WHEN WE CEASE TO BE HUMAN

The future of consciousness in the age of artificial intelligence.

SILVIO GUERRINHA

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Chapter 1 — The Last Fully Human Generation

The Invisible Frontier of Humanity

The expression "last fully human generation" is not just a provocative metaphor; it is a sociotechnological hypothesis that emerges from the convergence of cognitive psychology, digital anthropology, and future studies. Since 2020 onwards, technological acceleration ceased to be incremental and became exponential, altering not only the environment in which we live, but also the internal processes that define who we are as a species.

What Does It Mean to "Be Human" Today?

Historically, the definition of humanity has shifted between biological, philosophical, and cultural criteria. However, in the 21st century, humanity has also come to be defined by its relationship with technology. To be human today implies coexisting with systems that amplify, replace, or condition natural capabilities.

2.1 Pre-Digital Humanity

Until the beginning of the 21st century, the human experience was marked by:

Internal memory as the primary repository of knowledge;
sustained attention as an essential skill;
slow learning as a natural process;
face-to-face social interaction as the basis of relationships;
waiting time as part of daily life.

These characteristics shaped the way we think, feel, and relate to each other.

2.2 Humanity Post-2020

Following the widespread adoption of smartphones, social media, and generative AI, a new human condition has emerged:

Externalized memory (cloud, search engines, apps); fragmented attention (notifications, digital multitasking); assisted learning (AI as tutor, explainer, problem solver); mediated interaction (apps, algorithms, avatars); abolished time (instant answers, immediate gratification).

The central issue becomes clear: technology has ceased to be a tool and has become an environment.

3. Post-Technological Acceleration- 2020

The post-pandemic period — the pandemic marked a structural shift. The forced digitalization of work, education, and social relationships created an unplanned evolutionary leap. Artificial intelligence, previously confined to laboratories, became accessible to the general public.

3.1 The Speed of Change

Between 2020 and 2025:

The number of AI models has doubled annually; processing capacity has increased exponentially; the integration of AI into public and private services has become the norm; digital dependence has grown across all age groups.

Technological acceleration is not just technical—it's behavioral. Society has adapted so quickly that there has been no time for ethical or cultural reflection.

3.2 Standardization of Algorithmic Assistance

Today, algorithms:

They choose what we see;
they suggest what we buy;
they influence what we think;
they shape what we feel;
they replace decisions that were once made by humans.

Human autonomy has become negotiable.

4. The Gradual Loss of Basic Cognitive Skills

The externalization of intelligence is a phenomenon studied in cognitive psychology. When a mental function is repeatedly delegated to an external resource, the brain reduces its investment in that function.

4.1 Memory

Human memory is being replaced by:

Search engines;
digital notes;
automatic histories;
recommendation systems.

The brain no longer needs to remember — only to retrieve.

4.2 Attention

Deep attention has become rare. Recent studies show that: the average sustained attention span has fallen to less than 40 seconds; digital multitasking reduces the ability to concentrate; constant exposure to stimuli reduces tolerance for silence.

4.3 Reasoning

The ability to solve problems without assistance is declining.
AI has become:

calculator; explainer; tutor; universal solver.

Human reasoning is being replaced by assisted reasoning.

5. The Invisible Dependence on Machines

Technological dependence is not merely functional—it's structural. Modern society cannot operate without digital systems.

5.1 Cognitive Dependence

We use AI to:

to write; to think; to decide; to learn; to remember.

The human mind has become hybrid.

5.2 Social Dependency

Relationships are mediated by:

Social networks;
communication apps;
compatibility algorithms;
emotional filters.

Human interaction has become curated by software.

5.3 Existential Dependency

Without technology:

We don't work;
we don't communicate;
we don't move around;
we don't learn;
we don't exist socially.

The machine became part of the identity.

Conclusion

The last fully human generation is not defined by age, but by experience. We are the last who still know the world before total algorithmic mediation. The next generation will be born into an environment where artificial intelligence is as natural as electricity.

Humanity is crossing a silent frontier:

We do not stop being human all at once — we stop being human gradually.

"Technology doesn't replace us; it replaces what we no longer cultivate."