

THE AI FIX

Reflections on the use and abuse of technology

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Abstract: This article addresses the ubiquitous influence AI has on all of our lives at the moment — the **fix** we are in. With our smart phones informing us of our addictive tendency — “Your screen time was up 10% last week - over 6 hours 42 minutes a day!” — our **fixation** with ‘the machine’ (entertainment ... ‘edutainment’ too) is turning us into passive consumers. Marshall McLuhan argues that the use of the medium itself is the message to be understood and this essay presents one direction we, as academics at least, may perhaps take to **fix** the problem which is stealing our humanity and draining our *Ko'ngil*.

Keywords: Fabricating news; Luddism; Moral Economy; AI addiction; ‘Touch Grass’; Technological distraction; ‘The Medium is the Message’; Awakening the *Ko'ngil*; Ahmet Yasavi; Giving vs Being consumed.

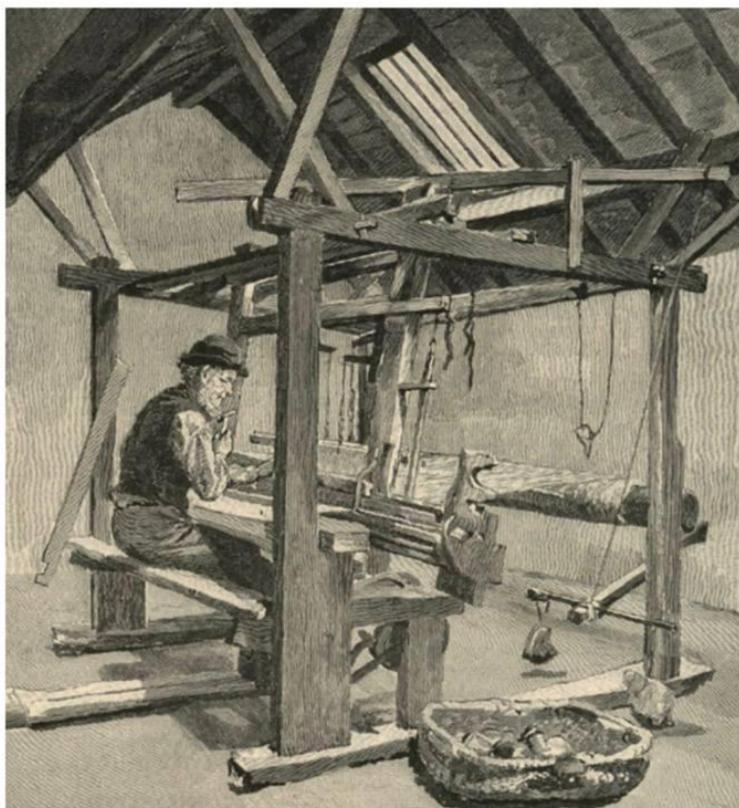
This article addresses the ubiquitous influence AI has on all of our lives at the moment — the **fix** we are in — and presents one direction we, as academics at least, may perhaps take.

We are in the latest industrial age or revolution; some say the 5th, and as with the 1st, AI is making subtle and not so subtle changes to our lives. The prospect of Machines taking over the world seems less like Science Fiction especially when the so-called godfather of AI, Geoffrey Hinton, recently said that the thing that he ushered into existence has a 20% chance of causing total human extinction. Interestingly he is calling for ‘maternal instincts to be introduced into AI’ otherwise the ‘war-gamers’ have the upper hand. The ‘Wow! factor’ of the content of AI is undoubtable but can be shown in many cases now to be unreliable. To take one recent example, the heavy snows in Kamchatka, Russia:



Commentators showed that within hours of this genuinely interesting happening in the world event becoming news, AI content

