

On Technological Rationality and the Lack of Authenticity in the Modern Age: A Critique of Andrew Feenberg's Notion of Adaptability

Christopher Ryan Maboloc

Abstract: I will argue in this paper that Andrew Feenberg has erred in his claim on technological adaptability. Adapting to modern technology may not always be liberating. Drawing from his reflections on Heidegger and Marcuse, I will explain why Feenberg thinks that adaptability has a redemptive role in the midst of technological domination. I will also show why technological domination still characterizes human relations in the modern age. Advanced technologies including social media, have continued to manipulate people and as such, diminish rather than deepen the authenticity of human life. For instance, two people in a café sometimes spend more time on their smartphones rather than valuing their face-to-face encounter; here, one can point out the lack of authenticity in human relations. This clearly manifests how consumer culture has taken over human life. In addition, it can be said that the notion of adaptability also fails to account for the hegemonic social relations created by modern technological innovations, since these gadgets remain beyond the reach of the masses, thus broadening the divide between classes of people in society. In order to address this, I propose that people should use technology in a socially sensitive way in order to truly give meaning to their lives and to effectively resist the totalitarian tendency of the modern age.

Key words: technological rationality, consumer culture, adaptability, authenticity

1. Heidegger and Marcuse on Modern Technology

One of Andrew Feenberg's most enduring insights is that the understanding of human beings and/or culture is rooted in some form of instrumental relation to reality. (Feenberg 2008, 19) In our modern technological world, while the basic

freedoms of people make us want to plan our daily activities meticulously in order to live a truly meaningful life, the problem is that our modern ways of living sometimes take control and impose on the manner we interface with each other. An authentic life means that we become individuals through our shared experiences with others. We become who we are in and through our network of experiences with actual people. Feenberg says that human experience teaches basic respect for people, implying the basic recognition that the human being has his or her own capacities for living. But consumer culture poses a challenge to the way human beings actually value each other. Human actions are no longer spontaneous for they are a result of economic planning, technical innovation, and cultural imposition. So, does modern technology allow us to re-invent our purpose making us truly and fully human in the modern world? What does it mean to be human in the modern age?

At the outset, this study intends to examine the political juxtaposition between Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse as well as evaluate the fruition of technology's transformative power in Feenberg's interpretation of these two Western giants. But its modest goal is to put forward an argument that highlights the value of social sensitivity as a way of deepening the authenticity of human relations in order to make life worth living. I believe that human relations must be grounded in some form of lasting commitment, which means that we hold each other responsible for our actions and for this reason we have to find value in the things that we do.

We begin by stating Heidegger's complaint against modern technology. For him, what is called "thinking" in our modern age has been reduced to the calculative. Feenberg points to Heidegger's bold claim that technology is relentlessly overtaking us (Feenberg 2000, 295). Heidegger exclaims that the modern age is entrapped in *Gestell* or Enframing. In such an "enframed" world, people lose their authentic selves through the instrumentality of things. This diminution means that things diminish human lives as human activities are reduced to their functionality. Feenberg explains that "we ourselves are now incorporated into the mechanism, mobilized as objects of technique" (Feenberg 1999, 183). He opines that for Heidegger, *Dasein's* active and engaged being-in-the-world is obscured by technological thinking that treats everything as essentially an object of cognition, a simple matter of fact, including human beings themselves (Feenberg 2005, 2). This reductionism is apparent in how the pernicious products of consumer culture permeate human reality in order to undermine its meaning; one that reduces most aspects of human life to what Feenberg described in a lecture in Japan as some form of an operating manual (Feenberg 2003). Our modern gadgets have control

over us insofar as we might feel so ineffective without them. This form of control drags us toward our egos instead of allowing us to take into account the situation of others. Modern gadgets can make actual people socially invisible. Feenberg says that “translated out of Heidegger’s ontological language, this seems to mean that technology is a cultural form through which everything in the modern world becomes available for control” (Feenberg 1999, 185).

