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Insight Paper: An Artificial Human Condition

The human condition of modern times is a manufactured one. Today's society maintains order and establishes peace through a mechanized dehumanization that began at the advent of the Industrial Revolution. This order relies on the forceful organization of people's lives into a technological system that makes the daily lives of people lugubrious and dull. This creates an omnipresent unconsciousness in the population that has now essentially become the human condition. It is an unconsciousness that hinders individual subjectivity and stifles questions that may be posed by conscious observers of the manner in which society is run. The upper echelons of society oversee a gradual process of conditioning done over the formative years of young people that encourages routine over spontaneity. Through a need for money, people find themselves fixed in a mundane but necessary daily routine that has to be followed in order to subsist. People fit into roles and become mere cogs in the intricate gears of a modern society; their unique consciousness is veiled under the roles they have to fit into in the process. This unconsciousness is representative of the artificially produced human condition that modern society has instilled into most of the population. It is inherently dehumanizing because it goes directly contrary to the quality of humanity that is uniquely human: an immaterial, self-aware consciousness that is constantly questioning and curious about the world it occupies.

The proper and real human condition that modern society has phased out is much different than what faces most in today's world. I come to terms with it for only short periods of time in my life, but those are the moments worth feeling and knowing. The real human condition is one of sheer and unadulterated freedom, and to experience is to live through life's greatest joy and greatest pain all at the same time. (I should note I experienced this to the highest degree whilst in the countryside near Portsmouth in England). This freedom is of such an extent, that even when I want to retreat into a basic existence like the one of my childhood (which in many ways was an existence where I was under control), I will be unable to because my thoughts race and the multiplicity of desires, thoughts, and ambitions coalesce to prevent that. It is a joy because you can realize how rich and full of potential the human mind can really be. In these moments of realization I learn that it is the natural state of a human to constantly be thinking, pondering, and weighing all the intracies of life at once. I also learn that humans are meant to be unchained and unbounded. At the same time it is a pain because your eyes are opened as to the great responsibility of action you have, and that you are the master of your realm of being. The Catechism of the Catholic Church will often mention that humans were made in the image and likeness of God. I think this idea has great credibility for all of humanity, even for those who are non-religious. Human beings are gods because they can create their own realities with the power of their intellect, and they have the mental capacity to do whatever they see fit. That is precisely the foundation of what is called "free will" by the doctrine of the church. Regardless of whether people believe god is the responsible for humanity's creation, it should be a universally recognized state of humanity to be in perpetual freedom of mind and thought.

I have spent most of my life in New York City. In my 17 years here, I have been exposed to the dehumanizing and hyper-organizational functioning of society. In many ways, New York City is a micro-chasm of how today's modern society works. The aggregate unconsciousness aforementioned is embodied by the readily observable lack of engagement on the faces of some in the subway, on the streets, and those sitting on the stoops of their buildings. The demand by the city and state for money for living space in the city makes it so everyone has to fit into a role (job or career) and spend their energy everyday pursuing money. When I look at the posture and countenances of people, I see that some have succumbed to the emotionally numbing influences of the society at large. My older brother Patrick, who is now in the workforce himself, identifies this unconsciousness as "living for Friday"; they go through the entire week as unconscious bodies and only on the weekend do they find any solace. The "Sunday blues" that people feel is their brief conscious realization that for the entire week they were simply existing, rather than living, and it makes them despondent as a result. I too have fallen victim to the day-in, day-out routine in school, and in retrospect I have been unconscious a number of times through the work week. I think it is indicative of the resignation on the part of the public to be unconscious during the work week. It is not a way to nourish the soul to be like this. Society needs to be encouraging people to realize the power and essence of life that can be tapped into just through a certain level of awareness and passion.

The dehumanizing influence that today's society puts on us is a large reason why I, like many others, try to find solace in nature. The calm, tranquility, and beauty of standing alone in a grand forest or surfing the ocean waves is a highly valued commodity in our lives. I can feel my physical body as well as my soul react in a special way whenever I immerse myself in the cool water of the ocean. This powerful force and influence of nature is recognized ubiquitously, indeed, even Nietzsche himself, whilst walking near Lake Silvaplana, came to his epiphany about Zarathustra. I think it is the apparent lack of organization, numbers, and chaos that attracts us to nature. We can be conscious of the real qualities of what is around us, as opposed to a developed area with tall buildings, where artificiality and the pace and demands lead us to becoming unconscious. People I have met who were from rural areas always seemed to be more at peace and laid back as compared to their urban counterparts. I think this is indicative of the unfortunate tension and relentless pace put on our lives in a city environment. Perhaps this pace of life in urban environments is an accompaniment to the breeding of the mass unconscious in modern society. Although by no means it the mass unconsciousness limited to the urban sprawl. Even a quick glance at the destitution and misery of the third world will reveal this unconsciousness on an even more severe level.

