

Hi, My name is Marcus and I grew up in a small town close to Rotterdam called Oostvoorne.

When my mother got pregnant with me, my parents got a bit worried. See, my mother was 46 at that time and even by today's standards that is a very late age to get pregnant. Let alone 37 years ago when medical technology and facilities weren't as advanced as they are now.

On top of this, a few years before, my mother lost my twin brother and sister during labour. You can imagine that all of this combined fueled the anxiety of my parents about the pregnancy.

My parents were christian so abortion was definitely out of the question (luckily), so they decided to turn to God for advice. Always when my parents were in the car together, they listened to this tape with a German priest.

And given the circumstances, they decided to call that priest and explained the situation and asked for guidance. The man proposed he would talk to God, and get back to my parents. A few days later, he called my parents and told them "I spoke to God, he says it will be alright, you will get a boy, named Marcus and he will do very special things in the world".

Funny enough, this completely set my mother and father at ease and lo and behold, they got a baby boy on the 18th of February 1980. It probably won't surprise you that they named me Marcus and for as long as I can remember they shared this story with me, making me believe (and act) like I'm destined to be special.

So when I was bullied at school I was able not to feel that down, because off course they see I'm different, I'm special! And all through my career I have made my path defining decisions in situations that I found myself in an environment with people around me that did what I did. These realizations, at those moments always prompted me into radically changing direction into new industries where I could be 'special'.

By now I feel blessed to have this upbringing and history, and it was only until I was asked 'why do you do what you do', that I realized that this was my motive, my reason for acting the way I do. It was my culture.

Culture that for everyone is defined by norms and values that are implemented to us by repetition. The more repetition, the more it rubs off on us. Because I spent the first 18 years with my parents, with this story, this became true to me. In the years following friends, colleagues and relations became my influencers of what I perceive as 'normal', or 'me', or my culture.

I met Michelle, my girlfriend, about five years ago in a club in Paris. She is a beautiful Finnish-Italian national that then lived in Italy. After a few months of dating, flying back and forth between Rotterdam and Bologna, she decided to move to Rotterdam and live with me in my apartment on the Witte de With.

After 2 years our first baby got born, a girl called Filippa, a bit over a year later Rocco our son was born. Since our one bedroom apartment was getting too small we decided to upgrade to a house and after a big renovation we moved into our new dream home in March 2016. When we visited Stockholm on a weekend trip two months later, we decided to move there.

Whilst in Stockholm, I called my broker that a couple of months earlier brokered the purchase of our house, to put it out for sale again. We sold the house within 8 hours, sold all our belongings that wouldn't fit in the rental van, sold our car, and moved to Stockholm first of November last year. I now travel back and forth every weekend, because I still work in Rotterdam.

I think it is safe to say that we are living the millennial lifestyle, with maximum flexibility, more online than offline interactions, no real perceived national borders, as little assets as possible, and an ov-chipcard instead of a car.

I believe that the stability I was blessed with in my upbringing, has been an important part of the development of my culture. From my birth to leaving the house at 18 I lived in the same house, my stay-at-home mother and working father were always there and I had the same friends around me.

Filippa turning 3 in a month has, by now, lived in 4 different houses, 2 countries, she is in her third daycare, and sees her mother when she comes to pick her up from work and both of us in the weekends.

In many aspects, this lifestyle couldn't be more of a contrast from the one I was raised in. With respect to the upbringing of my kids I am getting increasingly concerned about the culture Michelle and I are passing on to them with the choices we've made honestly more for our own needs and benefit.

I don't think we are the only ones in this situation, around me I see many people growing into the same environment. The world has changed so radically. It is no longer parents and kids and only this human interaction, with the added complexity of our busy/ more complex lifestyles. On top of this there is also a new strong third party at play. Technology.

Amidst the massive information flow we have to compute every day with email, whatsapp, texts, instagram, facebook, snapchat etc. we are trying to find ways to ensure our human face-time with the people we love because we know from our upbringing that this is valuable. I bet most of you have experienced a pretty tech-free childhood, and we have sort of grown into technology over the last decades. Nowadays kids don't know any better than to have technology all around them from the get go.

For the people here that have kids, I don't think anyone hasn't let their children watch kids videos on a handheld device to get some of our own 'well deserved' peace and quiet.

Whatever your opinion on this, it is clear that YouTube is where many small kids are found today.

