time he was happy was with an "ordinary" widow who was attracted to the arch of his foot (Schwartz: "Kind of Woman"). He compromised, and in doing so, found what he was looking for: a companion. And that is something truly extraordinary.

The last lines of Pippin, sums my thoughts up quite nicely:

Katherine: "Pippin? Do you feel that you've compromised?"

Pippin: "No."

Katherine: "Do you feel like a coward?"

Pippin: "No."

Katherine: "Well then... how do you feel?"

Pippin: "...Trapped. Which isn't too bad for the end of a musical comedy. Ta da!"

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