MARY AIKEN, *The Cyber Effect. Psihologia comportamentului uman în mediul online* [*The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behaviour Changes Online*] (Bucharest: Niculescu, 2019)

Dr. Mary Aiken, the author of *The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behaviour Changes Online* (2016) is backed by an academic and professional portfolio that credits such an exceptional work. Her book was chosen as the book of the year by *Times* magazine and it was reviewed in the *Nature* magazine. The almost 400 pages are organised into nine chapters preceded by an *Introduction*. The cover bears several remarkable opinions on the book, as well as certain accomplishments from the author's career – as all American books are usually "packaged."

Mary Aiken characterises the online environment as: *intoxicating, sensational* and *captivating*, offering an *absolute freedom*, which can *corrupt absolutely*. When we are on our phones, we are somewhere else, in a different environment, one that is real and distinctive, in which time is distorted and our instincts, which had been perfected for real life, fail. Technology is neutral, it mediates the behaviour just as any other technological product, but its use can also be abusive. The author emphasises the ethical boundaries of science, by using the dexterity of the word through abundant studies in the adverbs of protection. Many researches are difficult or impossible to carry out in longitudinal studies. Therefore, until the actual impact of technology throughout one's life is clear, the author relies on and recommends logic, common sense and rational arguments, insisting that *common sense is what accompanies good science*.

In the first chapter, *The normalization of a fetish*, Mary Aiken likens the behavioural influence and shaping inflicted by technology on the human behaviour to that inflicted by alcohol. People are under the illusion that the cybernetic space is safer than reality and they are more tempted by adventure. Just like alcohol, the online space makes people feel: liberated, encouraged to be direct, disinhibited, more impulsive and their judgement is thus impaired. The effect of the online disinhibition is that, in the virtual space, common sense, restraint and the rational attitude crumbles. Through the online escalation, the tendencies and vulnerabilities that produce difficulties in real life become more aggressive. The cyberspace is the field in which the antisocial and psychopathological behavioural mutations from real life reproduce.

Further on, in Chapter 2, entitled *Designed to addict*, the author explains the multiple cybernetic effects, sharply pointing at the slavery of the impulses that keep us within the Wi-fi networks. Mary Aiken mentions that people are not addicted to their phones, which had previously been hyper-orthodoxly described as *elegant little devils that snuck into our pockets*, but rather to technology. The

exploitation of impulsivity, of failure as entertainment, as well as the instinct to seek, as a form of existence, maintain the man-machine addictive relationship. Technology offers the illusion of control while undermining it.

Harlow's conclusions regarding the experimental preferences of the young at the expense of nourishment, argue for Aiken's concern regarding the necessity of certain messages of public interest transmitted to the parent's gadgets: *You must spend time with your child*! The way in which technology interferes with childcare, according to Aiken, could generate an *evolutionary syncope*. The author insists on the need to be aware of the importance of spending real time with the child, and of the fact that no device could ever replace the experience of life: caressing, speaking, eye contact, laughter or holding hands, reading and discussing. The fact that there is an ADHD epidemic is caused by the contrast between the strict school system and the rest of the digitalised and highly stimulating world.

The digital monster that today plays with the child is compared to Mary Shelly's character, Frankenstein's Monster – which has become the didactic material for explaining the dangers of losing parental control on one's own child. The digital revolution brings a somewhat new field in which the child grows up, one with very dangerous vicinities. Parents are recommended to be very vigilant when faced with a situation that could become a public health crisis, because of the excessive use and because of the pornographic contents that circulates online. The author is intrigued by the fact that we have reached a point in which we need studies to show that pornography is disruptive for 8-12-year-old children and she names it *a horrible situation, from a moral viewpoint,* in our society.

Under a suggestive subtitle, *Teenagers, monkeys, and mirrors*, the author poses the selfie issue. She analyses the cruelty, as well as the bluster, the desire to be appreciated, acknowledged, the ironic statements to the world – all of which usually emerge from the selfie. The author emphasises the fact that we have a true, human self, which must be cared for, not just a virtual, hyper-celebrated online self. The risks posed by the selfies are analysed at the level of the psychology of one's personality, for which she cites Zimbardo, who states that *the virtual self gradually becomes less and less similar to its real operator*. The issue of the rich pornographic content present online made sexting a cybernetic normality and a trend; the natural sexual curiosity of all time, expressed privately, behind different veils, now has an unlimited distribution, thus, at the same time, becoming the object of bullying and blackmail.

