POSTHUMANISM – FOR AND AGAINST

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Abstract

The inventions and innovations which define the human being appeared mostly in the last century and a half. The speed of the discoveries is so high and the jumps are so amazing that researchers are more and more convinced that the human being that we know as the second most important creature after God will gradually loose his central position and descend more and more into the environment where he naturally comes from. Raising artificial intelligence above one's own ability to think would be the cause of this repositioning. Simultaneously with the loss of importance in relation to computing machines, at the beginning of 2020 the human being admitted defeat (at least temporarily) in front of a common virus. COVID 19 is another type of challenge that homo sapiens must face.Romanians were never left out of the efforts that the inquisitive mind made in search of solutions for the betterment of the human being. This article presents the way in which the author perceived this change of paradigm.

Keywords: *posthumanism, transhumanism, communication, journalism, computers, technology, flight, robot.*

1. AT THE GATES OF POSTHUMANISM – A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Taking about transhumanism or posthumanism represents a huge challenge. As a journalist (used to asking questions especially to others) plunging into the abysses of philosophy (when you have to answer to your own perplexities, the most difficult and which require the most honest answers) may lead to a certain venture. But it is also exciting! Looking to explain the origin of this restlessness I noticed that its roots are quite deep and they are the result of more than 10 years spent in scientific research[i], in which I was summoned to "couple" the natural "hard disk" to an IBM computer and subsequently to its autochthonous followers produced by the Pipera Platform in order to transfer everything we know about aviation in general and air traffic control, in particular. Like me, there are also a few dozen engineers, mathematicians, physicians, architects, economists, doctors, philologists and even artists. We all put our knowledge first on punched cards, then on magnetic tapes and later on hard drives! Of course, during those times there were no USB connectors through which the human brain "discharges" into the memory of a few tens of megabytes of the computer and, even less, of the technology (from the fantastic scenario that Hans Moravek will imagine in a few years) capable of transferring every molecular layer to the machine of the human brain to be read and recorded (MORAVEK, 1988). This does not mean that we wouldn't have wished for a mechanism that could faster and more accurately transfer the information that we possessed into the computer's storage base. I discussed this hypothesis with other scientists:

"What are we going to do if the transfer gets out of control and, instead of downloading only the information referring to aviation, the computer absorbs everything that can be found in our memory?"

Fig. 1. The C-802 RT robot which was about to replace the ground traffic controller and connected the flying car (MURARU, 2019)

This tricky question did not receive any answer but is possessed an authentic base since *The man of the year* award offered by *The times* magazine in 1982 had just been awarded to …. a computer (although the happy winner had never applied!)! The human being who worked so hard to improve his condition was put at index because of the announcement on the cover of the magazine: "*The computer enters the scene*" (BADMINGTON, 2019). We were actively taking part in this change of paradigm but our reflection time was extremely limited.

2. GETTING INTO POSTHUMANISM WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING IT

And therefore, while theoreticians from other parts of the planet confronted each other, some even distinguishing "the end of the human being" (DERRIDA, 1972), our preoccupations where much more concrete. Even if we joke about it, in one way or the other, the complex activity of the navigator with ordering (the present-day traffic controller), it can "transform" him into a ... viewer. Basically, a duplicate of the computer which has to take over the activity of the operator!

We felt that the new technologies allowed it, but we were not fully aware of the subtle tectonic movements that we were contributing to with the most honest enthusiasm. It is true that among us there were some people who were afraid that by developing stronger machines than our performances, we could lose our jobs. However, their protests were not enough convincing. Therefore, we continued our attempts to establish the connection between the individual and the supersonic machine, which Doru Davidovici had been talking about ever since and the "machine man" on the ground.

"*A symbiosis which could only be led by a human brain, excellently trained and lucid, which could leave the perfection of the execution to the machine*", as professor Mihail Orzeata[ii], former pilot and air traffic controller points out.

And the transfer from man to machine did take place! Maybe slower than some enthusiasts would have wanted or maybe too fast for those who due to ethical or political reasons would have wanted to delay the passage of human intelligence on ferrite memories, on magnetic stripe kilometres or on the magnetic fields of external memory units. Most often, during experiments, there was not the fear that the machine could fail, but especially the one that the human mind might not represent the most suitable referee in the relationship between the computer on the ground and the plane.

The main concern was not related to the individual connections between the two inanimate entities (the calculating machine and the supersonic aircraft) but especially by the exclusive relations generated by the only relatively independent systems of which the two entities were part. We tried to judge things not from the perspective of the beginning phase of our studies but from the complexity of the systems we dreamed of on the computers we were developing.

