

## On Inhuman Conditions and Its Overcoming

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### Abstract

Modern technologies have brought about alienation, disorientation, ill-beings and malaise in human lives by gradually transforming human beings into “inhuman beings”. Bernard Stiegler’s reflections on the relationship between human beings and technologies illustrate why and how the development of modern technologies induced such “inhuman conditions”. It begins with the descriptions of alienation by machines and the loss of knowledge of work. Subsequently, it describes culture industry and the loss of knowledge of life leading to an one-dimensional society and human spiritual disorientation. Then it illustrates how the ubiquitous programmed automaton (UPA) and the tyranny “24/7 capitalism” have contributed to the reign of stupefaction and stupidity and the loss of theoretical knowledge. It shows that the inhuman conditions are frustrating consequences of “the loss of all knowledge” as well as the “devaluation of spirit”. Overcoming of inhuman conditions requires human beings to reinvent knowledge as “knowledge of work” instead of “alienated labor or pure employment”, to reinvest the time liberated by technology in the re-sublimation of the human spirit and to re-enchant the world with an improvement in spiritual ecology.

**Keywords:** inhuman conditions, culture industry, UPA, knowledge, spirit, Bernard Stiegler

### 1. Introduction

Human conditions have been extremely disrupted by the innovative technologies since the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century resulting in a chain effect of “metamorphosis” in every walk of life. The industrial revolution brought with it the subway, the car, the train and the airplane; new modes of transportation that shortened the period it took to cover a specific distance, changed population mobility and strengthened cultural communication between regions and countries. Additionally, the invention of electronic light breached the natural rhythmical boundary between day and night. Furthermore, the internet, information and digital technologies have transformed the whole world into a “global village”. Digital literacy and artificial intelligence is beneficial for human beings’ work, communication and everyday life. However, over-exploitation and overuse of fossil fuels by machines or vehicles have resulted in environmental pollution and ground destruction. Moreover, electronic lights have caused light pollution and consumed lots of non-renewable resources. Living a digital and intelligent life has also raised new alienated problems, such as de-territorialization, dis-individuation, destruction of knowledge and hyper-control over human’s consciousness and unconsciousness. The fate of human beings, which has been intensely intertwined with technologies, requires a reconfiguration of “the present now”. A careful reconsideration of the inhuman conditions brought about by technologies is required for the future generations.

This article aims to illuminate the consequences of technological control over human beings’ body, behavior and consciousness. It reconsiders the present human conditions in light of Bernard Stiegler’s thoughts on humans and technology so that a counter-tendency could be re-invented to care for our earth mother and the entire human enterprise. The article addresses following questions: 1) What are Bernard Stiegler’s main ideas about the relationship between human and technology? 2) How and why are “humans” transformed into “inhuman beings”? 3) How could a counter-tendency to the inhuman conditions be devised? The first section introduces the major thoughts of Bernard Stiegler on technology and humans and provides theoretical guidance for this study. Afterwards, the article describes the alienation of labor induced by machines and industrial production and the disorientation resulting from culture industry and the industry of consumption. Subsequently, the article discusses human ill-beings and malaise since UPA and intelligent algorithms have destroyed the faculties defining human beings as non-inhuman beings such as subjectivity, knowledge, work and intelligence. Lastly, it deems the reinvention of education, subjects, knowledge and free work with the backdrop of UPA to re-enchant the world and increase the value of spirit based on Bernard Stiegler.

## 2. Bernard Stiegler, Human Beings, Technology

Given the mutations in modern technologies and its massive effects on human beings, French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020) reevaluated the relationship between human beings and technology from the perspective of philosophy, technology and anthropology. Stiegler's main ideas, in the context of the relationship between humans and technology, provides theoretical guidance for this study.

First, there are three main viewpoints regarding the relationship between humans and technologies namely: anthropo-centrism, techno-centrism and techno-neutralism. But Stiegler posits that these points of views are inadequate to explain the relationship between human beings and technology. According to Stiegler, humans have no origin and no essence due to the fault of Epimetheus who forgot to distribute talents to humans (Stiegler, B. 2017, pp.48-51). To compensate for Epimetheus' forgetfulness, Prometheus stole fire and techniques. Technology is thus regarded as supplements for humans' lack of essence and as the default of origin in hominization. He declares that there is an originary technicity in human essence. Thus, technology and humans have co-constructed each other from the very beginning. Technology in this sense is also the "prostheses", the exosomatization of human organs, or the organized inorganic form of human lives, evidenced by Andréw Leroi-Gourhan's anthropological findings in *Gesture and Speech*.

