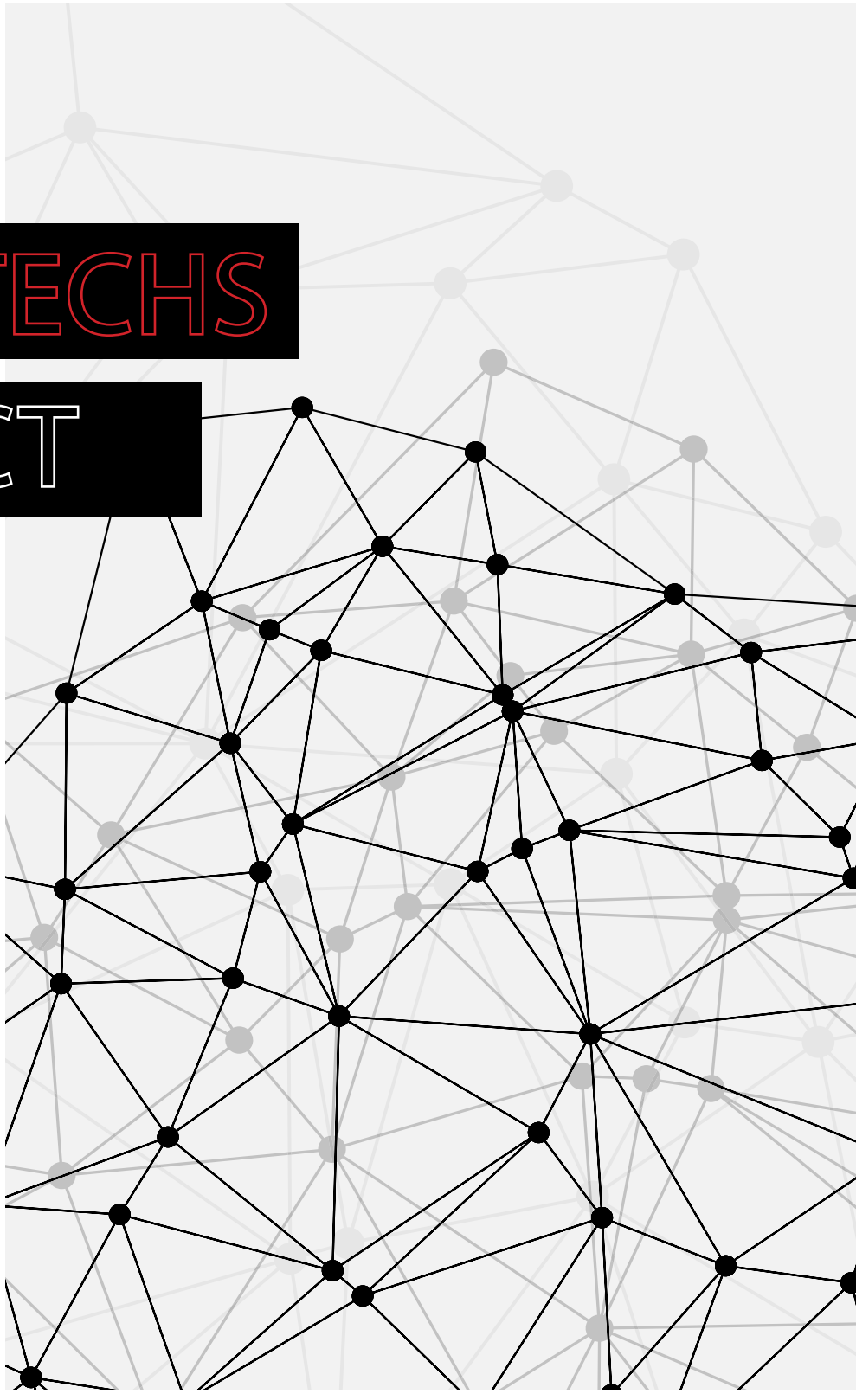
THE ARCHITECHS PROJECT



VOLUME 01

How to work, govern and learn in a hyper-connected world.

THREAD

WELCOME
THE ARCHITECHS PROJECT

The ArchiTech project began as an excel spreadsheet documenting examples of individuals who were using technology to harness a scale of power traditionally reserved for major institutions. Determined to write about this phenomenon, we started a book draft in 2010, but kept finding more and more stories we wanted to add. We called the people who were using technology to influence everything from art culture to global diplomacy ArchiTechs - those who were using digital tools to rebuild the world around them.