sites start pumping out their own exaggerated versions designed to hijack your attention. “The real story becomes invisible next to its own fictional spin offs” - in a word, ‘false news’. “We’re entering an era where reality has to fight against fabricated versions of itself.” The word fabrication originally meant something made in a workshop, *fabrique* in French, and only developed its pejorative meaning around 1790, coincidentally at the same time workshops were overtaken by factories and mass production. The rise of the factory system saw huge changes as a result of mechanization. People in search of work migrated to the cities and created pools of cheap labour. Poor families sent their children to work in factories and exploitation was rife. The surplus of labour meant there was no job security and no union to protect them. The mill owners, the property holding and manufacturing class could hire and fire at will. It was around this time that Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels were writing of the suffering of the ‘labouring class’, in particular the weavers, a profession that was carried out by thousands of households across the middle of England (Fig 1). The Luddites came to be known simply as machine breakers - characterized as such by the growing number of newspapers, with the phrase ‘neo-Luddites’ coming to mean anyone who was ‘anti-Tech’ – or ‘against progress’.²⁶ In reality though, as historian EP Thompson and others have shown, the Luddites were not just about smashing machines - as they became famous for - but were trying to protect an older, more traditional way of life, in a time when they had no representation. Communications then were by horse or on foot, and gatherings would be restricted to church and a growing number of ‘field meetings’. As they saw their traditional way of life disappear, they wanted to protect themselves. Far from unintelligent, the Luddites were attempting to show how social values and moral obligations should define “legitimate economic activity and protect against exploitation.” This is sometimes referred to as a “moral economy”: “A system of economic exchange based on cultural norms, fairness, and mutual obligations rather than solely on profit-seeking or market mechanisms”

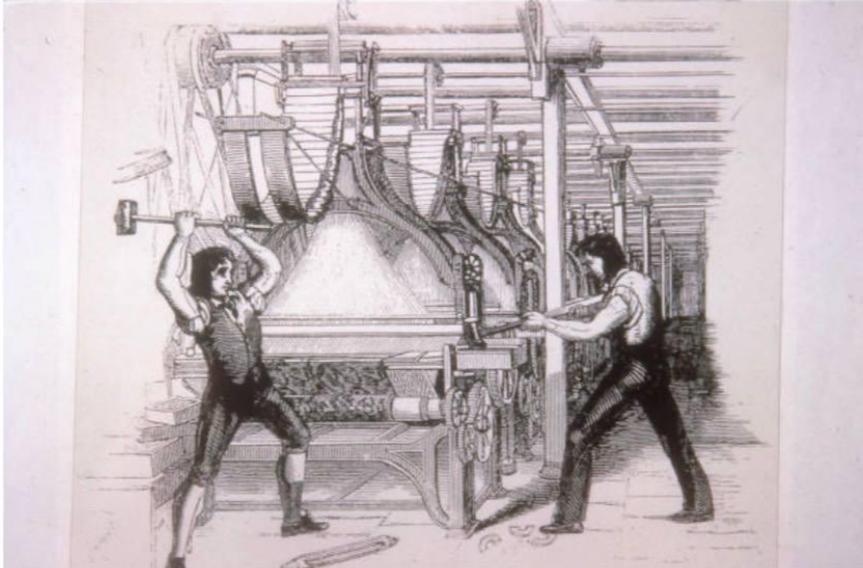


²⁶ (Masterovoy might be similar in the Russian context - *The Decembrist Revolt (1825): There were several “Masterovoy” units from the Peter the Great factories that joined the soldiers in Senate Square to revolt against Tsar Nicholas I.*)

EP Thompson

Of course, few or none of us know this today, so completely have we been absorbed into factory-made consumer items (from cigarettes to cars) and the indebtedness that comes from the credit economy.

There is one possible comparison with what for us in the West is now very difficult for us to understand — but I sense would be familiar to the Luddites — and that is how your own traditional family-based economies *Oila Jamgarmasi* work... but work they do... even if the spending is largely under the eye of the mother-in-law!



It was ever thus and indeed the root of the word 'economy' comes from the management of the house:

[1530s, "household management," from Latin *oeconomia* (source of French *économie*, Spanish *economía*, German *Ökonomie*, etc.), from Greek *oikonomia* "household management, thrift,"] OED

How common is this

now?

It's losing traction.

We are all running to the banks now.