Second, technology is considered as memory, i.e., tertiary retention. Tertiary retention is a concept defined in relation to Husserl's primary retention and secondary retention (Stiegler 2010c, p.4). For him, all artefacts are memories for human existence to some extent. Tertiary retention constructs the pre-individual milieus for human consciousness which in turn preconditions primary retention and secondary retention. This idea is connected to Gilbert Simondon's description of individuation of psychic and collective individuals which postulates that psychic individuation and collective individuation are conditioned by the pre-individual milieus formed by technology. Stiegler based on Simondon's investigation proposes three strands of individuation: psychic, collective and technological individuation (Stiegler 2014b, pp.50-51). It purports that technology individuates themselves concurrent with the psychic individuals and collective individuals' co-individuation with each other. The motives of technological revolution stem from not only human beings but also technological individuals. The individuation of technology gives rise to the disadjustment between psychic individuals and collective individuals, i.e., the disadjustment in human lives.

Third, technology is hypomnesic memory and is considered as "pharmakon". This idea can be traced back to Plato's pharmacy which says that writing is a toxic pharmakon for anamnesis that leads to a loss of memory. Derrida has discussed Plato's pharmacy in *On Grammatology* from which Stiegler (2013, pp.1-5) develops his theory of Pharmacology. For him, technology as pharmacy denotes that there are good effects and bad effects of technology. The toxic effects of hypomnesic memory will induce the loss of memory, while its pharmacological effects can counter the toxicity and bring light to human beings. Accordingly, Stiegler detects the disadjustment among the three strands of individuation, with an aim to give his pharmacy to uncover the pharmacological sides of technologies in what he calls "the second moment of epokhal redoubling". He devises to re-invent a counter-tendency to fight against the inhuman conditions in our epoch.

In summary, technology for humans, from the perspective of Stiegler, is considered as the prostheses, supplements and exosomatic organs of human beings that compensate for humans' lack of essence. It is the originary technicity of human lives that makes humans pursue life by means other than life. Technology and human beings co-constructed each other. Furthermore, technics as memory comprise the pre-individual milieus for human lives. Both the psychic individuals and collective individuals are preconditioned by the associated milieus constructed by artificial organs. Besides, technology is viewed as hypomnesic memory and pharmakon, by which Stiegler hopes to discover the pharmacological effects to detoxicate technology. With these viewpoints in mind, these following sections analyze how technological development transforms humans into inhuman beings and how to fight against the toxic effects of technology for the betterment of human beings' future.

## 3. Inhuman Conditions: The Loss of Knowledge and Devalue in Spirit

### 3.1 Machines and Industrial Capitalism: Alienation, Loss of Knowledge of Work

It is generally accepted that the industrial epoch began with the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. Marx depicted the proletarianization and alienation of the labor class (Milligan, M. 1988). The arrival of machines in factories replaced the position of laborers, akin to Marx's prediction that all artefacts will in return govern and enslave human beings either in material or spiritual forms. The machinic turn in production industries does relieve the painstaking of manual labor, whereas it results in the alienated situations of workers. Laborers ought to take care of the machines and enact the dull, repeated, and stupid operations required by the machine. Machines are designed to improve production efficiency, standardize products and increase profit rate. But it turns out that manpower is enslaved by mechanical power. The proletariat submits to the directives of machines and industrial capital to merely live a life. According to Stiegler's viewpoints on technology, labor's alienation induced by machines resulted from the loss of knowledge of

work or how to do. The knowledge and memory of the “how to do” of wage laborers was discretized into the machines which imitated the workers’ gestures. Workers only need to familiarize themselves with the machines’ instruction manuals and what should be done to support machine operations. Thus, it is the loss of knowledge of work that led to the alienation of wage labor.