Our mode of existence is threatened by modern consumer culture. Consumerism is like some monstrous, cold-blooded, heavy equipment that overruns people without due regard to deeper context of human relationships. Indeed, it is symptomatic of what is so irrational about modern life. The technological rationality of the modern world has diminished the meaning of our deep and interpersonal experiences. For instance, instead of making the effort to visit someone who is sick in person, one finds it sufficient to send a private message online. What happens is that human existence is entrapped in the impersonal character of Heidegger’s “they-self.” In addition, we can speak of commercial advertisements conditioning people’s minds and replacing their critical and reflexive capacities. In the virtual world, the image replaces the person. In this mode of being-in-the-world, there is a diminution of human reality into the existential vacuity of a pompous crowd that is falsely conscious of reality. Implying his neo-Marxist stance, Feenberg tells us that “modern western technology is uniquely rooted in capitalist enterprise. As such it privileges the narrow goals of production and profit” (Feenberg 2000, 310).

Consumer culture entraps people into a form of technological rationality (Feenberg 2009). This entrapment alienates most individuals from their authentic selves. For instance, social media today influences the way we live so that trends online may define our behavior. We may even have a “friend” whom we have not met personally. For this reason, online interaction defeats the goal of person-to-person encounters. The person we meet online, like some desirable commodity, is represented by an avatar which serves as his or her make-believe identity. Roberta Sassatelli says that consumption has become an active search for personal gratification through commodities (Sassatelli 2009). In the midst of the rhapsody of modern consumer culture, a capitalist-driven consumption thrives and triumphs over the honest portrayal of real human life. The worship of a materialistic way of life often results in some form of social and moral indifference. Consumer tastes, desires, preferences, likings, etc. indicate the malleable behavior of the masses which can be exploited by tech firms and broadcast media in order to advance their interest for profit. As such, persons are reduced to mere buyers of goods, and the value of real human interaction is lost. The introduction of new TV soap operas or

smartphone apps and online networking sites uproots people from real life. The individual falls into the trap of deceptive representations in online or broadcast media.

While the consumer is autonomous and competent to handle things in a highly globalized world, he or she is without the broader understanding of the social and moral ramifications of this latent form of domination. Two people in a café who are busy with their gadgets instead of giving real value to their face-to-face encounter is symptomatic of how human beings have been uprooted from the world of “being.” People are transported into the world of “seeming” in which human relations are defined superficially. What has happened now is that the ability to insert powerful miniature chips into our mobile devices has actually hooked us into the virtual world. This uprooting from the world is reminiscent of the Lukácsian critique of modernism as the human being’s estrangement from the truth. The individual is simply transposed into a false reality, into a world that is reflective of the deceptive nature of the culture industry. Feenberg tells us that “Lukácsian reification involves an objectivistic misunderstanding of the social world as composed of law-governed things subject to theoretical representation and technical manipulation, precisely the worldview against which Heidegger and Marcuse also protested in their early work” (Feenberg 2008, 14). For Marcuse, consumer culture somehow reveals how “the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (Marcuse 1964, 13).

In the same manner as Heidegger forewarns us with respect to the reductionism inherent in calculative thinking, Marcuse points to the onerous consequences of objectification that comes with modern technology, contending that, “scientific-technical rationality and manipulation are welded together into new forms of social control” (ibid., 146). In explaining this position, Feenberg says that for Marcuse, modern technology is prejudiced towards a capacity for domination, manipulation, and control (Feenberg 2002, 168). Marcuse reiterates the dangers immanent to capitalism, which reveals the fact that totalitarian motives present in modern devices will ultimately deprive the individual of his freedom. Georg Lukacs has suggested that the whole machinery of capitalism intends to generate desires in order to lure the human being away from the objectivity of the world. Such is reflective of what Feenberg calls the “irrationality of the whole process” as made manifest in the fetishized world of consumer culture (Feenberg 1981, 69).

Dana Belu is correct in suggesting that Heidegger’s *Dasein* is without influence from any form of political dogma and for this reason the facticity of

Heidegger's *Dasein* appears to be purely on the ontological level (Belu 2005). According to Feenberg, "Heidegger's argument is developed at such a high level of abstraction he literally cannot discriminate between electricity and atom bombs, agricultural techniques and the Holocaust" (Feenberg 2000, 297). I believe that what Belu is trying to say is that one cannot actually put aside the concrete historical dimension of the human being as *Dasein*. *Dasein* cannot be bracketed away from the human condition or from the facticity and historicity that characterize every human being, the sort of worldliness in which *Dasein* is thrown. In fact, Marcuse politicizes *Dasein* (Ocay 2009). Marcuse recognizes *Dasein* as one that is inseparably bound with historicity. *Dasein*, by being cast or thrown into the world, cannot be insulated from the political. The rootedness of *Dasein* in historicity means the recognition that the individual is always already involved in public life and the struggles that accompany it.

