



THE RISE OF THE HOMO SAPIENS IMMODICUS

Luis Camillo M. O. de Almeida

Mass Communications, Department Chair of Mass Communications, Claflin University.

Email: lca120@gmail.com

Cite this article:

Almeida, L. (2024), The Rise of the Homo Sapiens Immodicus. British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research 4(2), 44-49. DOI: 10.52589/BJMCMR-RMJBPPF

Manuscript History

Received: 16 May 2024

Accepted: 29 Jul 2024

Published: 12 Aug 2024

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *This article explains the Homo Sapiens Immodicus model's entire cycle, an operationalization of what occurs inside technobrain in 2024. Each cycle phase is compared to characters in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 book, Mildred, Montag, and Faber, using Bradbury's literary work and the teachings of Marshall McLuhan, Jaques Ellul, and Neil Postman.*

KEYWORDS: Media Edology, McLuhan Studies, TechnoModeration, Homo Sapiens Immodicus, Human-Robot Syndrome, Futurism.



Liquified Brain Cells and Technological Effects

“It was a pleasure to burn” (Bradbury, 1991). This is Ray Bradbury’s very first line in his *Fahrenheit 451* novel. *Fahrenheit 451* is the temperature at which books burn; however, I wonder if that might be perhaps the very same mental temperature that our brain cells melt.

Sometimes, after a day of opulent entertainment and excessive fun, I collapse in bed. Sometimes, I feel a sliding delicate drip inside my ear, though I hope it is a figment rather than reality. I believe this drip must surely be liquified brain cells escaping my skull. Using my ear canal like an escape hatch, the dripping feeling fades, and I fall asleep.

Just like the browning, drying, crispy pages smoking into nothingness, so too do my brain cells jellify and drip out my ear canals. “[Entertainment] destroys human autonomy, freezes perception, and sterilizes judgment” (McLuhan, 1951). McLuhan’s quote, when explicitly applied to technological devices paired with easy access to the internet combined with my Human-Robot Theory, brings specialized effects to the forefront. Linking those thoughts to *Fahrenheit 451*, I can illustrate the detrimental impact of technology on society through the book *Burning Fanaticism*. My liquified brain cells are my version of the technological effect on my person.

Go back and check paragraph two; I am pretty sure I wrote “opulent entertainment” when I described what typically precedes my brain cells melting. My opulent entertainment needs some de-mystification. First, wealth is defined as an adjective, meaning rich or luxurious, with its synonyms including grandiose and lavish. Second, joy is described as being provided with amusement or enjoyment, with synonyms including pleasure, interest, and diversion.

With the average smartphone costing a whopping \$453, the only befitting adjectives are opulent, grandiose, and lavish, especially when that does not even include the monthly data plan charges. The most correct, true, accurate synonym of entertainment, when looking back over the list, is diversion. The internet, in all its forms, desktop, laptop, smartphones, and watches, is merely a diversion from having authentic human connections and an excuse for vapid thoughts. Reapplying Neil Postman’s thoughts on telegraphy and photography to the internet has led me to conclude that the internet is a context-free zone that takes meaning away from knowledge. *Fahrenheit 451* shows us a potential outcome if we, as individuals and society, do not change.

Mildred Immersed or Human-Robot Syndrome

Bradbury has created this wall-to-wall circuit, essentially a TV screen that completely covers four walls, immersing the viewer in an alternate reality. Actors are life-size and play to the viewer. They are viewed as family, and the viewers invest emotional ties into people they never meet in “real life.”

My Homo Sapiens Immodicus Model starts people in a state of equilibrium, where computerized devices are inexistent or there with healthy interactions. This means the person can leave the machine without physical or psychological effects.

During the transformation process, the person interacts repeatedly with the device. This leads to the person starting to exhibit machine-like behavior. These behaviors are shown through habitual computer use and a lack of interpersonal human communication.



The third phase is the human-robot syndrome phase. The person will display excessive computer use and show a lack of empathy towards anyone who disturbs them during said interaction. This is the farthest point from equilibrium one can be.

Let us go back to examine Mildred's behavior. She has a three-wall TV and is excited to participate in a play. The play is about her being mailed a script where she reads her lines to the TV people. When Montag, her husband, asks what it is about, all she can state is that there are people named Bob, Ruth, and Helen. There is no plot, concrete message, or imparted wisdom to what the TV shows. What is worse is that Mildred does not even realize the lack of her intelligence. Drip, drip, and bubble melt the brain cells. Forsberg, in her article, "Introducing Jacques Ellul to English Education," sums up Ellul's "'death of the word, 'the 'disintegration of language, 'and 'pointless discourse (1973)" (Forsberg, 2014), wonderfully. "There is a proliferation of words without meaning, without referent, and with no basis in reality" (Forsberg, 2014). This is Mildred and thousands of millions, if not billions, of people today. Mildred actively seeks to be wholly immersed in her technology, complaining they only have three walls instead of four.