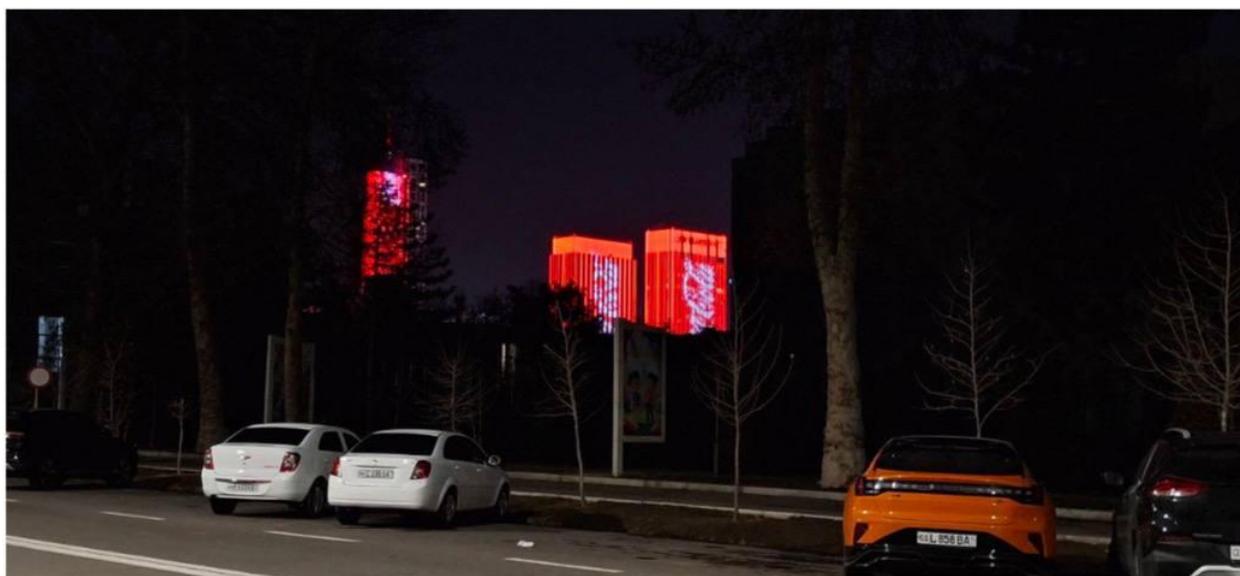


So the *maqol* 'bir yigitga yetti mahalla' is losing relevance as the skyline of Tashkent is changing. Tashkent amongst others is becoming, thanks to urban migration and expansion, a very big city and growing. The *mahalla* are slowly being replaced by high rise buildings... and surely the family focus is changing.



Advertising is subtly changing what is acceptable behaviour too. Did anyone see their grandmother drink like this?

Now when you see how the wealthy franchisers use their power — I do not need to mention their names but they are the world's biggest sponsors of advertising and marketing and so here too in Uzbekistan — might one not stop to ask why? Subtly - and not so subtly - our way of life is being changed.



Just to mention a few ways how this is happening; take our sugar intake, our diet, our health, our use of medicine. Pills today. Home grown remedies yesterday. How many *Dorixonas* and *Stomatologias* can a city have?! And inevitably the higher incidence of your children's use of glasses because of our screens. Just imagine the contrast with the views from the summer *Yaylo*.

So, what kind of action can we take? Am I suggesting neo-Luddism?

Back into history for a moment. We saw with the Luddites that their natural grievances were not supported (by any form of unions or representation) and indeed they were suppressed violently. Thousands of the same soldiers who had defeated the Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 were marched up from London, and in Manchester and other places they charged with swords drawn on the crowds of families peacefully protesting.²⁷

²⁷ Footnote see *The Battle of Peterloo*

The Peterloo Massacre took place at St Peter's Field, Manchester, England, on Monday 16 August 1819. Eighteen people were killed and 400–700 were injured when the cavalry of the Yeomen charged into a crowd of around 60,000 people who had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation).

The technical oligarchs had then, and have today, the support of the governments and can manipulate the development of technology to their advantage - arguing that they are in the stream of modernity and progress. What was first practised on the British working class and newly industrialized poor then became the model for colonialism abroad (and this applies both to the British and Russian models) where traditional societies were forced to abandon their 'moral economies' to enter the imperatives of Empire - not the least of which is medicine (or 'Big Pharma' as it is referred to today). Hospitals have become the most visited 'temples' of our time. How wealthy and how healthy do these institutions want us to be?

On Babur's birthday recently my daughter sent me an article from the British Guardian newspaper about the health of children today... another alarm call about the effect of neglectful schooling on the welfare of kids - and I'm not just talking about glasses.



Sun 8 Feb 2026 14:00 GMT

Schools that cultivate the mind but neglect spiritual education leave children unanchored in a challenging world

Kat Eghdamian

This is not the place to go into all the ailments of the Western model school system, but the lack of good intelligence given the social disorder in England (and America), for example, is striking; people divided on matters of immigration, colour and race, still to this day. And hospitals can hardly cope with the mental illnesses exhibited by children.

Is a robotized future inevitable? Will teachers disappear? Adaptation may be necessary but it is hardly encouraging news for our children. Even Gen Z are aware of the problem and have created the idiom 'Touch Grass', a way of telling someone believed to have been online for too long to "Go outside!". They should know as other phrases like 'click bait' and 'engagement farming' express our absolute fixation with the Internet.²⁸

However, my concern here is not so much an argument with the content, but with the effect of the media technology itself.

