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IUMW4005 WAYS OF THINKING

ASSIGNMENT 1: Portfolio Writing

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Part 1: Divergent Thinking - Persuasive and Descriptive Writing

The Contemporary Human

As I in front of my iPad, opening another word document to complete an assignment, browsing a streaming site to see what film or television show that might pique my interest or even simply mindlessly scrolling on social media, I find myself constantly returning to the same question at the back of my head. “What are you doing with your life.”

Being born during the rise of the internet, going through the latter half secondary school online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and starting university in the age of AI, technology has always been a constant in my life, However I did not expect it to cause me so much isolation and disconnect towards the world I was born into, along with the people I surround myself with. Sitting in front of a screen hours on end to complete academic responsibilities, communicating with friends through texts as our adult lives get busier, and dealing with classmates who rely on AI tools like ChatGPT to “brainstorm” ideas instead of communicating eventually took a toll on my mental health. According to Hilty et al. (2023), Immoderate use of social media and technology among youth can lead to mental health issues such as, suicide, depression and even burn out. With a large amount of modern-day society relying on technology to get by their day-to-day life, how much longer will the youth have to live their young adulthood in a lonely, dystopian manner and what does it mean for the definition of a “contemporary human?”.

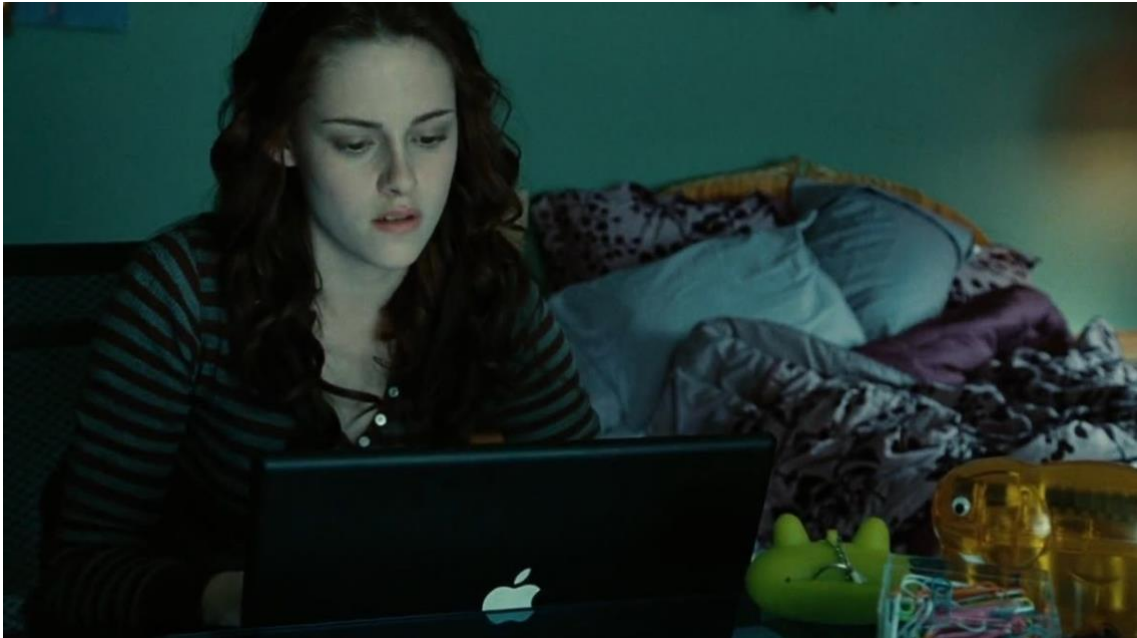


Humanism at its core emphasises on compassion, the complexities of the human condition as well as the emotions and the connections that it brings. It defines what makes us human and separates us from the likes of flora and fauna. As society becomes hell bent on curating the perfect social media feeds, generating images using AI to reduce risks of imperfection and striving for online validation, *Post humanism* contrasts humanism as it questions the concept of human identity and examines the influence of technology on human life. Loneliness and isolation are matters within the human condition that has been explored through scriptures, art and literature throughout centuries. To quote Sartre, (1938) *“I felt myself in a solitude so frightful that I contemplated suicide. What held me back was the idea that no one, absolutely no one, would be moved by my death, that I would be even more alone in death than in life.”*. To still be able to feel such emotions in a post humanist world where the use of technology is prioritised over the human touch tells us that there is so much more to the human spirit than simply succumbing to the constant use of technology. Curating a social media profile takes effort and creativity while AI generated images still has its faults and mistakes (Groh et al., 2024) which subsequently relates back to the core principles of humanism. Regardless of how fast technology continues to develop and society continues to rely on its use, the choices, efforts, and emotions that can be made and evoked from using the technology at the end of the day are still what makes us human.

All in all, the definition of the contemporary human has been and will always be debated within different generations across many societies for centuries. Economic and environmental changes, the uncertain future in which technology will take us to are some of the factors that will continue to make us feel, create, innovate and wonder, which are all the things that make up the human experience. It ultimately returns to how we choose to exist and experience what it means to be a contemporary human in a post humanist world ourselves. To quote another excerpt from Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), “I am going to outlive myself. Eat, sleep, sleep, eat. Exist slowly, softly, like these trees, like a puddle of water, like the red bench in the streetcar.”

Part 2: Problem Solving: Convergent writing and Expository Writing