### *3.2 Culture Industry and Consumerism: Disorientation, Loss of Knowledge of Life*

In the late industrial society, human beings experienced a feeling of disorientation and became lost in the developed material world. Herbert Marcuse (1964) talked about ideology of the one-dimensional man in the late industrial society. He noticed that with the adaptation of technological rationality, another totalitarian governance was constructed about ideology, culture, politics, and philosophy. “One-dimension” denotes that the ideology of technological totality and the tyranny of technological rationality are accepted with no hesitation. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) implied a retrogression of the Enlightenment from the catastrophic results of culture industry. Culture is nothing but business. Leisure is nothing but entertainment. The culture industry is indeed an industry of entertainment. Thus, workers entertain themselves after hours without being paid. Additionally, Hollywood cinema “configures” the blueprint of the future of human beings and spreads American ideology around the globe with “unending sameness”. Human beings’ faculties of perception and imagination are damaged by the montage of available films. Nowadays, culture industry has significantly developed via digital social media and greatly impacts people’s way of living, working, communicating and thinking. The products of a digital culture industry like songs, videos, films, TV series, destructively and unsustainably channel a spectator’s attention or consciousness. Through these products, billions of consciousness are connected and interconnected via the internet and by all types of devices. The culture industry is used by consumerism to turn masses into consumers and takes over their knowledge of life. It produces artificial crowds who experience the loss of knowledge of living and become disoriented in their everyday lives.

### *3.3 UPA and 24/7 Capitalism: Malaise, Loss of Contemplative Knowledge*

Nowadays, with ubiquitous programmable automaton (UPA), consumers are hyper-controlled by digital platforms, apps, and devices. Human beings are left in a state of stupidity and stupefaction from digital technological and artificial intelligence shocks. The coupling of computer and brainpower enabled by UPA has liberated spare time for human beings. However, the spare time has been utilized by the industry of consumption to increase consumers’ purchasing power. As we know, the intelligent algorithms and devices in our age do serve consumers for twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, which creates a 24/7 capitalism and generates automatic ill-beings and malaise, according to Johnathan Crary (2013). Moreover, artificial intelligent algorithms has made decisions for human beings in every sphere of life, ranging from economics, to politics, and to finance. Alan Greenspan attributed the subprime crisis in August 2007 to the “misuse of financial mathematics and automated calculation systems to assess risk” (Stiegler 2016, pp.1-2). In June 2008, Chris Anderson asserted “the end of theory”. Stiegler claimed that human beings have lost their contemplative and theoretical knowledge with their noetic faculties bypassed and destroyed by artificial intelligence. He uses “generalized proletarianization” to depict the loss of all knowledge regarding consumers’ subsistence and existence (Stiegler 2013, p.27). With knowledge and noetic faculties destroyed, the herd crowds are transformed into an “automatic artificial crowd” (Stiegler 2016, p.36) suffering from “spiritual misery” (Stiegler 2014a, p39). Automatic artificial crowds are “averaged human beings”, disembodied and left in hopelessness with obsolete knowledge and no alternatives.

As a result of the loss of all knowledge, the young grow up in an age of disorder, entropy and desert suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, attention deficit disorder, mental illness, and sleep disturbance. Their available brain time has not been channeled to make them well-educated but rather to be well-entertained in the digital world with no becoming future. Instead, what awaits us is the negation of knowledge, the devaluation of the spirit, as well as “the automatization of existences”. Some empirical studies show that students will be addicted to short video platforms and measures must be carried out to protect them from social media addiction (Zeyang, Y., Mark D. G., Zhihao, Y., & Wenting, X., 2021; Youl Pyo, H., Yeon OK, Y., & Myung Ho, L., 2021; Sangmin, J., 2016). Without doubt, students’ attentions have been channeled, interrupted and captured via intelligent algorithms by collecting the “traces” or “data” left on the internet. With users’ attention destroyed, digital capitalism damages its own foundation—desire or libidinal energy (Stiegler 2010a, p39-40). Desire is routinely fulfilled by delayed gratification, however, speculative capitalism has transformed desire into drives with immediate satisfaction. The investment in drives instead of desire by digital capitalists is essentially a “dis-investment” and “dis-economy” of attention (Stiegler 2011). Students’ conscious time is unsustainably exploited and distracted in a way that will finally result in education crises and an ailing future.