As we were saying, during flight, the nesting of the human with the machine had taken place a long time ago and it had already been presented in the literature of those times by Doru Davidovici who spoke, in all his writings, about the human-machine unity, the prolonging of the human senses beyond the extremity of the neuronal sensors, through the epidermis, into the dural molecules of the plane. Dumitru Berbunschi, another pilot, presented a similar image at the death of Davidovici, explaining why the pilot had refused to catapult although he could have done it.

"The plane is the same as man, the plane does not have to die as long as there is still hope" (ATHANASIE PETRESCU, 2009).

But how did it get to this? How was this metamorphosis possible? One of the most honest and direct answers is represented by Emil Cioran's 1966 reflection: "Any man who touches a motor proves that he is damned" (CIORAN, 1966).

Back then the question appeared whether or not the human is above everything, especially the machine, as long as he himself can be confused with the robot and he chooses to die at the same time with it. We surprisingly notice that the answer is no, he human is no longer in the centre of attention! Anthropocentrism was no longer a philosophy of the present and even less so, of the future! Or that the first option was

not to see the universe! From their crystal ball, the thinkers of the last four or five decades noticed that placing the human being immediately after the divinity might represent an impiety for the ecosystem in which it exists even if it changed the world in which we live. Scientists pushed humanity so far that the place of humanism as we know it from antiquity was replaced by anti-humanism and later by transhumanism so that the international scientific world becomes preoccupied by posthumanism.

For a long time, I was against the idea that the human being is no longer the alfa and omega of the universe and that it is put in its place, alongside all the other forces presented by doctor Antonio Damasio (DAMASIO, 2003) and the nonentities, the entire ecosystem! This statement was easily dismissed up to some time ago, but the change of paradigm triggered by the traumas produced by COVID 19 completely supports the idea. As unacceptable this idea might seem researchers are not the ones who triggered this shift of paradigm, but the inquisitive attitude of the human being. Davidovici's sacrifice and of many Icarus's dedicated to their machines who refused to leave them in front of death represents the most eloquent confession of this change. What makes us go down this road which willingly transforms us in machines? Because we are spinning in a vicious circle. We try to progress, to become better and more performant on the basis of science and of the new technologies, we open new gates without realising the wall that we put up between ourselves and the humanity we come from. Then we look back, we see the growing chasm we leave between us and Homo-sapiens and we shudder. We even revolt, when we notice that the human being is becoming more and more faded in the environment in which it moves. So erased and insignificant that it will no longer have access to human justice. Because, as the future unfolds, even the chair judge will be replaced by a virtuous magistrate (BARBU, 2020).

Everything takes place as in a swirl in which we throw ourselves with the vain hope that, instead of sinking into the mist of metal, we will ascend with the "good tornado" into the blue spheres of the future:

"The wish and anxiety of becoming a machine or something related to the cyborg cannot be repressed", according to Herbrechter and Callus (HERBRECHTER & CALLUS, 2014).

Whether we admit it or not, the restlessness in the face of the alteration to which the paradigm shift exposes us exists. This is demonstrated both by the works in the important libraries of the scientific world and by the films that we still stubbornly label as science fiction and that indicate a reanalysis of the border between human and nonhuman.

"What happens with the human when it is invaded by the other machinal? And what happens with the machine? Is there such "a thing"?" (HERBRECHTER & CALLUS, 2014).

3. THE ECHOES OF PALEO-POSTHUMANISM IN ROMANIA

For the group I was working with the avalanche started at the middle of the 7th decade of the former century and in 1985 when the Romanian military scientific research established the first Internet connection between two cybernetic entities located more than 100 kilometres from each other, Donna Haraway published her most famous essay: *A manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (HARRAWAY, 1985). In the scientific environment from Clinceni where at that time we did not have the most relevant studies published in the West, the joining of some completely different concepts, such as "feminism" and "socialist" in a completely capitalist world led to serious discussions. Engineers, architects and mathematicians in the community enthusiastically welcomed the article whose purpose was clearly to substantiate the hybrid discourse of feminism based on research with origins in the philosophy of science. For most people, the essence of Donna Haraway's thoughts was related to the term "cyborg" (cybernetic organism) at least as a hybrid concrete "man-machine" form, if not as a philosophical analysis tool of technological incarnation. And if their male co-workers, the men, were already damned, according to Emil Cioran, since they all had touched a motor, for them, the women researchers

in the technical field, damnation was hidden by the escape from being a housewife. What was the price that this liberation of the eternal feminine for the human being in general? This is a question which I think will raise more questions?