Digital Overload and its consequences



Based on the Poem “Ruin” by to Charles Bukowski (1990) *“There will always be something to ruin our lives, it all depends on what or which finds us first.”* As a contemporary human living in the digital age, the internet can be a convenient tool to access information, however with over an unlimited amount of search results on google and differing opinions on social media sites now enhanced with AI, is there a limit of how much information a human can consume ? Transitioning from a society that once relied on books, typewriters and an overall slower paced lifestyle to a fast paced, continuously developing, technologically reliant one all within a century has caused a significant impact on how humanity has adapted to the change both physically and cognitively. Despite the younger generation being more technologically sound, there are drawbacks to being exposed to technology for long periods of time. Digital overload is a phenomenon where one consumes so much information online that they are unable to process and comprehend the information that they have read and can invoke feelings of overwhelming stress and anxiety (Tukinova, 2018)

To continue further, mobile phones are able to provide many apps for different uses ranging from E-mails, social media, streaming apps and even navigation. While it can be helpful for

our daily errands and general use, these phones and apps are engineered to continuously capture your attention. For example, the colour that has the most stimulating effect on the brain and is used on stop signs, warning signs and now, notifications (Sercan, 2024). Moreover, according to Goldman (2021), bright colours, loud music combined with the notifications release dopamine, a chemical that the brain releases when we explore and find something interesting and can also cause addiction. Scrolling, tapping on one app after another and texting different people with all the dopamine stimulating elements combined can be too much for what our brains are equipped for. Cognitive fatigue, a repercussion that comes with Digital overload can increase forgetfulness, reduce focus and damage our ability to connect with others in real life. Not only that it can affect our decision-making skills, deprive you of sleep and worsen your attention span (R. Imama, 2024).



From a humanist perspective, digital overload can be overcome with by prioritising human connections over online, or AI options. As the use of AI companions (Robinson, 2025) and online friendships continue to be on the rise with the digitalisation of communication, users should prioritise creating connections with people physically around them as it is more productive, engaging and personal as compared to digital connections. This will then improve communication and social skills, reduce the risk of dopamine addiction and provide safer connections. Next, users can also participate in a dopamine fast (West, 2020) by disconnecting with their overstimulating devices entirely outside of emergencies and

priorities so that they are able to find healthier, less stimulating hobbies like cycling or reading and reduce their overall screen time. All in all, it all returns to the freedom of choice.

Individuals with a technologically dependent, fast paced lifestyle however may find it difficult to cut off their devices completely. With that being said, in a post humanist world, there are technological solutions that are able to help with a digital overload. Firstly, tech developers can design apps that can help with reducing a user's screen time to complete more productive tasks for example, Forest is a timing app that reduces notifications and limit distracting apps while you do work for a specific period of time (Maiorca, 2025). Next, you can reduce, silent or completely remove your notifications by using the do not disturb or mute function to prevent you from being distracted with the notification sounds (Cornell, 2018). Rather than fearing the technology we can provide solutions to not only reduce the digital overload but also embrace how humanity has evolved far enough to create these technologies and provide the solutions with the risks that come with it.

