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DISEASES OF THE FUTURE

Nowadays humans suffer from diseases that didn't exist in the past, a trend that will probably continue into the future. A wide range of new disorders, especially related to the latest technologies, may affect us.

Computers, video games, office work, virtual realities, and their lumbering presence, are just some of the elements that have changed the context in which we live and the way we spend our time. Technology has found our new weaknesses and will exploit them.

1. Computerization of the Personality

People who spend many hours in front of a computer, for work or for fun, may experience a computerization of the personality.

The relationship with the computer influences cognitive processes and daily actions of the person affected from this modern disease. People with computerized personalities relate with others in the same way they communicate with the machine. The language, the way of thinking, the decision-making processes reflect information technology methods.

Anxious and impatient, they don't speak much. Long talks bore them, they think people have lost the ability to answer in a concise and clear way. Unambiguous, impersonal, fast, that's the kind of conversation they want.

Yes/No, Proceed/Cancel, Save/Delete, Open/Close are their only possible answers to everyday life situations.

2. Virtual Reality Addiction

Simulations are increasingly more influential, satisfying and meaningful than the reality they are presumed to represent. Virtual reality is introducing us to environments and settings far more compelling than real life. Digital worlds are more and more "real" and blended with our physical world.

VR offers the opportunity to physically interface with friends and colleagues across vast distances, and with a dizzying array of technological features at disposal, it won't be easy to detach. Once fully immersive VR gets available, it will be difficult for people to engage with reality. Consequently, virtual reality addiction will become a common and serious problem. In the Society of Simulations in which we are living, will we still be able to have genuine experiences?

3. Nature Deficit Disorder

A warning message on videogames packaging advises players to take a break for every hour of activity. Despite that, young people– and some adults – spend hours with their face glued to screen. We are consumed with screens of all types and sizes. Whether it's high-definition TVs, laptops, or mobile devices, we interact with screens more than we do with other individuals. We are spending less time outdoors resulting in new behavioral problems.

Nature Deficit Disorder refers to a hypothesis by Richard Louv in his book Last Child in the Woods. Louv says the effects of the lack of nature in today's wired generation lives will be an even bigger problem in the future: "An increasing pace in the last three decades, approximately, of a rapid disengagement between children and direct experiences in nature has profound implications, not only for the health of future generations but for the health of the Earth itself".

4. Nanotech Poisoning

Scientists use to operate on a nanoscale, ranging from nanostructures, nanocircuits, nanocoatings, nanosensors, and more. In the future, medicines will get smarter thanks to nanotechnology, but at the same time, nanotechnological devices infused into the human body could cause serious problems.

Since there is no authority to regulate nanotech-based products at the moment, there are many products that could possibly be dangerous to humans. Poorly designed nanobots could deliver medicines to the wrong area, or act in unpredictable ways. And if their programming goes wrong, they could physically damage tissue, or replicate uncontrollably, leading to an internal catastrophe.

5. Superintelligence Psychosis

To be in step with the times, we'll start to increase our intelligence and boost our cognitive abilities using biotechnologies and cybernetics. Genetic modification could tweak us to be smarter, while neural interfaces might allow us to plug our brains directly into the web. But the acquisition of extreme cognitive abilities could prove to be counter-productive.

Our evolutionarily-calibrated psychologies may not be able to handle such exceptional intelligence. Super smart augmented brains will think too much, causing information overload, anxiety attacks, existential cries, egomania and many other psychosis.

It's easy to blame technology for being so distracting, but distraction is nothing new. If we're honest with ourselves, tech is just another way to occupy our time and minds. If we weren't on our devices, we'd likely do something similarly unproductive.

Personal technology is indeed more engaging than ever, and there's no doubt companies are engineering their products and services to be more compelling and attractive. But would we want it any other way? The intended result of making something better is that people use it more. That's not necessarily a problem, that's progress.

These improvements don't mean we shouldn't attempt to control our use of technology. To make sure it doesn't control us, we should come to terms with the fact that it's more than the technology itself that's responsible for our habits. Our workplace culture, social norms and individual behaviors all play a part. To put technology in its place, we must be conscious not only of how technology is changing, but also of how it is changing us.

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