



LIVING IN ALGORITHMIC HYPER-LATE MODERNITY: FROM DESIRE FOR VALIDATION ON SNS TO THE INAUGURATION OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND TO WAR

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Abstract *This paper examines contemporary society through the concept of algorithmic hyper-late modernity, a new phase emerging from the convergence of digital technologies and global mobilities. Rather than viewing the digital revolution as a purely technological development, it conceptualizes it as a profound transformation of social systems, everyday life, and modes of human existence. Drawing on both classical and contemporary sociological theory, the paper situates this transformation in relation to earlier phases of modernity and late modernity, engaging with thinkers such as Durkheim, Giddens, Jameson, and Elliott. It further analyzes how social media platforms, algorithmic infrastructures, and artificial intelligence increasingly mediate political processes, public opinion, affective dynamics, and risk. The paper also advances the concept of Mobilities 3.0 to describe a condition in which mobility becomes deeply entangled with digital systems, generating algorithmic forms of movement, communication, subjectivity, and governance that operate across national borders. The paper concludes by arguing that human life is now constituted within networks linking humans and technologies, rather than in opposition to them. In this context, the humanities play a crucial role in critically reflecting on these transformations and in articulating ethical boundaries for human life in the age of artificial intelligence.*

Keywords: algorithmic hyper-late modernity, Mobilities 3.0, reflexivity, Humanities in the AI Age

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the “digital revolution?” It is not simply the process of media systems being increasingly enabled by digital technologies. Rather, it is a far-reaching transformation of social systems driven by digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and social media platforms in a way that reshapes our daily lives and politics and even the mode of existence, and then those technologies themselves are recursively changed anew.

From the desire to receive validation on social media to the emergence of the Trump administration and even to war, the society in which we live is now beginning to undergo

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sweeping change in the digital revolution. A “new humanities” is called for that will help us vividly describe and critically consider how our lives, politics, emotions, and much more are becoming intertwined under the influence of digital technologies in both utopian and dystopian ways.

This paper begins by examining the 2024 gubernatorial election in Hyogo Prefecture in Japan. I can still clearly remember it because video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and social media more generally exerted a greater influence on the election result—which was released on Sunday, November 17, 2024—than traditional media such as television and newspapers. On September 26, Motohiko Saito posted on his official X account: “Today, I have decided to quit my job and run for office¹ again.” The post garnered substantial public interest, receiving approximately 170,000 “likes” and more than 28 million views. He initially posted photos of himself campaigning alone on the street, but the number of images featuring him alongside local residents steadily increased over time. During the campaign, the number of posts on X mentioning “Motohiko Saito” surpassed 1.1 million, and the volume of such posts increased at the later stages. The number of posts not only from his official account but also from his supporters rose across social media platforms.

Takashi Tachibana, another runner for office in the prefecture, took the unusual step of supporting Saito by posting over 100 video clips on his official channel, reportedly attracting nearly 15 million views. As if responding to the increasing volume of social media posts and videos, voter behavior and support changed. There was more and more fake news and slander. Supporters of Kazumi Inamura, another candidate in the gubernatorial election, filed a criminal complaint with the prefectural police, alleging that a number of unspecified individuals had submitted false reports to social media platform administrators and accused them of obstruction of business by fraudulent means. Moreover, the circulation of posts claiming that Inamura advocated the granting of voting rights to foreigners and that she had substantially increased her retirement benefits during her tenure as mayor of Amagasaki City was rising sharply. She flatly denied all those allegations on her official webpage.

This case illustrates that we are living in an era of “algorithmic hyper-late modernity,” in which social media, video-sharing platforms such as YouTube, and digital technologies, including especially artificial intelligence (AI), have profound impact.

2. BEFORE HYPER-LATE MODERNITY: MODERNITY AND LATE MODERNITY

What was the nature of the modernity and late modernity that preceded hyper-late modernity? I would like to begin by examining this question. Capitalism, democracy (civil society), and nation-states emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in Western societies, ushering in the era of modernity.

¹ *Note from Japanese-to-Korean Translator:* Motohiko Saito had lost his post as governor in September 2024 after the prefectural assembly of the Hyogo Prefecture adopted a no-confidence motion against him following a whistle-blowing. He ran for office again and was re-elected in November. “Quitting the job” in the post means that he would accept the non-confidence motion and step down as governor to seek the judgement of the public again.

The advent of modernity had a profound impact, unsettling long-standing forms of human relationships as well as values and modes of thought that had previously been taken for granted in Western societies. Émile Durkheim's thought is closely connected to this historical moment. Durkheim, together with Max Weber, was among the leading figures in the sociological community at the time when sociology became institutionalized as an academic discipline in universities in the early twentieth century. Durkheim approached modernity through two fundamental questions: "Why does society fragment?" and "How can society be reconstructed?" He wrote *Suicide*, now a classic of sociology, with these concerns in mind.

Egoistic suicide results from weakened social integration and increasing individualization. Altruistic suicide refers to obligatory self-sacrifice carried out for the sake of honor within a group, such as the military. Anomic suicide is triggered by the absence of social norms or by a state of social disorder.