To conclude, the human experience is far too complex to continuously pick a side with either humanity and technology, and with that being said, the best solution to this problem is ultimately the freedom of choice. Depending on what lifestyle you live in, both humanist and post humanist solutions can be used to combat the issue of Digital Overload. To be human is to make mistakes, and the internet is also prone for misinformation. With trial and error anyone can find solutions to their problems, and all in all with the right education and awareness, humans are able to make the correct choice to control them.

Part 3: Lateral Thinking and narrative writing

Who am I?

To Oscar Wilde (1895), “To love oneself, is the beginning of a lifelong romance.” How do I love myself if I don’t know who I am? Who Am I? A haunting question that has been at the back of my mind for as long as I could remember. To live authentically in a contemporary world, how do find myself without being influenced by others?

To understand myself better, I picture myself as a fictional persona of mine, Lily. Lily is a lonely, aspiring young adult that craves the validation of others. She was willing to pay for her “friends” meals, let them copy off her assignments, lend a shoulder for them to cry on and even adapt to their lifestyles even if she did not enjoy it. Despite it all they never seemed to care for Lily or reciprocate any of the kindness that she has shown to them. Of course, she did not expect anything in return, but it did feel nice to be validated and belonged to someone. Growing up she was always alone, with strict, busy parents Lily had nothing to do in her free time except to keep her nose in books. She envied all the girls in her school with their dazzling clothes, close friend groups and latest smartphones, but all she could do was draw in her little notebooks and imagine she lived their life within the confines of her hardcopies.

As she entered early adulthood, Lily made many friends and would obsessively attempt to fit into whatever that was trending. As Lily grew up with hardly any access to the internet, she became infatuated with Pinterest boards of celebrity style, shopping for high end makeup, browsing TikTok for what shoes to wear or what bags not to wear and was consumed by her newfound freedom. Hours were spent on the internet browsing online stores and listening to what popular influencers had to say about a new trend, doing everything but listening to herself simply just to fit in. She began to post pictures of herself on Instagram, constantly refreshing her notifications to see who liked or commented on her posts. De Valle (2021) claims that “On social media, users are not just recipients of content but also creators.” Eventually, she caught the attention of a boy, and of course she was elated. Finally, someone she could trust and attain validation from personally. But what she forgets to realise is that the boy only knew her as her persona. So, she kept on performing for him, giving into his fantasy of a pretty, bubbly, trendy girl he saw on Instagram until she eventually grew tired and showed him her true colours, a nerdy, shy, lonely girl that loves books and drawing. He

was obviously caught off guard and immediately breaks things off with her, threw her away, like all her friends did, like a wilted lily.

Lily was distraught. All those hours scrolling the internet to keep up with trends, posing for her Instagram pictures, socialising with people that did not like her, listening to all those irritating influencers and their high-pitched voices just for her to end up alone. Again. With no sense of who she is. She could not even remember the last time she picked up a book. According to Poiter (2025), “Social media has become the ultimate source of validation for many; if something isn’t shared online, its validity and veracity are often questioned.” Lily thought that if she could not keep up with her peers physically then they could know her better through her curated online personality, but her lack of experience and education on social media ultimately failed her.

Fortunately for Lily she had time to spare during a semester break, and she utilised it to return to her former hobbies. Lily then used the internet not as a guide, but as a tool to expand her knowledge on literature, perfect her art and eventually discovered her own sense of style, based on her own fashion muses like *Liv Tyler* and *Zoey Deschanel*. And as the new semester started, Lily finally bloomed. Gone were the days of disposable friendships now that she has found her own friends that share similar styles and interests. She finally understood that she did not need the validation and attention of others to thrive and that she did not have to conform to social standards whether physically or digitally. To conclude, living as an authentic, confident, secure and understanding version of her younger self meant that she did not need to gild the lily any longer. Who am I? I am still Lily. A lily that finally began her long awaited, lifelong romance.

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