It is so mind numbing, because my daughter doesn't laugh at it or talk when she watches YouTube. She just sits there, concentrated. And there is something weird about seeing your child watching a video of somebody playing with toys, instead of actually playing with toys herself.

But is it really different from what many of us used to do as children - flicking through toy catalogues and dreaming about what Sinterklaas might bring us? Well yes, I think it is.

Watching videos again and again is more compulsive, it's more addictive, and it's more time consuming.

Did you know that in the last ten years since the iPhone was introduced, ADHD has increased with 42% in children.

Children have less patience, and immediately when they are bored, we give them the iPad to calm them down when nothing else works. Kids don't get bored that quickly anymore with the entertainment in their pockets, and I believe boredom is the fuel for creativity.

Research has shown, that heavy device use during young childhood could negatively interfere with the development of these kids' empathy, social- and problem solving skills that are typically obtained by exploring, playing and interacting with other children, and of course with their parents.

Steve Jobs himself didn't let his children use the iPad. In fact he commonly warned that technology should be limited for kids use at home. And he was not alone. Many technology executives strictly limit their children's screen time, and banning technology during school week.

My daughter is luckily still so small, that she hasn't got any social media accounts and cannot share content with anyone yet. One less thing to worry about for me, for now. But I honestly dread the day she will, and will I be around to be able to provide the balance?

And unfortunately, I don't have the same story as my parents that I can share with my kids from the German priest, nor can I be around all the time telling them they are special. In a way my airtime with the kids is already limited due to the lifestyle we chose to lead. And with their increasing use of technology it will even be less, so who is defining and setting the norms and values, who is defining their culture?

What story will Filippa share when she is asked to give a Millennial speech at De Nieuwe Poort 20 years from now?

I got curious about the topic of the influence of technology and social media on us, and came across a TED talk from Sherry Turkle, professor of psychology at MIT. And her words left me a little worried.

Turkle said "We are letting technology take us to places that we don't want to go, these little devices are so psychologically powerful that they don't only change what we do, but they change who we are."

This is true, we text during meetings, classes, and family dinners. We are constantly distracted.

Time doesn't flow the same way in the digital world as it does in the normal world. It seems to me that digital now is focused to distract us and leave us from what we are doing now, to go somewhere else and do something else.

Are we really getting worse at communicating with each other face to face? Michelle works at a startup in Stockholm and they actually have to practice to make eye contact whilst writing on their laptops.

How will my daughter's brain develop if she is spending more time with an iPhone in her hand, than with her father's hand in hers? Will I be able to guide her and share my norms and values, my beliefs and history, and experiences enough to provide her with an upbringing that is an influence strong enough to compete with the massive information flow she is projected with every day at any time from her pocket? And will she be creative?

Sure, our smartphones enable us to be in contact with an ever increasing number of people far away. But at the cost of those close to us. I see kids and parents at the dinner table only looking on their phones. I don't want this to happen to my kids and my family. But how can I prevent this from happening when the battle for attention is increasingly difficult to win, especially combined the lifestyles we live nowadays?

I see that technology has been evolving at an exponential pace and under the prophecy that technology is making our lives better, safer, easier. It is actually evolving at such a pace that I find it difficult to define what the rules of engagement are that I should define for myself and for my family.

How to make sure we keep up with the real conversations with each other, the upbringing of our children, that they develop social skills, become creative by themselves and not staring at these screens all the time.

In relation to an ever exponentially evolving technology, aren't we humans exponentially getting more, and more detached from each other? It is very paradoxical as we are the creators of these technologies to make our lives better and more connected.

Our millennial lifestyle, that is evolving ourselves in free moving, personified entities that value the accumulation of our own intellectual property over the ownership of assets that built tradition around us for coming generations. Are we, with the increasing information flow, not more involved with now and the short term future, rather than to build stability and culture for our generations to come.

I guess what I'm saying is that I'm struggling with the realisation that in these times of disruptive and exponential technology that is supposed to make our lives better and easier, and our lifestyle change we in parallel need to develop our own personal rules of engagement with our culture and the technologies around us. It seems to me that these are developing much faster than we are able to live with.

I do not have an answer or method how to, but I believe the first step is my awareness of that things can get out of control when I don't make the necessary lifestyle adjustments.

I really want to see my daughter Filippa here 20 years from now telling you that her loving parents brought her up right and feels special and equipped to conquer this world filled with humans, not with social media accounts.

Thank you