

Anti-Anti-Social: Embracing Presence in Public Spaces

"No AirPods in public. It's your choice, but I don't think you should wear them when you are outside. Wear them in private when you are inside."

What's popping, everyone? It's Dante, just waking up this morning with some thoughts I wanted to share before I head out and face the day. Every time I walk around the city, I notice how many people are **plugged in**—AirPods, phones, the whole bit. And look, I get it. It's modern times, right? Sometimes we need to be on calls or use our phones for work. I've been there too, doing the Zoom thing with my standing desk just to feel like less of a slob working from home.

But after a while, the reality sets in—**you start feeling isolated**, even sloppy. This new tech is cool and enticing, but it's **ripping apart the foundation of what society was built on**: public space and social interaction.

The Lost Art of Presence in Public Spaces

When I'm out on the street, I'm always struck by how few people actually engage with their surroundings. We're in the **City of Brotherly Love** here, a place meant for connection. But more and more, people are shut off in their own bubbles, locked into their screens and soundscapes. **Humans thrive around other humans; it's in our nature.** But the more plugged in people get, the harder it is to make a simple connection, to even have a conversation.

There's this funny thing I've started doing: when I walk down Walnut Street, I'll count the phones and AirPods in sight. Walking just three blocks, from 19th to 16th, I'll spot around *50 people with phones in hand and AirPods in ear*. As a street photographer, I'm scanning for interesting moments, for things that make the city come alive. But it feels like we're living on *mute mode*, making those authentic moments harder and harder to find.

Choosing Connection Over Isolation

"When you are on the street it is important to be aware, smile at people, and uphold basic social skills."

So, here's my take: let's challenge this trend. Let's save AirPods for private spaces and keep them out when we're out in public. This small step pushes back against the isolation that's becoming all too common. It's about choosing *connection over isolation*. A quick smile, eye contact, or even just saying hello to a stranger can break the ice and remind us of the community around us.

Simple Social Practices for Staying Connected

1. **Smile** – It's universal and breaks barriers.
2. **Make eye contact** – Recognize the people around you.
3. **Say hello** – Even a quick greeting makes a difference.
4. **Be aware** – Notice what's happening around you.

The Cost of Working from Home

"Working from home doesn't work unless you're some computer nerd coder or something."

I know that's a bit of a hot take, but hear me out. When I worked from home, our team became **disconnected to the point of dysfunction**. I'll give you a funny example: at my last job, our boss was so out of touch that my coworkers ended up unionizing, and most of it was over misunderstandings. People couldn't size him up or read his body language over Zoom, and small things became big issues.

Remote work has its perks, but for jobs that require team collaboration, **face-to-face communication is critical**. We're losing that natural in-person interaction, which is hurting us on a social and psychological level. I'd even go as far as to say: *ban remote work for roles that thrive on collaboration*.

Living Life on Mute Mode

"I feel like everyone's living life on mute mode... the more we lean into this, the worse we're going to get at social interaction."

Our cities, once vibrant places of connection, are turning into spaces of isolation. AirPods, VR, iPhones—they're all part of a *technological revolution* that's quietly erasing our social skills. The more we sink into this tech, the less we engage with the real, messy, beautiful world around us. But those who can look up, put away the distractions, and *truly connect with others* will be the ones who thrive.

Practicing Public Presence as a Form of Resistance

This push to disconnect from the "outside" has transformed even our once vibrant public spaces. I make it a point to go to places like the mall, specifically to talk with people and engage with them. I'll even take my iPad to a coffee shop to do my work, rather than doing it at home, just to be around other people. **Outdoor spaces should be a shared experience.** Even if it's just sitting in a café with your laptop or saying hello to someone passing by, these small acts keep us connected to the world.

"The strong will be on the streets, engaging and having real conversations, while the weak slip into the metaverse."

Key Ideas to Take Away

- **Limit AirPods to indoor spaces** – Choose to connect when you're outside.
- **Seek out face-to-face interaction** – Let's keep our communication genuine and physical.
- **Challenge the isolation of modern tech** – By practicing awareness in shared spaces, we push back against a trend that alienates us from each other.

Living in a hyper-connected, always-online world has its advantages, but let's make sure it doesn't rob us of the simple, foundational human connections that make life meaningful. So, leave the AirPods at home. Smile at someone on the street. Choose to live life off of mute mode, and let's start building a world that truly embodies brotherly love.

Now, time for the gym. And when I get back, you'll find me at the coffee shop, not at home, because everything I do, I'd rather do in the presence of others.