What followed is more or less known. Because scientific evolution is so rapid that the technological jumps which appear are left behind. Now you are afraid to use the "SF" label when talking about the possible conquests of science because you do not know if somewhere, in who knows what laboratory (if not even in a factory) they are already put into practice. Let's remember how condescendingly we were thirty years ago when it came to the cell phone. And where are we today? Nine years ago, during a visit in Japan, I was completely stunned by the ultra-flat for of the Japanese furniture and by the strange look of the people in the street. Everyone was so absorbed by what he could see through the small bleu window that they kept as compos so close to the eye that no one was feeling the pressure of the well-known "anonymous pushers" from the underground. No one saw no one! In order to understand those atomised people in a crowd of 23 million souls like Tokyo, 5 more years had to pass until this situation became something ordinary for us. We look through a keyhole at a huge world, but we don't see the people we meet at intersections or at the entrance to rooms. Even at home, around the same table, the mother, the father and the child, not a meter away from each other, are isolated by tens, if not thousands of kilometres, each being immersed in its small blue screen. I know what you are going to say: "*the traumatizing experience of the COVID 19 pandemic, not denying the usefulness of the cyber machine*" But we must not overlook the fact that up to know we are not yet fully aware of the consequences of the individual's quasi-total isolation.

In a book dedicated to the radical changes that took place within the human being and the society in the last decades, entitled "*Transhumanismo. La búsqueda tecnologíca del mejoramiento humano*", the Spanish philosopher Antonio Diéguez lures us with an incredible range of technological offers which are more and more attractive. All in all, the uninterrupted scientific revolutions tell us nothing more and nothing less than "youth without old age and life without death". "We are close!" says

Diéguez quoting the gerontologist Aubrey de Grey who, like other transhumanists, assures the present-day youngsters that their life can be extended for decades thanks to the achievements of science and technology.

"It can be said that the first being that would live a thousand years was already born. When he would reach its eightieth year of existence medicine would be so advanced that he would reach this age in excellent health conditions and would be able to survive forty more years; and when he would reach a hundred and twenty years, medicine would have already made such progress that all his body cells, including his brain, would be at a young age, in such a shape that, if did not suffer any accident, death would be projected for him at an indefinite horizon. All these would be possible if, prior to this, immortality would not be already possible through the integration procedure we have discussed before" (DIÉGUEZ, 2019).

With this last sentence we are being directed to the Jewish author Yuav Noah Harari, who, in the chapter *The End of Homo Sapiens* of his book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), accepts the idea that perhaps we are not at the moment yet when the human being becomes a superhuman, but by evaluating the situation in a country which holds the most advanced technologies in the world, allows himself to appreciate that there is no insurmountable technical barrier in the way of this objective, just ethical and political reservations.

"And no matter how much convincing the ethical arguments may be, it is hard to see how they can hold back the next step for long, especially if what is at stake is the possibility of prolonging human life indefinitely, conquering incurable diseases, and upgrading our cognitive and emotional abilities" (HARARI, 2011).

Therefrom questions flow in a totally different direction because the inquisitive human being is no longer forced to choose the ideal coat for bad weather, but he can generate even his ideal existential conditions.

"[…] If the curtain is indeed about to drop on Sapiens history, we members of one of its final generations should devote some time to

answering one last question: what do we want to become? This question, sometimes known as the Human Enhancement question, dwarfs the debates that currently preoccupy politicians, philosophers, scholars and ordinary people" (HARARI, 2011).

"Since we might soon be able to engineer our desires, perhaps the real question facing us is not 'What do we want to become?', but 'What do we want to want?'" (HARARI, 2011).

Continuing this demonstrative thread and without forcing imagination too much, we could determine that the dichotomy projected by Eminescu in Luceafărul assumes new interpretations in our days. The human being has to choose between staying a `warm` being, but transitory, as we know him, or living in symbiosis with the machine, `immortal and cold`! A price has to be paid! Eminescu's Luceafărul is the sublime metaphor of the cyborg created by Donna Haraway, the milestone of the new expansion paradigm:

"Haraway's cyborg is not merely transhuman, but posthuman, as a rejection and a reconfiguration of the values of the traditional humanist subject. On the other hand, the cyborg metaphor indicates that Haraway's version of feminist posthumanism does not reject technology as a source for the reconfiguration of the human." (BOLTER, 2016)

The "surgical" question asked by professor Vasile Burlui falls as a cold shower: "Will the programming of the living cell change in order to survive indefinitely? Who and what could trigger such a mutation which could change mankind fundamentally?"