Durkheim argued that egoistic and anomic suicide become particularly serious problems in modern society. Durkheim believed that modern society is characterized by the tendency for individuals to become increasingly isolated and dispersed, falling into egoistic or anomic states, and these tendencies appear particularly pronounced in urban environments. Modernity, in his view, fosters anomie—a condition of normlessness and social disorientation. He posited that the future would not be defined solely by increasing individualization, and that small groups connecting individuals would become increasingly important (the theory of intermediate groups).

How did Durkheim arrive at such a view? This again is deeply connected to the historical circumstances in which he lived, particularly the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was accused of spying for Germany, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment. The charges were fabricated and driven by individuals unwilling to accept France's defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War. The affair divided French society into two opposing camps—those who supported the conviction and those who opposed it.

It developed into a major episode of social fragmentation at a time when France as a nation-state was still consolidating itself within the framework of capitalism. As rationality is promoted as a characteristic of modernity, individualism intensifies, and society enters a state of anomie, ultimately resulting in deep divisions. This was a concern shared not only by Durkheim but also by many intellectuals of the period.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, modernity, particularly in Western countries, entered a new phase following the period of social resistance in the 1960s. A set of new values and principles of conduct emerged that differed from those associated with classical modernity.

Fredric Jameson explored this new phase of modernity in depth. From the early 1980s, he developed a series of postmodern theories from a Marxist perspective. One of his key concepts is "pastiche," referring to the "quotation of others' work," a concept that resembles parody in certain respects. He describes pastiche as "a form of expression that quotes others only superficially, in a non-subjective and amoral manner," regardless of ideological or formal originality or historical significance. As seen in contemporary social media, individuals often "copy and paste" opinions encountered at some point in time and space, reproducing them endlessly in a pastiche-like manner. In doing so, they effectively adopt highly insular systems

of values and principles of conduct that operate primarily within their immediate communities of acquaintances. This serves to satisfy the desire for social validation.

As common values and shared principles of conduct gradually fade from society, its formerly stable foundations begin to erode and society grows increasingly “liquid” (Bauman 2000). Under such conditions, modern society acquires a strong element of reflexivity. This refers to the process whereby one’s own actions or attitudes feed back upon themselves, shaping and directing those very actions and attitudes, much like light reflecting from a mirror. This concept can be illustrated through the example of the “family” discussed by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens.

He argues that the answer to the question of “Who am I?” in traditional societies was determined to a significant extent by external criteria such as one’s social class at birth, family background, and region of origin. The family one was born into largely determined whom one would marry, and one’s social class strongly influenced one’s occupation. However, the situation began to change with the rise of modern society. Individuals were gradually able to break free from the constraints of class and locality and acquired the freedom to choose their occupations, spouses, places of residence, and lifestyles. Today, living in modern society, we must continually ask ourselves, “Who am I?”

We must engage in an ongoing reflexive monitoring of our own mode of existence, deciding which profession to pursue, whom to marry or whether to remain single, where to live, what to value, and even how to dress or style our hair. In this process, we continuously construct a narrative of the self. Giddens identifies this as individualization and argues that the family has also become individualized in contemporary society. Like lifestyles or hairstyles, the family has become something that individuals can choose through communication. This shift suggests that intimate relationships within the family have undergone profound transformation, which he describes as the “transformation of intimacy.” We now recognize that the family is no longer defined exclusively by traditional forms.

The “grand narrative,” in which everyone pursued a single form of happiness, has lost its authority, and individuals increasingly believe that they may pursue happiness in diverse ways. For us today, we no longer “act as a family simply because we are a family”; rather, we “become a family through the practices by which we enact family life.”

3. TOWARD HYPER-LATE MODERNITY

As discussed earlier, modernity emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western societies against the backdrop of capitalism, democracy, and the rise of nation-states. It entered the phase of late modernity in the mid-1970s after a prolonged period of transformation lasting roughly fifty to sixty years, including the era of social resistance in the 1960s. Another five to six decades later, late modernity evolved into what may be described as “hyper-late modernity” in the 2010s and 2020s, following the wave of globalization that unfolded in the 1980s and 1990s. Hyper-late modernity may be characterized by the following features:

(1) It unfolds against the backdrop of globalization, which accelerated rapidly during the 1980s
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and 1990s.

(2) It is therefore deeply connected to mobilities, which are fundamental to the functioning of a globalized world.

(3) Hyper-late modernity has become inseparable from algorithmic technologies, as global mobilities increasingly depend on the revolutionary digital infrastructures that have developed since the 2010s.

The scholar who has most insightfully explored this phenomenon is Anthony Elliott. In his co-authored work with John Urry, Elliott describes contemporary society as fundamentally “mobile” and argues that we now live “mobile lives.” What we understand as “the real” is reshaped and realized only under conditions in which people, objects, capital, information, knowledge, and ideas are constantly in motion (Elliott and Urry 2010).