Essentially, from an industrial society to a developed industrial society to hyper-industrial society, technological innovations have greatly impacted nature and human life. Technological innovations improve people’s living conditions, change ways of work, communication, behavior and break limit of space and time, etc. However, with time, human

beings become disoriented, alienated and ill-beings. Humans are enslaved by machines, controlled by capital and hyper-controlled by the convergence between technology and capital. The UPA will make “alienated labor” or wage labor and the Taylorist division of labor unsustainable and obsolete and even lead to “the end of work”. Disaffection and disorientation are prevalent among automatic artificial crowds, which make them “inhuman” in a “social and connective dementia” (Hassan, R. p.103).

#### **4. Exit to Inhuman Conditions: Knowledge, Education, Reinvention, Re-enchantment**

Faced with the digital and general automatic human conditions, Stiegler (2016, 2014a) suggests the reinvention of knowledge and free work, the revitalization of the value of spirit and the re-enchantment of the world with a “transvaluation” in Nietzschean sense. The time liberated from UPA must be used by humans to develop new abilities for free work and reorganize new division of labor. Human beings, as non-inhuman beings, are noetic beings capable of creating a world of well-being, courteousness, joy, care and happiness. A world of functional and systemic stupidity, of generalized stupefaction and of disaffection and desert must be trans-valued and re-enanted with the negentropic knowledge and liberated work. To re-enchant the world means to re-invent the subjects with capabilities to invent their own social lives, to increase the value in spirit and to reconstruct their associated milieus. It means that “the knowledge of savoir-faire, vivre, contemplation” must be reproduced to obstruct the “generalized proletarianization” of human conditions. A new model of industry, capitalism and economy must be created to reconstruct the human enterprise with the development of “spiritual technologies”. The culture industry must be reinvented for humans by knowledge instead of “non-knowledge” and by culture of “dis-automatization” and “negentropic values”. All public power must be able to take action to fight against the tendencies of disassociation, disindividuation and disaffection.

The human condition within UPA also requires a revolution in education. The hyper-solicitation of attention by digital technologies and artificial intelligence leads adults to be infantilized, herd-like, mindless, irresponsible and poor role models for the younger generations. The identification process between parents and their children is replaced by the products of culture industry. According to Stiegler (2010b), education’s primary goal today must first and foremost cater for the time availed to the young’s brain, protect the symbolic intergenerational milieus for transmitting the heritage from the older adults to younger children and reconstruct the psychic apparatus of the young’s attention formation. The enlightenment defined as maturity—adulthood in the Kantian sense, is proposed to cultivate the obligation and intelligence to educate children and care for their “transitional space” (Winnicott, D. W. 1980). The youth deserve care from mature and responsible parents and older adults as well as the public, as opposed to soap operas, videos, online games, etc.

In short, the reinvention of knowledge, work and education will contribute to a promising and bright future for human beings. The new model of capitalism must be a human enterprise that can care for both the natural ecology and spiritual ecology of the human planet, invest in “the value of spirit” anew to fight against the desublimation and regression produced by the capitalism of consumption and can “mobilize collective global intelligence” (Stiegler 2014a, pp. 96-97) through the technologies and industries of spirit. Public power should be able to sustainably construct and regulate new industrial models for the noetic beings that we ourselves are.

#### **5. Conclusions**

This article set out to arouse people’s awareness of the inhuman conditions brought by technological development with a view to make our world more livable. From the perspective of Stiegler’s thoughts on the relationship between human and technology, this article discusses the inhuman conditions caused by technological innovations beginning from the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century to the information technologies in the nineteenth century and the digital and artificial intelligent technologies to date. The loss of knowledge of work, life and theory, which are discretized into technologies and machines, is illustrated and analyzed in relation to the development of capitalism in different periods. Moreover, it shows that the innovation of technologies will bring about adjustment and disadjustment in both human lives and social organizations. The convergence of technology and capitalism cause innumerable crises, including both natural crises and spiritual crises. Besides, the innovation of techno-science is catastrophic for humanity because it transforms humans into inhuman beings. It is unpredictable and unmeasurable where artificial creation or invention will eventually lead human beings to, given the malaise, ill-being, alienation and disorientation of today’s inhuman conditions. Each of us should unite and fight to resist the reign of stupidity and stupor. Finally, according to Stiegler, with the assistance of new spiritual technologies, the reinvention of knowledge, free work, industry, capitalism and automation may make our world re-enanted again and promise a sound future for the youth.

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