The above is crucial in understanding the vicissitudes of modern technology, including how the reality of a consumer culture has come to affect us, whether negatively or affirmatively. Undeniably, while viewing technology in a deterministic way may mean that modern technology objectifies the individual's mode of existing, it must be noted that human beings possess the critical capacity to be able to liberate technology from any form of moral suspicion. After all, humans are the ones who can manipulate their gadgets and so for this reason, they can demand from tech firms that they be retrofitted to serve just human ends. Modern technology, in this regard, can fuel social transformation (Ocay 2010). For instance, we can mention how modern devices such as tablets have enhanced the education of many tribal children who do not have access to the explosion of knowledge online.

Feenberg points out that the concept of historicity in Heidegger has somehow failed to take cognizance of the social nature of emancipation (Feenberg 2005, 4). Heidegger has not put into account the fact that the future actions of the human being in responding to the new forms of control in the modern age can be a part of the possibilities of *Thrownness*. We cannot reduce humans to mere viewers of online products. Our power to be in the world includes the capacity to make prudent choices, which means that humans cannot be relegated to having passive roles. For this reason, it can be said that *Dasein*'s future unfolding is also a political unfolding. The unfolding of the politicized *Dasein* forms part of what it means to be attuned to being. The notion of attunement on the part of *Dasein* is one that allows *Dasein* to understand his or her mode of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1996). It contains within it the very seeds for *Dasein* to be able to embrace radical

action and thereby develop norms of resistance when the authenticity of human existence is threatened.

Feenberg thinks that for Heidegger, “behind the functional appearances of modern technology there lies a mysterious revealing of new meanings which are still hidden to us but which may someday be revealed” (Feenberg 2008, 20). This revelation in *Dasein*’s mode of being in the world may well be interpreted as the capacity to be able to resist consumer culture. So, in concluding this section, it can be argued that the individual cannot just be a conformist in the real world. Authentic human interaction means that we possess the power to withstand the onslaught of modern consumer culture by maintaining our unique interpersonal commitments. *Dasein* needs to be politically awakened so that it may effectively resist the ills of modern industrial society. By being-in-the-world, *Dasein* possesses a “power to be” in the world, which means that *Dasein* has the capacity to be able to translate a potentiality for being into some form of actual political empowerment.

2. Questioning the Redemptive Role of Modern Technology

The modest task of this section is to put into question Feenberg’s notion of adaptability. Feenberg asks if engagement with modern technology is merely an attitude or if it is embedded in the actual design of modern technological devices (Feenberg 2000, 297). He goes on to say that all the properties of technologies are relational insofar as we recognize their technological character (ibid., 305). Peter-Paul Verbeek summarizes Feenberg’s critical theory of technology:

For Feenberg, political power and the cultural appropriation of technology are closely connected. In his view, technology involves both a decontextualization and a recontextualization: while it detaches entities from their context in order to use them in a functional way, the resulting technologies are always recontextualized when they acquire a place in society. (Verbeek 2013, 72)

What is crucial in understanding Feenberg’s neo-Marxist and phenomenological approach to the critical theory of technology is the important distinction between primary and secondary instrumentalization. Feenberg explains:

The essence of technology has not one but two aspects, an aspect that explains the functional constitution of technical objects and subjects, which I call the ‘primary instrumentalization,’ and another aspect, the ‘secondary instrumentalization,’ focused on the realization of the constituted objects

and subjects in actual technical networks and devices. (Feenberg 2000, 305–06)

Feenberg suggests that on one hand, “the primary instrumentalization lays out in skeletal fashion the basic technical relations. Far more is necessary for those relations to yield an actual system or device: technique must be integrated with the natural, technical, and social environments that support its functioning” (ibid., 308). He rightly sees integration as an important process to compensate for the alienating effects of primary instrumentalization (ibid.). The deep context of our experiences becomes crucial insofar as “social interests and values participate in the process of realization” (ibid.). Technology, in this regard, must adapt to the situations of people. For instance, in densely populated cities, mass transport is crucial in order to move thousands of people. On the other hand, Feenberg says that secondary instrumentalization “includes the integration of technologies to larger technical systems and nature, and to the symbolic orders of ethics and aesthetics, as well as their relation to the life and learning processes of workers and users and the social organization of work and use” (ibid., 303).