In 2008, the Obama presidential campaign's use of social media rewrote the rules of supporter mass-mobilization. The Iranian protests in 2009 showcased YouTube's power in humanizing a conflict on the other side of the world. In 2010, we felt the impact of cablegate, the release of hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables by Wikileaks that sent ripples through the diplomatic community, caused tensions between governments, and planted the first seeds of the Arab Spring in Tunisia. Facebook was used to organize the unprecedented number of protestors in Egypt, Libya, and Syria. When the Turkish government tried to ban Twitter in 2014, citizens spray painted DNS codes on posters of the president, enabling Internet users to bypass the restrictions and access the service anyway. In between all of that, netizens celebrated a royal marriage, mourned the loss of global icon Steve Jobs, and danced along to Gangnam Style.

ArchiTechs are not defined by geography, occupation, or nationality. They come from all walks of life and have diverse backgrounds and experiences. The only thing that defines an ArchiTech is their ability to use technology to redefine the world around them. As digital technologies enable us to connect to each other faster we are seeing a redistribution of power that is shifting towards the individual and away from groups and organizations.

ArchiTechs aren't just do-gooders who want to make the world a better place. They can also be hackers, criminals and predators who use those same digital tools to inflict harm.

And so, instead of trying to fit this into a book, we've decided to turn ArchiTechs into an ongoing series of essays that explores this new trend. Whether it's a macro look at the trends influencing global markets or individual profiles of the people spear-heading these changes, we'll be sharing with you our ongoing passion for understanding how technology is changing us and how we, by extension, are changing the world.

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Rahaf & Riwa Harfoush,
Founders, Red Thread

SECTIONS

THE INTELLIGENCE OF NETWORKS
LIBYA

citizenship | *geo-politics* | *governance*

We'd like to turn back the clock to 2011, the year we began to truly understand the potential impact of ArchiTechs. Emboldened by the successful revolutions that had occurred in both Tunisia and Egypt, citizens in Libya began a series of peaceful protests against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, who had ruled the country with an iron fist for the past forty years.

The world watched and wondered if the momentum of the Arab Spring could blossom in a country where dissent had been deemed a criminal offence, and public executions were broadcast on state television as a warning to others. Initially, the military was dispatched to forcefully break up the protests using water cannons, tear gas and even live ammunition, but to no avail. As the country dissolved in chaos, Gaddafi became increasingly desperate, blaming the ensuing civil war on the interference of foreign countries, hallucinatory drugs and even Al Qaeda. He shut down media organizations, making it difficult for the world to know what was happening on the ground.

The hunt for information was on and allies would emerge from the unlikeliest of places. One them was a 59 year-old woman living in rural Canada named Janice Clinch.[1] Clinch, is a retired auto-shop manager who has never traveled to Libya, nor the surrounding Arab regions. She is however, passionate about the fight for democracy and dignity, two themes that inspired her to get involved.

Along with several social media users, she monitored Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites and poured over online satellite images for any leads on Gaddafi's movements. After months of tireless work, she was appointed as one of the administrators of the "Libyan Youth Movement" page on Facebook, where she constantly scanned posts for helpful information. She sends anything she finds to NATO forces, including tweeting the longitude and latitude of a gas station in Western Libya that was being used as temporary base for pro-Gaddafi forces. An impressive feat for someone who lives on the outskirts of a small Canadian town.

Clinch is not alone in her efforts. There are many other individuals engaged in similar activities, acting as a new breed of self-organized volunteer intelligence analysts. Across the border, Robert Rowley is one of them. The 48 year-old Dairy Queen supervisor from Arizona noticed something odd as he was scouring satellite images: he spotted what looked like military vehicles parked on the yard of a commercial warehouse. Ten hours after tweeting his findings, the location was targeted by a NATO air strike.

Let us be clear: while NATO officials recognize social media channels as an important source for tips, each piece of intelligence is methodically vetted and checked prior to action. What interested us about this story was the presence of volunteers who were not personally linked to the conflict, who were willing to spend hours of their free time trying to help. "We get information from open sources on the Internet; we get Twitter," NATO Spokesperson Wing Commander Mike Bracken said at a press conference. "You name any source of media and our fusion centre will deliver all of that into usable intelligence." Those sources include everything from reading blogs and twitter streams, to contacting online activists directly for their input.

This is the main thesis of ArchiTech: the idea that digital media ecosystems have made it possible for an individual to have an impact on something as far removed as a military offensive in a foreign country. We are living in an age of digital empowerment where each person has the unprecedented ability to disrupt events on both a local and global scale- for both good and evil. Technology has changed how we act as colleagues, friends, lovers and activists.

"The world watched and wondered if the momentum of the Arab Spring could blossom in one of Africa's most censored countries."

1 http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/africa-mideast/how-social-media-users-are-helping-nato-fight-gadhafi-in-libya/article2060965/

THE GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE
ROMAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

education | *access* | *networks*

"This isn't the first time that access to technology has changed the way we live."