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher, writing as far back as the 1960s, argued that new technologies, or media, basically extend or amputate our bodies and senses and have the effect of "amplifying or accelerating existing processes" introducing a "change of scale, or pace, or shape or pattern into human association, affairs, and action", which results in "psychic, and social consequences"

(You may know the difficulty of getting to sleep after watching media at night - our smart phones speed up our brains at least.)

McLuhan argues that it is not a question of the content, and therefore simply a matter of trying to adjust or control it as parents would for children or schools for students. Rather, he says, the message is the medium itself...

Or as he sometimes wittily puts it: The Medium is the Message

In a book called Understanding Media (1964) he wrote this:

"The 'content' of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.

²⁸ *This is the second meaning of 'fix' - and it has overtones of addiction of course.*

I want you to really understand this. With my class and colleagues we worked on an Uzbek translation of this image.

“*Axborot vositalarining “mazmuni” xuddi o‘g‘ri qo‘riqchi itning e‘tiborini chalg‘itish uchun olib kelgan bir bo‘lak mazali go‘sh tga o‘xshaydi*”.

And in Russian:

“*Содержание” медиа подобно сочному куску мяса, который несёт грабитель, чтобы отвлечь сторожевого пса разума*”.

Does it make sense?

McLuhan is saying that we are in danger of losing our most precious things in ‘our house’ — (my students will know I refer to these as ‘The Lost Keys’ of Affandi)²⁹

We are being robbed!

We think we are taking something (almost free - music/videos/phone calls etc.) but in fact, something is being taken from us.

Alisher and Babur have been mentioned already. We do not celebrate them for nothing. It’s important to remember their exploits — building bridges, hospitals, madrassas and much more. The activities connote them as models of the best of behaviour. They gave so much to their/your people and society. Naturally they are people to emulate.

The upshot of the Guardian article above is that we neglect spiritual education at our peril. Our children will be cast adrift if they do not anchor themselves in the principles which look beyond this short life. For sure, Babur and Ali Sher would agree. I personally don’t like the word ‘spiritual’ myself as it confirms or substantiates ‘material’ - and has developed a romantic connotation ‘in our material world’.³⁰ A teaching that I like to use are the three rules of the famous Ahmet Yasavi who instructed the *toliblar* en route to Anatolia (and Hindustan) in the C12th.

Rule One: Welcome people; feed them and see them fare well back on their road.³¹

Rule Two: Whatever (work) you do in life, do it as well as you can, so that people love you.³²

Rule Three: Do whatever you can for your *Din* - a hospital, *madrassa* or whatever.³³

All of the above - which I would argue are in the very soul of the Turk people and Uzbeks — and may be expressed as the summation of *ko‘ngil* — involve giving (not taking) and this has always been the measure of mankind hereabouts.

²⁹ From the Nasrettin Affandi story where again because of distraction he’s looking for the keys in the wrong place

³⁰ (which physicists have shown is at the sub-atomic level of existence is anything but).

³¹ In a word *odob mehmondorchilik*

³² In a word *amal*

³³ In a word *ibadat*

While I was on the Tashkent Metro the other evening, trailing out through the suburbs of this impressive city (and surely one of the most important crossing points of the Silk Roads), it came to me that the life indicated by Ahmet Yasevi has been subtly changed into the art of living in the rat race. One man had a T-shirt reading 'Live and Run'. He might have been a cross-country runner but I doubt it. He too was on the metro run and like me soaking up the adverts, promising himself things to alleviate the grind. Everyone on their phones, with quick glances at strangers "... gotta look smart ... gotta get a car ... gotta drink coke, must get a new phone and get to a fitness class", and all of us wearing or carrying the brands of our purchases. Branded like sheep (where once we were the herders!)"

So ran my thoughts on the way to *Yangi Hayot*.

As a last word I would say that still — although for how long remains unclear — we are free to choose how to live our life. As with any other choice that we make for our life we must reflect on the consequences of those choices. If we are distracted then may miss the chance to live a life like the great ones. If we continue to consume for consuming's sake, are we not likely to be consumed in our turn.

"Where then are you going?" The great books ask.

فَأَيُّنَ تَذْهَبُونَ

Well, that up to you!



Just to finish on AI. Recently an English writer and activist Paul Kingsnorth, who has written a book called 'Against the Machine' has advocated a voluntary suspension of our turning the machine for ready answers. "The machines may be very smart, but they are not wise ...

"Feel free to join the movement..."

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