One can be completely immersed, submerged, floating adrift with only ethereal phantoms projected around you. This behavior gnaws at the mind. It chews and chews until there are no more true individual thoughts left. Only the mindless, repetitive computer behaviors survive. I was seeing without eyes and hearing without ears. Eating without tasting and touching without feeling and forever grasping at figments. This is the human-robot syndrome phase.

Arrest, Release, and Cycling Back

"Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred when you came down to it? Not just one wall but, so far, three! And expensive, too!" (Bradbury, 1991). This is the point where Montag has finally stopped. Physically and mentally, he has stopped and let his senses take in his surroundings. Mildred is obsessed with her TV family to the point that she does not even realize she is overdosing on sleeping pills. The TV family offers zero substance, no information and no knowledge, not even a plot. He opens his eyes to his lack of love for Mildred, to their disconnectedness. To his disconnectedness of life in general. In his arrest, his pausing of life's whirlwind affairs, he can think. As McLuhan puts it in his introduction to *The Mechanical Bride*, "A whirling phantasmagoria can be grasped only when arrested for contemplation. And this very arrest is also a release from the usual participation" (McLuhan, 2001). Montag stops his participation in the entertainment around him and thinks. He realizes the empty, mindless world he is living in. His eyes become open. Those mental neurons firing at speeds the machines cannot achieve, or be allowed to work, show him reality.

Do you stop your robotic behaviors? Do you allow an "arrest for contemplation, a release from the usual participation"? (McLuhan, 2001). The world is whizzing by us at lightning speeds, but it is going even faster when we ignore life and only focus on our devices. The devices begin to take over our lives through a subconscious action of repetitive behaviors.

The rise of the *Homo Sapiens Immodicus* comes with frigid arctic air. It comes with icy fingers and mental frost. I have added the term *Immodicus*, meaning excessive. *Homo Sapiens* means knowledgeable man. Hence, *Homo Sapiens Immodicus* is an excessively familiar man. The internet is a stupendous modern achievement—a way to make the world smaller and more accessible. Have a question? The internet has all the answers.



I can remember a time before the internet. It was filled with books and libraries and Dewey Decimal. It was filled with intelligent conversations between individuals over coffee or tea. It was filled with students using an entire table to cross-reference materials for papers.

Knowledge took longer to acquire. The brain had to sift and read. The brain had to decipher and remember. Now, the words and images are a racket to the senses, the brain picking the flashiest choice. Regurgitate and forget is the new motto of today. “[Our] culture is seek[ing] its authorization in technology, find[ing] its satisfactions in technology, and tak[ing] its orders from technology” (Postman, 1993).

How can this be possible? It is straightforward. The rise of an excessively knowledgeable man comes with a catch. “It consists [of] the deification of technology” (Postman, 1993). When you worship at the throne, e.g., using your devices specifically while accessing the internet, you become, according to my theory, like the machine you are using. What does this mean? It means the overuse of technology, the deification of technological devices, strips us of our humanity.

We lose empathy, social skills, and connectedness. We lose love, morals, and values. We allow our culture to be hijacked. As Postman attests, “Technopoly is a state of mind” (Postman, 1993). To ponder the why of this argument is crucial. Why does the chronic use of an internet-accessing device change our humanity, society, and culture? Traditionally speaking, before the ability to tote the internet with us wherever we went, societies would “maintain a balance between the old and the new, novelty and tradition between meaning and conceptual disorder, and ... do[ing] so by “destroying” unwanted information” (Postman, 1993). This enabled society to control its culture and for most individuals to maintain their humanity. Now, there is no escape with smartphones and watches, wifi, and data plans. The bombardment of images and words, the headlines grappling for attention, a cutthroat advertising platform of flashy nonsensical garbled vomit, the brain cannot thrive. This suffocates the brain and produces a society of incapacitated, anxious people incapable of logical thought or creative ideas.

This leads to the robotic phase of my model. In this phase, mental exhaustion and fatigue awaken the person to their overuse behaviors. Realizing their obsessions brings the person back to phase one, the equilibrium stage.

Real vs. Ethereal Within the Human-Robot Cycle

The world has shrunk exponentially since the advent of radio and TV. It has shrunk to infinitesimal proportions since the internet and is even smaller than that with its becoming portable. As the world shrinks, there is a direct correlation to its speed. Everything seems to whiz by. This “encourages people to avoid many unpleasant truths” (McLuhan, 2001). This avoidance encourages hermit-like behavior, solidarity, and a very un-confrontational life in the “real world.” It does, however, promote community within its surroundings. You might sit surrounded by people on the subway, yet you are conversing with someone in England about the cuteness level of a cat video. As we trade the real for the ethereal, we also trade our experiences, thoughts, and feelings from the physical to the imaginary. The only way society can function in pleasant daily living, where the majority is harmonious with one another, is in the physical world. Yet many, just like Mildred and her TV family, allow the internet to swallow them whole. They do not stop to protest the nonsense whizzing by them.