It is in secondary instrumentalization where people may be able to adapt and use modern gadgets to suit their social or moral goals. As Albert Borgmann explains:

It is the appropriation of a certain technology by ordinary citizens, often against the intention (the primary instrumentation) of the designers. Secondary instrumentation enlarges people’s scope of discretion and competence, and it has in inconspicuous but significant ways made the industrial democracies socially more just and environmentally more benign. (Borgmann 2006, 116)

But is secondary instrumentalization in Feenberg’s sense adequate to address the ills in a modern capitalist society where the ruling class controls almost all aspects of human life? While secondary instrumentalization means being able to use technology to make it more people-centered rather than profit-oriented, it can still be argued that the tools the bourgeois employs in order to take advantage of the proletariat cannot be considered as value-neutral. Factories are designed in such a way so that everything is built into some form of a seamless functionalization, making workers mere “cogs in the machine” churning out production *quotas*, a deliberate means employed by the giants in the industry in order to expend all the strength from the poor worker. Marcuse reminds us that under capitalism, hap-

piness has been reduced into a form of delayed gratification (Marcuse 1964). It is one that is restricted to and merely defined by the individual's capacity for rapacious consumption.

The notion of "happiness" in consumer society is patterned after the dictates of the culture industry. True happiness, however, must not be confused with the pleasure derived from the products found in consumer society. Consumer culture creates a type of desire that renders the satisfaction of people ephemeral. Marcuse says that people, by falling into the lure of new trends and styles, have all succumbed to their false needs, false desires, and false dreams (Marcuse 1964). In fact, capitalism has invested billions of dollars on modern tools of deception and has reinvented the human world into something that is artificial, like those huge theme parks and malls. Theme parks and malls offer temporary pleasures. Consumer culture is a product of a political technocracy that organizes itself around its capacity to control the forces of production and the technicality of its rules, thereby making the human mind poor, exploited, abused, bored and imbecile.

Marcuse is concerned with the fact that the bourgeois mentality uses modern technology in order to undermine and exploit the human being. Marcuse's position thus seeks a return to the authenticity of one's existence which necessitates emancipating our humanity from the false consciousness of reality. Marcuse's *Great Refusal* is meant to resist modern bourgeois mentality, the primary culprit in the subjugation of the individual in those various schemes of deception (Ogay 2010). According to Belu, "Marcuse's critique of technological rationality culminates in the call for the overcoming of the reified split between nature and culture in an aesthetically grounded affirmation of life that would endow life with dignity and respect" (Belu 2005, 589).

The innovations that emerge out of Apple or Google control not only our rationality, but also and even more, the way we live. We have observed from everyday experience how the profit-driven promotion of some gadgets has created a huge gap between the modern world and the conditions of humanity in the margins. Powerful tech firms have invested billions of dollars on marketing, sometimes using sports superstars to create a fantastic, false, and fancy world. It is in this sense that there is a need for true redemption. Feenberg is right in saying that "we cannot recover what reification has lost by regressing to pre-technological conditions, to some prior unity irrelevant to the contemporary world" (Feenberg 2002, 189). Instead, he speaks of the Hegelian dialectical relation between rationality and modern technology. Feenberg intends to locate that unifying ground between the modern way of life and our inherent humanity. He finds this unity in the no-

tion of adaptability that makes manifest the self-realization of life. Feenberg says that for Hegel, “life is thus a concrete process of revealing, the highest and fullest revealing,” where in the enduring effort to overcome its negativity, “life is the true meaning of being insofar as it masters its own possibilities and exists through knowing and freely disposing of it” (ibid.). For Hegel, life is that constant process of change by means of self-awareness. Life is the self-realization of human consciousness. Feenberg’s important argument on the matter is that the individual can live interdependently with modern technical progress (Feenberg 2005, 190). This ability to adapt forms part of the development or the self-realization of life, one that unfolds when people learn to adapt to the positive role that modern technology plays. For instance, instead of bureaucratic control, the use of modern technology can enhance the social bond between colleagues in the workplace. Design changes and development of computer apps can be influenced by actual needs of people like weather patterns and road safety notifications. These are examples of how modern technology can promote human well-being. Indeed, the use of modern gadgets can no longer be limited to “a standard functionality of a technology that was originally conceived by computer professionals as a device for calculating and storing data” (Feenberg 2000, 310).