Mobility generates continuous flow across national borders and brings them into convergence, revealing the landscape of a mobile society (Adey et al. 2014; Cresswell 2006; Endres et al. 2016; Sheller and Urry eds. 2004; Urry 2000a, 2003, 2007). The consequences of accelerating mobilities are also visible in the changing patterns of risk. Many contemporary disasters, for instance, are closely linked to climate change driven by rising carbon emissions. In 2019, airplanes alone emitted more than one billion metric tons of carbon dioxide worldwide. Air travel accelerates society’s dependence on carbon, contributing to the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters. Importantly, the effects of such disasters are not confined to the countries responsible for the emissions but spread across the globe. This process can aptly be described as an “offshoring of disaster.”

Infectious diseases follow similar dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic was also deeply connected to global mobilities. The virus spread rapidly across national borders, regardless of differences in environmental sanitation. Global flows of people and goods facilitated their worldwide proliferation. Paradoxically, the global spread of the virus ultimately led to an unprecedented suspension of human mobility. This situation may be understood as an “offshoring of infectious diseases.” As Ulrich Beck (1986, 2002) argues, risks such as disasters, infectious diseases, and war increasingly circulate globally, transcending national borders.

Elliott proposed a three-stage model of mobilities at a conference held at Ritsumeikan University in 2023. The phase he calls “Mobilities 1.0” refers to the 1980s and 1990s, when mobility became normalized, global society emerged, and discourses on globalization flourished. The phase of “Mobilities 2.0” begins in the 2000s, when routine mobilities began to reshape everyday ways of living. At this stage, the notion of “mobile lives”—lives profoundly shaped by mobility—came to the fore. Even the self became inseparable from the mobilities of information enabled by smartphones. Communication, family life, education, labor, and lifestyles are all deeply influenced by mobility.

Elliott further argues that we have now entered the era of “Mobilities 3.0.” In this stage, mobility evolves—or intensifies—through the advancement of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. Mobility becomes deeply intertwined with technological systems, and the boundaries between the real and the fictional increasingly blur. Logistics systems such as those used by Amazon, for example, are sustained by sophisticated digital infrastructures. Border management is likewise increasingly governed by such technologies,

and digital passports are expected to become widespread in the near future.

In short, contemporary society may be characterized as both mobile and digital. The real and the fictional increasingly synchronize to produce new forms of reality. In the stage of Mobilities 3.0, risks and other social processes are no longer confined within a single nation or region. Modern mobilities, intertwined with digital technologies, evolve into what may be described as algorithmic mobilities, offshoring risks and other phenomena across global networks (Bissell et al. 2018; Everuss 2024; Sourbati and Behrendt 2020).

Global mobilities combined with digital technologies are also transforming the nature of warfare (Lyon 2021). Autonomous drones, for instance, challenge the very concept of war itself. Our sense of self and consciousness increasingly take shape within digital networks. The AlterEgo technology developed by a research team at MIT enables AI to interpret a user's intentions directly from neural signals associated with thought. In the future, the self and consciousness may be sustained within networks formed through such devices.

Even the realms of dreams and the unconscious are beginning to be networked (Possati 2021). The headgear Halo, developed by the technology company Prophetic, aims to enhance productivity by artificially inducing lucid dreams, allowing users to fly or generate ideas within dream states. Similar transformations are occurring in communication and intimacy. Cases in which individuals converse with—or even marry—AI partners illustrate the emergence of an era of “algorithmic intimacy” (Elliott 2019, 2023).

4. ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES IN THE AI AGE

The humanities and social sciences—such as sociology, geography, and anthropology—must reconsider elements such as the self, the unconscious, communication, and intimacy from the perspective of networks operating through digital information. Human creativity is increasingly realized within networks that connect humans and artificial intelligence. Indeed, searching for information without the assistance of generative AI systems such as ChatGPT will soon become increasingly difficult.

Our everyday lives can no longer be sustained without digital technologies. Cash is gradually being replaced by electronic payments; deepfakes influence the outcomes of elections, and it is AI itself that detects and verifies those deepfakes. In my own work, I have examined how algorithmic technologies interact with human emotions in the phenomenon of mobilities, particularly in the context of tourism (Endo ed. 2020). Yet today the very mode of emotion itself is being transformed using AI technologies.

How, then, should we understand life in algorithmic hyper-late modernity? This condition should not be interpreted as a simplistic utopia in which happiness can be achieved simply through the wise use of technology, nor as a dystopia in which humanity becomes alienated through technological dependence. Rather, we must recognize that diverse dimensions of human existence are increasingly realized only within networks that connect humans and technologies. We therefore have no choice but to continually reflect on how humans are being transformed by technology and, at the same time, how technologies themselves are being reshaped by human practices (Latour 2005). Within this process, it becomes essential to

establish ethical standards that define the lines that must never be crossed.

Where, then, do such ethical standards come from? They can emerge only through an ongoing process of reflection. Without the humanistic capacity to ask ourselves the fundamental question—“What does it mean to be human?”—we risk becoming profoundly disoriented. The humanities are therefore indispensable for those living in hyper-late modernity, enabling us to “install” ethical reflection within ourselves and to reconsider the mode of human existence. As Cicero famously observed, *Cultura animi philosophia est*—“philosophy is the cultivation of the soul.” To ask what it means to be human in the age of AI, and to continue cultivating the soul, is precisely the task that the humanities must undertake in the years ahead.

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