“[This] is an environment as real as the world. It *becomes* and *is* the truth” (Bradbury, 1991). The human robots, lacking empathy, seeking internal happiness, and searching for physical connectedness, will reach a breaking point. They will, as will many of us, become mentally exhausted, weary in mind and body. They are so exhausted, tired, and jaded that they snap like Montag turning against Mildred’s guests. In a quietly escalating burnout, over-the-edge scene, Montag shouts, “... think of your first husband divorced and your second husband killed in a jet and your third husband blowing his brains out, go home and think of the dozen abortions you’ve had, go home and think of that and your damn Caesarian sections, too, and your children who hate your guts!” (Bradbury, 1991). How many of you reading that passage have experienced or witnessed a similar episode? You may become physically ill with excessive headaches, dizziness, and depression. Maybe you looked up one day and realized all the “real” people were gone. This is the final phase of the Human-Robot Syndrome.

The Human Robot Syndrome, in its completion, is a cycle. After the final phase described above, we stop those obsessive behaviors and break from the excessive technological overuse. This brings us back to the beginning, where we use technology in healthy doses. The cycle continues indefinitely throughout the individual’s lifetime.

Homo Sapiens Immodicus, Technomoderation, and You

We live in the dawn of the era Homo Sapiens Immodicus. Humans, people, in other words, us, have not ultimately arrived yet, but we are coming. What are we coming to? We are coming under the spell of technology. “Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities” (Turkle, 2012). Sherry Turkle makes a profound statement in *Alone Together*. Technology is not just entertainment, a simple innocent reprieve from daily life. It is seductive: an email during a meeting, a message in the bathroom, a post during an argument—trophies for running clothes for your skinny avatar or medals for learning a foreign language word. It breaks up life. It soothes the introvert and excites the extrovert. Technology is the new reality or the socially acceptable cave for the hermit.

The new drug of choice where society says, “More, more, more!” Fahrenheit 451 illustrates the extreme with the masses, shown through Mildred, of the empty, unsatisfying unreality of technology overdose. Mildred is so unsatisfied with life she overdoes, literally, within the first.

Bradbury, unknowingly, has illustrated every phase of the Human Immodicus model, not necessarily perfect, but close enough would be Faber. Faber does not partake in the technology obsession, but he can function in society at large. We would consider him to be in the Equilibrium Stage. Mildred would be in the Machine-Like Stage. Montag takes us through the Burn Out Stage, when he is questioning his life and society to the Near Human Stage, where he is running from technology. As Montag is running from technology and the law, he has “a sudden peaceful-ness, away from the city and the lights and the chase away from everything” (Bradbury, 1991).

“He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new” (Bradbury 1991). I shudder to think that my littlest child is growing up in a world where reality is more unnerving than a computer world.

“[Technology] tends to run out of control, to occupy more of our mental space than it warrants, to invade realms of discourse where it can only wreak havoc. When it is out of control, [technology] buries in a heap of trivia what is necessary to know” (Postman 1993). This is the



main problem for the Homo Sapiens Immodicus man—too much information without substance. Just as Montag realizes he lives in unreality, we need to realize and manage our unreality-time. When we run out of control like Mildred, our life has no substance. When reality hits, whether through a disaster or personal issue, we need to be prepared rather than unnerved.

Technomoderation is not a call for extremism. It is a call for balance and awareness. It is a call to stop the brain cells from melting. It is a call for intelligence, for varying skills. It calls humanity and society to wake up to their fellow man and reach out for reality.

To truly techno-moderate is to reach the modern pinnacle of balance between reality and unreality. A true technomoderator lives like a phoenix. They are aging and dying, being reborn fresh and new, liberating the senses. The Human Robot theory is just that, a walk between two worlds, where we cycle through healthy doses of the computer to overuse to burn out and back again. Just as Bradbury shows a world where the machine has passively taken over the human population to the detriment of society, my Immodicus model shows the disadvantage to the person.

What is the call to action? Is it to stop using all technology? No, that would be impossible in the world in which we live. I do not think that we can stop this roller coaster that we are on. We are headed to some unknown future where people will no longer connect face-to-face. Our best bet is to be self-aware and make an effort to slow our technology addictions. So far, no one seems to have an answer. There are only questions. Where do we go from here? If you look up from your device, maybe the change is you.

REFERENCES

- Bradbury, R. (1991). *Fahrenheit 451*, New York, NY. Ballantine Books.
- Forsberg, G. (2014). 'Introducing Jacques Ellul to English Education', *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 13(1), 79-88.
- McLuhan, M. (2001), *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, London, England. Gerald Duckworth & Company.
- Postman, N. (1993). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, New York, NY. Knopf Publishing.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, New York, NY. Basic Books.