The analysis of the inline romantic relationships represents a different chapter. It shows the way in which the obstacle of separation, of distance (via the internet) generates romance, similarly to all the classical love stories. The online communication is made as a syndrome, that of *the stranger on a train*, to whom one can tell an entire life story in one breath. The problem is that the impostors and criminals lurk online, from profiles different from the real person behind it, on the

level of which the dark personality tetrahedron often lies: narcissism, psychopathy, sadism and Machiavellianism. Unfortunately, people tend to base their judgements on first impressions, following a gestalt principle of continuity that makes them ignore the *dark holes* of the whole. The number of rapes connected to online meetings increased sixfold. Cybernetic infidelity is explained through the experience of military psychology, in which it is easier to kill from a distance, while the cybernetic celibacy became a fad, since technology, just as alcohol, offers complete confidence, comfort, emotional consolation and relaxation.

The author does not overlook another widespread cybernetic effect: the cybernetic hypochondria, the health concerns inflamed by the information received from Dr. Google. The number of unnecessary medical check-ups substantially increased as a result of the cybernetic effect. Characters such as Hungry Joe from Joseph Heller's novel, *Catch 22*, or Munchausen are exemplary for hypochondria (after DSM) and for cyberchondria, a disorder estimated to afflict 4-9% of the population, enhanced by the web and thus generating difficult patients. Medicine now has a clear research subject for Iatrogenesis: the internet, multiplied into infinite healers that produce diseases of the *third cause of death* type.

As an expert in criminal psychology, Mary Aiken explains what hides in the depths, throughout an entire chapter dedicated to Cybernetic piracy. The deep web is compared to a deep, uncharted sea, much like the Caribbean, inhabited by pirates who use hideouts and grottos and who market stolen goods. Everything takes place in accordance with simple and few rules, which is why it bears the name of organised crime. The cybernetic criminals are described as antisocial figures of moral failure, whom people somehow still trust, based on a natural impulse. Hacking is explained by Aiken from three viewpoints: humanist – as love and revenge; behaviourist – as reward and profit, and psychoanalyst – as the desire to penetrate. The depths of the web represent the biggest threat to global safety through social engineering attacks: criminality as a form of employment, crypto-markets, cybernetic criminal networks and omnipresent victimology, since the weakest link in the secured system is: man!

By analysing *The cyber frontier*, the volume ends in a transdisciplinary approach: we are encouraged to think more, to discuss and to live in reality. Aiken understands the architecture of the internet as a Wild West crossed by a high-speed highway, which had initially been created as a mountain footpath. Suggestively, the author ends by having a discussion with her own gadget about… God. The app responds: yes, I am God!

The Cyber Effect can be read as a scholarly treaty, as a university course on cybernetic psychology, but also as a reflexive work containing a variety of confessions and examples taken from the author's own experiences and from her daily life, together with examples taken from the mass-media, movies, books or the studies that structure her knowledge into a unique, fascinating, critical, harsh,

incisive approach of the situations in which the scholar sees that the line of common sense has been crossed. As a film crew specialist who has the expertise on the course of the events, on the scene of life, the author, outraged, draws our attention to the lack of a firm reaction to the imminent dangers that not only will occur, but that are already underway. Mary Aiken takes a clear stance on the dilemmas of ecologist ethics claimed by the political correctness, giving primacy to the human being, to humanity, to life and the anthropological innateness, all of which are now more than ever threatened by the cybernetic effect, as part of the evolution of humanity. Her first-rate expertise, her experience, culture and humanism in writing, make The Cyber Effect an extremely interesting work that is extremely topical, easy to read and that must be discussed, disseminated and acknowledged, as a reference point for human rights and psychology in the cybernetic era.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

ANA-NICOLETA GRIGORE
grigoreananicoleta@gmail.com