It is undeniable that modern technology has the huge potential to improve our way of life. Adapting to modern technology does have a transformative role. We can point to the life stories and experiences of young teachers who serve far-flung schools and cultural minorities, wherein they use modern technological tools to advance their aims in educating children living in these isolated places. What inspires them is the burning desire to find meaning and a sense of purpose in life. More importantly, these acts of heroism uplift the way of life of disadvantaged children. Indeed, the realization of social solidarity by using new tools forms part of life’s possibilities. Feenberg believes that the escape path is not the rejection of modern technology but figuring out how modern technology, by adjusting to it in a synergistic way, can be an authentic experience for humans. Positively, the transformative role of modern technology means that gadgets possess the capacity to enhance and expand the life-experiences of people.

It can be said that although ethnic games and practices have been replaced, modern tools of communication can improve the real life experiences of people if they adapt to this new way of doing things responsibly. While most of the older generation considers digital games foreign and destructive because they think that these devices will just make children too self-absorbed, modern gadgets cannot be absolutely rejected because the digital age offers some transformative value. For

instance, online communities can be committed to worthy causes that promote and propagate cultural diversity, democracy, and innovation. Human relationships, while mediated by modern devices, can also be anchored in authenticity and commitment, a life worth living, so to speak, whether online or elsewhere.

According to Feenberg, the problem is not with technology as such but with the way institutions or processes use political power in order to exploit people. The only hope lies in redesigning society in order to move beyond instrumentation and control. The real struggle is not against modern technology but against hegemonic systems that have a tendency to subjugate the powerless. Marcuse calls this attentiveness to the wrongs of society “negative thinking” (Marcuse 1964). Negative thinking is an attempt to analyze “social pathologies” in order to resist a prevailing world order with the hope of changing human society in the process.

Henceforth, it can be said that the notion of adaptability, broadly conceived, is about how in the modern technological age, the human being may be able to find the authenticity of his or her humanity so that he or she might be able to live the good life. What this means is that the human being can harmoniously co-exist with modern technology in such a way that as an individual, he or she does not lose his or her true sense of self. However, what may be alarming still is that there is a danger that the individual may not truly live a meaningful human existence because he or she is dominated by modern gadgets.

3. How to Make Life Truly Worth Living in the Modern Age

This section intends to show the meaning of authenticity and its role in making life truly worth living. A lasting insight which Marcuse wrote in *One Dimensional Man* is that “by virtue of the way it has organized its technological base contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian” (Marcuse 1964, 9). In this section, I wish to point out that Feenberg believes, just like Marcuse, that modern technology is not deterministic. However, I intend to show that given the realities in underdeveloped societies, various issues like resource inequalities influence social systems which most of the time favor the dominant economic power players. It is right to say that the problem does not lie in technology per se but in the overly excessive concern for profit. In relation to this, Feenberg points out that a critical theory of technology should be “centered not on obstacles to growth but on the nature of capitalist technology and management” (Feenberg 2002, vii). Feenberg speaks about the real need for modern technology to “address itself to the possibility of alternative paths of modernization with different consequences for human freedom” (ibid., 135). The danger that remains for us is that things can become

very technical in the modern world, stripping the truth of its human character. Feenberg explains that “technical means are stripped of any relation to an objective ‘truth’ of the object they create. The new norms which technology stands upon are reduced to the formal requirements of domination and, ultimately, of capital as a dynamic force” (Feenberg 2008, 15–16).