By now, we are all aware of how digital technology has dramatically influenced our world, but what about its impact on us, as humans? The last 20 years have seen our world changed in ways that would have shocked our ancestors. Our behaviour has evolved in order to accommodate this new hyper-connected world.

This isn't the first time that access to technology has changed the way we live. Our history is a constant reminder at just how drastically our day to day lives can change thanks to human ingenuity and innovation. However, it is the first time that we have the ability to influence each other far beyond the geographical boundaries that limited our ancestors.

After Europe's Dark Ages, it was the Roman Catholic monasteries that found themselves responsible for compiling and safeguarding the world's knowledge, much of which had been lost or destroyed. Housed within the walls of these holy places, hermits, monks and priests would painstakingly recopy scrolls and ancient tomes by hand, compiling them into books. To learn about the wisdom of Plato or the passionate and often fickle nature of Roman gods, a person had to go to these monasteries to access that information. Initially, that meant that the only people who were eligible to access this knowledge were the men who wanted to devote themselves to the path of the priesthood. Luckily, the Roman Catholic Church agreed that the knowledge held in their possession should belong to the general public and not just those who subscribe to a particular faith. In a revolutionary campaign, the Church began encouraging monks and priests to move into local cathedrals to open up institutions to share and distribute information with those who wanted to learn it. This would be the beginning of universities in Europe as we know them today. As thousands of people gained access to information, we were still limited by our physical location, and our proximity to one of these institutions.

THE PRINTING PRESS
THE DEVIL'S INVENTION?

technology | *innovation* | *scale*

The next big spike in accessing information wouldn't arrive until the invention of the printing press in 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg, a perfect example of an ArchiTech. The printing press laid the foundations of mass communication by enabling the rapid mass production of content at a much lower cost. Before Gutenberg's invention, producing a book could take several years as each manuscript needed to be copied by hand.

Ultimately, the ability to quickly mass produce identical texts would have a deep and lasting impact on our society's ability to share information. Printing also greatly improved education as it prevented the mistakes and inaccuracies that were often associated with hand-copying manuscripts. By providing scholars with identical texts, progress in critical thinking and advances in medicine or science were made in a more reliable manner.

This was a fast-paced society altering change. Fifty years after the invention of the printing press, over eight million books had been produced. The result was the ability for large groups of the population to improve their aptitude and increase their knowledge. In commerce, the ability to print items like contracts, deeds, maps and notes would dramatically change the way businesses were run.

The Internet shares many similarities with the printing press in terms of its impact on society. Unlike the invention and adoption of radio and television, the press and the web were both interactive mediums that enabled people to easily share their thoughts and opinions with a much wider audience than previously possible.

Even with such benefits, there were those who were staunchly against this new machine. The rise of the printing press meant the redundancy of scribes. More importantly, it meant that access to both producing and consuming information was no longer just available to the elite. This shift of power and change in hierarchy angered many. For example, in the Ottoman Empire, The Guilds of Writers, an organization of scribes, were emphatically against the printing press and referred to it as "the Devil's Invention." They were so opposed to its application that they prevented it's implementation within the broader Ottoman society until 1493- forty-three years after it has been invented by Gutenberg. Its the same type of protectionist behaviours we see today where the Taxi Cab lobby in Paris has waged war on services like Uber and where the service industry has pressured the New York City government to outlaw room rental services like AirBnb. These disruptive forces - started by ArchiTechs - are considered to be a huge threat to the status quo.

"It meant that access to both producing and consuming information was no longer available only to the elite."

GLOBAL TRIBES
RISE OF THE GEO-AGNOSTIC

community | *behavior* | *culture*

"Human nature doesn't change, human behavior does."

We are in the midst of another information revolution. The invention and increasing adoption of the Internet has already radically transformed various aspects of our daily lives and will continue to have an impact as the cost of broadband decreases and global adoption rates continue to rise. Every laptop computer, tablet and smart phone has turned into a publishing platform that can reach millions. The collective sum of human knowledge is at our fingertips. This is having both a positive and negative impact on our world. As with all technologies, the tools themselves are neutral, influenced by the intent of the people using them. Along with new opportunities, there are new threats as well, such as cyber-terrorism, viruses, and identity theft. The web has made it easier for predators, whether they are bullies or pedophiles, to lure their prey. [2] It has changed the way we identify ourselves and each other. With each trip online, we now leave a trail of data behind- data that is being tracked, collected and used by companies and governments. The Internet is the latest frontier for censorship and control. Denying access to information found online is standard practice in countries such as China and Iran.