Finding a passion outside of the menial day-to-day existence and attaching a greater meaning to that activity is an absolutely essential practice to combat the collective unconsciousness. I think that many people have realized this. Simply watching an episode of America's Got Talent or American Idol will reveal this. The hobby I have adopted in recent years is parkour, otherwise known as freerunning; it is a sport involving the jumping over obstacles, running along ledges, and climbing things, and is typically done in an urban environment. The greater meaning I attach to parkour is that the traversal of physical obstacles translates into a greater mind to world connection and an ability to overcome daunting life-related obstacles. For others, they may find greater fulfillment through art, music, or some other activity. It is through these passions that humans can manifest and magnify the raw creative tendencies that lay within all of us. By being forthright with these talents and inspirations, humanity can fight the cold rationality and lack of consciousness present in the enumerated system of society.

I think the sentiment of being a real human being and living under the human condition that we are meant to live under is reflected in a number of mediums. Our souls are able to be enriched by the fictional profundity of films, music, books, and even video games. One of the most profound moments in my experience with movies came in my first viewing of The Matrix. At the end of the film, the enlightened Neo walks out of a telephone booth and observes his surroundings. In the background the song “Wake up” from Rage against the Machine plays and he looks into the camera amidst the unconscious crowd going about its business. Suddenly the camera pans away and we see Neo flying through the air, the conqueror of the machines and the slavery of the digital age. Although it was only a movie, it exposed me to the fundamental predicament that humans in a modern society find themselves in. Cautionary tales of dystopian cyber punk worlds abound and have identified accurately that in a world increasingly connected with technology, numbers, trends, and machines, humans lose their power and become lost in a mechanized and unconscious dream world. Morpheus’s phrase, “Free your mind”, has become synonymous with the call to consciousness by different philosophers. The movie asserted an eventuality about a technologically advancing society that seems unlikely to us, but I think we should give credence to the possibility of the ultimate fate of enslavement that the movie suggests.

Being a part of the unconscious crowd that the power at hand wants people to be entails the classification of people into the numbers attached to their lives. Identification numbers, social security numbers, income, tax brackets, SAT scores and grade point averages all serve to remove the subjective human qualities from a person and make them into a statistic. In what is considered to be television's first masterpiece of a show, The Prisoner explored this concept greatly. The unnamed protagonist, in the prison town in which he was being held, was given the number 2. In response he exclaims, "I am not a number, I am a free man!" He is met with a sinister laugh from the ruling authority of the town, and since the show is an allegory, it aims to say that we to are simply numbers and have had our freedom undermined in a similar way. I think the system of numbers is absolutely connected to the mass unconsciousness. A strong example of this would be today's education system, particularly the high schools. Considering the need for money I mentioned previously as well as the importance of the career that children are continually indoctrinated with, high school students will become extremely concerned with their grades, test scores, and the number of extracurricular activities they have on their resumes. This is particularly true with students going to the specialized high schools in New York City, with Stuyvesant having the most infamous reputation of overworked students. I can hardly remember most of my first three years at Beacon because I was so concerned with getting the grades and making the numbers that were to be identified with my person impressive enough for the colleges I would be applying to. That ardent concern with numbers caused me to be unconscious for most of my time at this school, and is something I regret. Numbers and statistical categories are in no way conducive to individual subjectivity or curiosity. How can a consciousness be free to work if it is being classified under categories, numbers, and mathematical models? This problem has made me believe in the value of more socially oriented classes that promote thought and exploration, rather than memorization and the unconscious functioning that can be applied to many classes at school.

It is unfortunate that after thousands of years of societal evolution, when we think we have reached a point where people's lives have been bettered and their need for fulfillment satiated, that the human condition is in a degredated state. More Americans than ever are relying on drugs and antidepressants to keep them going. The condition people find themselves in is an unpleasant and painful unconsciousness that results from the unnatural mechanization and numerization of life. Society tells people that the organization is necessary, and that by fitting into a pre-ordained role, they can live a fulfilling life. Though the quality of life has gone up, and people have more material possessions and access to resources than ever, the essential dehumanizing nature that society has developed is having consequences on the population. Now, more than any other time, individuality and the curious consciousness essential to the natural condition of humanity are being trampled under the crowd forming tendencies of society. People are being grouped by numbers, categories, and are steadily losing both their unique identities and desire for individuality as well. Humans are the masters of the Earth, and have a natural free will. The future preservation of that free will is dependent on whether it is prioritized by the powers running the civilizations on Earth.