But I will try to show that Feenberg fails to fully account for the dangers which arise out of consumer manipulation. Modern capitalists possess the resources to control consumer behavior and preferences. Many uncanny methods employed on malleable people through mainstream media influence their attitudes. Sassatelli has noted that this control of consumer behavior is to the extent that people are no longer critical about their true social and historical condition (Sassatelli 2009). In addition, modern broadcast technology may steal from the masses the capacity to actually make mature choices in life. Consumer culture, by means of new electronic devices, has lured the individual into meaningless TV shows. The culture of consumerism conditions the minds of the masses in such a way that it estranges the individual from the truth of his or her being. This essentially renders a person’s ways of doing things inauthentic insofar as such shows are bereft of human values. As a result, the human being in the modern age is imprisoned in the meaninglessness of a lived experience that is controlled by the inanities of consumer culture. According to Internet critic Maria Bakardjieva, “in a more global sense, technology and the world become inseparable: the world is seen as technologically defined, and technology becomes a code for understanding the world” (Bakardjieva 2005, 107). Bakardjieva also mentions a form of reductionism in online interface. The online world is not the real world. Thus, the Internet as a “socio-technical system” is purely instrumental, and while it can become substantive according to Bakardjieva, it can be argued that there are greater threats which can undermine how people deal with each other.

But Feenberg makes a crucial point in response by saying that the “technical subject does not escape from the logic of finitude, but the reciprocity of finite action is dissipated or deferred in such a way as to create the space of a necessary illusion of transcendence. Technical action represents a partial escape from the human condition” (Feenberg 2008, 20). The point is that the Internet allows people to spend their time looking for things, but it can also mean the neglect of more important things, for instance, when persons play online games instead of personally sharing narratives or stories. Feenberg also notes that “in reality, technology is not rigid but is routinely adapted to changing conditions,” and rightly adds that

“sometimes it adapts to new scarcities or discoveries, and sometimes to the emergence of new cultural values” (Feenberg 2002, 143).

Indeed, Feenberg’s notion of adaptability is grounded in the assumption that a more authentic sense of human freedom can still be enjoyed in the modern age. It is only in the perpetuation of human freedom wherein human life becomes truly worth living. Adaptability appeals to what remains authentic in our shared experiences, one that is liberated from the bad influences of a reductive technological rationality, fully cognizant of the realities of an essential good in what “being human” means. Modern technology’s real hope is in re-connecting people with each other through their shared actual experiences, bringing them closer together as unique persons.

However, I wish to point out some emerging issues with respect to Feenberg’s notion of adaptability. First, I still think that Feenberg has failed to fully address the apparent dominating character of consumer culture. While one may seek to innovate, the power of capitalistic interests is actually unavoidable in the modern world. The modern gadgets that people hold in their hands and which organize the way they live are a product of capitalistic goals and motives. There is no way for the masses to escape the trap of consumer culture. The desire for greater profit is present in the technical design of modern gadgets. The consumerist agenda of capitalism remains apparent in the very applications found in those tiny hand-held things. In our modern consumer society, *Gestell* has remained inescapable.

The above phenomenon is something that one can observe in social media. While social media has allowed people to find an outlet for self-expression and thereby develop a higher sense of self, social media is also exploitative because it cannot be freed from the malicious influence of techno-capitalism. Every year, big tech companies churn out new products that reduce people into mindless consumers. For instance, the exposure of young people to consumer culture by means of modern gadgets reinforces their self-absorption, which deprives them of the value of social commitment. This results in social fragmentation as young people become indifferent to the plight of others. As an example, the addiction to online games may erode the formative aspects of education in the young. Their fragmented selves as individuals make manifest the kind of ill influence that addiction to social media sometimes brings upon young people.

The great divide created by the human being’s absorption in the consumerist way of life means that people have ignored the role of their social conscience. People are no longer disturbed by the presence of various forms of social injustices. The social conscience of people has since been buried deep beneath those micro-

chips. People, including many professionals, look to upgrade their smartphones on a regular basis rather than improve their social or civic engagements. Thus, it can be said that many people might have fallen into a lack of depth in the modern world. Our romance with these electronic devices forces us to somehow lose those human values which mold who we are as persons for others. Apple products, for example, are designed so that consumers will have to buy new chargers or will have to purchase things most of the time from the Apple Store, including apps, music, and other downloadable items. This means that the company ensures its customers will not only patronize Apple apps and the music it sells online, but also, the latent motive here is to strip from the consumer the capacity to make real choices. As such, Apple manifests technological domination which means that in places where poor people lack the financial means, they would be totally deprived of the novel designs introduced by new research and innovative product development.