Despite the fact that our behaviour is changing, human nature, the sum of thousands of years of evolution at work remains consistent. Our basic needs for food and shelter, security and health, friendship and family, self esteem and confidence, as well as morality and creativity remain strong motivators that drive our behaviour. Darwin came up with similar buckets through which all of our behaviour can be divided: survival, reproduction, kin selection and reciprocal altruism.

The only difference today is the way we go about fulfilling those needs, in particular, our need to interact and be social with other people. This sociability is at the core of our being, the foundation of our very human operating system. David Armano, a technology expert and EVP at Edelman Digital explains it best. "Human nature doesn't change, human behaviour does. Technology doesn't make us social," he said. "It influences our behaviour."

For us, the exciting development is not the latest social networking site, but really understanding how pervasive new technologies are influencing our species' innate need to socialize and connect. Our survival has always depended on our ability to collaborate. "Social behavior in humans is as old as our species, so the emergence of an Internet based on social behavior is simply our rudimentary technology catching up with offline life [3]," said Paul Adams, Global Brand Experience Manager at Facebook. From hunting big game to fighting wars, cooperation has been a key element to our evolution. Now, we are seeing these tribal values scale to a global online population.

The idea of the "Global Village" has been bandied about for years, but we don't quite think we are there yet. We are forming smaller global clusters of digital tribes, groups of people not tied by geography or proximity who are capable of self organizing and collaborating based on similar values and goals. Some of these tribes are static, meaning they exist because of the long-term needs of its members such as online exercises clubs, book clubs, etc., while others are much more elastic, flexible gatherings of people who generally come together to form loose bonds based around a shorter term goal. (We'll deep dive into this later.) These efforts highlight both the best and worst aspects of human behaviour.

2 http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/jan/24/internet-revolution-changing-world

3 http://radar.oreilly.com/2011/03/social-media-human-behavior.html

COGNITIVE SURPLUS
INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIENCY

cities | *identity* | *knowledge*

In his book "Cognitive Surplus," Clay Shirky was one of the first technologists to notice that people are channeling the extra time they have gained from watching less TV into various online pursuits. While we definitely agree with Shirky's analysis, we believe that he only illustrated half of the picture.

One of the main reasons why so many ArchiTechs are motivated to try and make these types of changes is that thanks to the speed of innovation, institutions are simply not able to keep up. While we, as a population, are constantly learning about how to use these new channels, governments, businesses, academic institutions, and other types of organizations need much longer to react and adopt these new mediums.

We have come so far from needing to trek to a monastery to learn about Plato or Ares. Now we can sit in the comfort of our own homes (or coffee shop or beach with a wifi) and with a few clicks have access to everything from research papers to video lectures and online reading lists and debates about the topics. And with the advent of mobile platforms such as tablets and mobile phones and e-readers, We don't even need to carry around a bulky laptop to get our fix for ancient knowledge, nor do we need to be a part of a traditional institution. We can access a wealth of scholarly papers thanks to Google without ever needing to enroll or set foot on a campus. Thanks to an increasingly connected web, these institutions are being outpaced by a flood of new ideas, innovations and technology rising from a general population that is now capable of collaborating on a global scale to achieve a common goal.

The speed at which this information exchange is taking place is in direct opposition to the hierarchal, one-directional broadcast nature of many of these institutions and it is becoming clear that the structure that once allowed them to flourish is now the very cause of their hindrance. For every ArchiTech that you see who is trying to accomplish something, you'll be able to identify an existing model or process that has failed them. And it is this gap that is driving the creation of new models in finance, healthcare, education, media and more.

"For every ArchiTech that is trying to accomplish something, you'll identify an existing model that has failed them. "

COMING NEXT
VOLUME 02

identity | *expression* | *relationships*

As technology changes the way we behave, it is also changing the way we see ourselves. In the next essay, we'll be taking a look at how technology is impacting our identity, and how our interactions in the various online spaces we inhabit is changing our offline selves. From people who take on the characteristics of their gaming avatars to tweeting as a form of existential crisis, technology is helping highlight some of the same questions that have been plaguing our species for centuries.

ABOUT US

CONNECTING THE DOTS IS WHAT WE DO BEST.

Red Thread is a do-tank that specializes in strategy, foresight and digital culture. A balance of exploration and action, our unique perspective helps us spot the possibilities, opportunities and contexts that others miss.

Founded by sisters Riwa and Rahaf Harfoush, Red Thread is a globally distributed network of strategists, designers, anthropologists, researchers, photographers and producers who collaborate on exciting projects and exchange ideas.

Work with us on special projects or speaking, or visit Red Thread's Institute of Digital Culture to learn more about how we develop organizational intelligence through thought-provoking courses and workshops.

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