To a great extent, there is a feeling of disappointment about how modern technology more often than not determines for most of us the nature and meaning of our associative relations. For instance, our mobile devices have become an extension of our bodily existence. The user, a warm-blooded human being, and the technological gadget, a piece of metal, now belong together in this mode of worldliness. These tools are used by young people in order to combat boredom and loneliness to the frustration of the real people around them who are reduced to no more than mute wallpapers. This has resulted in the slow disintegration of family life due to a self-gratifying over-indulgence in modern gadgets. The human being and the meaning of "being human" both seem to be lost in the jungle of microchips and online networks. The only way forward beyond this new form of determinism is to make firm decisions as to what really matters in human life. In the end, it is up to us to decide whether we have to put more value in people or whether we allow ourselves to be trumped by the illusions of modern gadgetry.

Second, Feenberg's affirmation of adaptability also fails to take into account the obvious inequitable distribution of global resources and acute lack of access to modern technology in the developing world. Inequalities simply repress the adaptive and/or emancipatory power of technical innovation. This means that ultimately, the inequitable distribution of wealth in the world will have created other forms of social alienation. The point is that the lack of access to the Internet, for instance, in poor communities, means that millions of poor children will be left behind in terms of the explosion and advance of human knowledge. This means that instead of enhancing human lives, the development of modern technological

products actually alienates the children of the rich from those of the poor. This too will diminish human interaction between people and will naturally establish hegemonic social relations. The adaptive value of modern technology then is defeated, insofar as inequalities in social status mean that access to the advances introduced by modern product development will only be limited to those who have the means to afford them, and as such, this will continue to increase the huge chasm between the rich and the poor, especially in developing societies. While governments intend to address this through policies and other bureaucratic adjustments, these moves are palliative rather than inclusive. In truth, modern innovation is an expensive proposition. Only those who are at the top of the economic ladder will be able to afford whatever new products are introduced. In a very huge way, this will then manifest positional disadvantages on the part of the masses, and for this reason, a bigger gap is created between the “technologically advanced” and the “technologically deprived.” The above also points to the harsh reality of exclusion which modern technology as a product of capitalism reinforces rather than cures.

In this regard, what modern technological advancement in fact hides is the reality of human beings suffering from the anxiety of having alienated lives. Feenberg reminds us of “our growing sense of the danger of the reified institutions and ever more powerful technologies bequeathed us by several centuries of capitalist progress confronts us with choices in the re-making of the technical world” (Feenberg 2008, 29). As long as capitalism controls the modern world, tools will simply serve the agenda of an unjust system that puts humanity secondary to the self-interest of capitalists. Capitalism has a tremendous impact on human lives insofar as a life defined by materialism means losing sense of what it means to be human at all. When modern tools are invented for the sake of profit, the value of human freedom is diminished. This happens when the individual transposes his or her presence into the virtual world, thereby making him or her lose sight of the actual presence of another person’s warm body in front of him or her.

My position in this paper intends to give the notion of adaptability a humanist purpose. Modern technology should be used in a socially sensitive way. Our social consciousness makes it an imperative that we reach out to the peripheries of human society and locate those ways of living that are truly empowering on the part of disadvantaged individuals. In this regard, I would like to make a connection between modern technology and social change. Feenberg’s notion of adaptability is good, but it is not good enough. Apparently, people have to appeal to human values and our sense of solidarity in order to make the use of modern technology truly meaningful. For instance, instead of wasting time and resources for self-

gratification through “selfies” in social media, people could begin to look at how Internet connectivity can rally a cause such as the fight against poverty or hunger. What this requires is putting a humanistic dimension in the use of modern technology, one that consumerism has defaced. It is a matter of grafting that moral aim or purpose into the use of gadgets, insofar as these gadgets can actually be utilized for the achievement of the good that serves the emancipatory interest of humanity. In this sense, it is important to give modern technology a human face.

By way of an illustration, teaching an autistic child how to use modern learning gadgets is not only about technological competence. A teacher’s commitment to his or her student is not diminished by using modern tools in teaching. The complementary dimension of these pedagogic devices has an effect in the quality of a child’s learning. Computer programs for intellectually challenged children can enhance their capacity to learn. Teaching these children how to use laptops can bridge the social gap little by little between them and other children. Pragmatically, providing Internet access to disadvantaged poor children should be seen as closing the divide between the rich and poor. Thus, the opportunity for the well-off to help poor children improve their lives is available.

Third, Feenberg’s position is silent on the ethical dimension of the modern technological age. The attempt to rectify social pathologies is the reason why it is plausible to think of the employment of modern technology as an ethical question. The reality of alienation that one finds in the impersonal interface between two people because of modern instruments is an illustration of the manipulative influence of a culture simply fueled by money or material wealth. The truth of domination, grounded in the uneven political and economic structures of the world so defined by the bourgeois culture, still interferes with our value systems. We can speak in this regard of false values created by consumer culture as the means of denying the poor or ordinary human being of a life well-lived. The phenomenon of modern innovation is simply the triumph of capitalism over and against our deeply cherished humanistic value systems.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Marcuse saw that bourgeois industrial society is the false determinant of the life of the individual. What this means is that totalitarian control is all about determining how the individual must think on the basis of technological control which Heidegger simply finds demeaning. The totalizing technocratic rationality of our age determines through and through new forms of class hegemony. Modern gadgets can alienate people from each other when these modern tools

take the place of being the new symbols of social status. But Marcuse believes that technology is not deterministic. It possesses a transformative value. Thus my basic position in this paper is focused on social transformation. There is a need to defeat the new forms of control in our consumer culture if we are to live meaningfully as human beings. Unless the abusive systems in society are changed, a meaningful change in the values that people have cannot be expected. It should not be the case that people should just adapt to consumer culture and just succumb to the way it fashions products for us.

Sometimes, there is a “lack of fit” between our social values and modern technological advancement. For instance, modern technology fails to recognize local cultures or the indigenous knowledge of people, which means that instead of promoting greater humanization, modern technology simply means death to local culture, including indigenous games which require group interaction. Today’s computer console makes children individually hooked on their online games, which devalue if not eliminate human contact. In some computer games, a child is simply playing against himself or herself, thereby depriving him or her of the authentic experience that actual physical games give children, which enables the development of their character and nurtures their humanity through understanding the meaning of social interaction and having a life that is fully human and truly worth living.

References

- Bakardjieva, Maria. 2005. *Internet Society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Belu, Dana. 2005. “Thinking Technology, Thinking Nature.” *Inquiry* 48 (6): 572–91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00201740500321235>
- Borgmann, Albert. 2006. “Feenberg and the Reform of Technology.” In *Democratizing Technology*, ed. Tyler Veak, 101–11. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 1981. *Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory*. New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 1999. *Questioning Technology*. New York: Routledge.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2000. “From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads.” In *Technology and the Good Life?*, ed. Eric Higgs, Andrew Light and David Strong, 294–315. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226333885.003.0017>
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2002. *Transforming Technology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2003. “What is Philosophy of Technology?” *Lecture for the Komaba Undergraduates*. <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/komaba.htm>

- Feenberg, Andrew. 2005. *Marcuse and Heidegger: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History*. New York: Routledge.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2008. "Between Reason and Experience." *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 42: 7–32.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2009. "Critical Theory of Technology." In *A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Jan Kyree Berg Olsen, Sindre Andre Pedersen and Vincent Fella Hendricks, 146–53. London: Blackwell.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444310795.ch24>
- Feenberg, Andrew. 2013. "The Mediation is the Message: Rationality and Agency in the Critical Theory of Technology." *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 17 (1): 7–24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/techne20131712>
- Heidegger, Martin. 1996. *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1964. *One Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ocay, Jeffry V. 2009. "Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn." *Kritike* 3 (1): 10–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3860/krit.v3i1.1166>
- Ocay, Jeffry V. 2010. "Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse's Critique of Advanced Industrial Society." *Kritike* 4 (1): 54–78.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3860/krit.v4i1.1835>
- Sassatelli, Roberta. 2009. "Representing Consumers: Contesting Claims and Agendas." In *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, ed. Kate Soper, Martin Ryle and Lyn Thomas, 25–42. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Verbeek, Peter-Paul. 2013. "Resistance is Futile: Toward a Non-Modern Democratization of Technology." *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 17 (1): 72–92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/techne20131715>