We try to postpone the answer to this question meant for the prospects of the professionals and without insisting on the differing opinions, we shall herein consider transhumanism as a self-supporting stage which can be sheltered under the umbrella of posthumanism very well. This last concept (appeared at the same time with feminism and robots, not by chance) comes as a reaction of rejection against the classic frame of reference of humanism: white male, too European, colonial imperialistic (BRAIDOTTI, 2013)

And changes do not end here because posthumanists erase other limits as well. They start bridges between the human and the animal kingdom (non-human beings) where humanists have designed impossible steeps because they saw a clear distinction between the knowledge characteristic to the human being and the complexity of the animals (no matter how refined it may be) which they associated rather with machines. Here is a news report from the middle of February informing that Sandra, the female orangutan recognized in 2015 as the first non-human person with human rights (including a better life), turned 34 years old on Valentine's Day!

"Through that ruling I wanted to tell society that animals are beings with cognitive ability, and the most important right that they have is our obligation to respect them" says Judge Elena Liberadori who granted this status. Let us point out that the ruling of the Argentine magistrate is observed in the United States as well where Sandra lives her new life in the company of primates enjoying a better life.

A possible solution for the jump from humanism to posthumanism could imply two relatively distinct stages. In a first stage a `disruption/deconstruction` of the whole foundation of humanism would be required because, as Janneke Adema and Gary Hall state, if we want to exist in posthumanism, not only the way in which the world is seen must be changed, but also our way of being and acting because one of the causes of restraining development is the mere "fossilization" into humanism. This first stage is seen as being strictly necessary before moving to the second stage, the reconstruction of humanism on new grounds:

"In particular, we view the challenge to humanism and the human brought about by the emergence of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, bioscience, robotics, preemptive, cognitive, and contextual computing, as providing us with an opportunity to reinvent, radically, the ways in which we work, act, and think as theorists. In this respect, if "posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore" (ADEMA & HALL, 2016).

The idea was already started by Jaques Derrida in an essay in which he proposes "a deconstruction

and a reconstruction of the legal and of the legal concept of human" (DERRIDA, 1972).

Therefore, the disruption of the "obsolete" humanism becomes the essential tool (if not the only tool, hence the most efficient) used to open the way to the "progressive" posthumanism. The same idea can be found in Bolter who discusses `the porous character of these boundaries on the continuum machine - human–animal` designed by posthumanism and determines a real deconstruction of everything related to art, literature, historiography and philosophy:

"Their deconstructions in these domains could be seen as necessary pre-requisites or co-requisites for the explicit posthumanism of a slightly later group of theorists, whose work focused on techno-science and biology more than art and literature" (BOLTER, 2016).

Such a perspective was certain to trigger various opinions, either for or against, the new achievements of science and technology. Their clash makes professor Pau Alsinia Gonzáles wonder whether or not their progress generates a conflict between technic and culture, if they are allies or enemies. And if things go one way or the other, which is the boundary between them? It is worth remembering here the way in which Alsinia Gonzáles illustrates the concert of tenophobes who really see technology as a danger rather than an opportunity. At the end of a long list of iconic thinkers (Henri Bergson, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Lewis Munford, José Ortega Gasset, Martin Heidegger, Jaques Ellull or The Frankfurt School and Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer or Walter Benjamin and many current ones, such as Hans Jonas or Neil Postman), Pau Alsinia Gonzáles presents the phobia in front of technique through the synthesis of the already invoked "Notebook from Talamanca", written by Emil Cioran in 1966, when he was in Ibiza:

"The car, the plane and the transistor – starting from the beginning of this trinity we can date the disappearance of the last traces of terrestrial Paradise" (CIORAN, 2002).

While the tehno-fatalists are afraid that humanity and culture might serve the machine and not the other way around, the technophiles and other determinists place themselves in the centre of the admiration for the scientific progress of modern society. In their conception, technological advancement represents the guiding force of cultural changes.

"In this way, we could say that both technophobe and technophile considerations harbour within them a deterministic conception of the relationship between technology and society" (ALSINA GONZÁLEZ, 2019).

From this point of view, adds Alsinia Gonzáles, the technophiles are similar to the transhumanists who claim that current technologies facilitate the improvement of the human species, therefore overcoming its natural deficiencies and leads towards a class of posthumanism that speaks about the moral obsolescence of the body as well as the physical one in comparison with the perfection of the machine (ALSINA GONZÁLEZ, 2019).

At the intersection between the two great attitudes there is, as it should be, an area of philosophical peace, a position of equilibrium, of mutual acceptance and of exploration which leads towards a content vector for all parties involved. Techno-realism facilitates the critical assessment of the ways in which technology favours or obstructs humanity and it leads to the conclusion that humanity and culture support and potentiate scientific research and the new technologies who return their progress in the development of the human being and of culture.

From the existing gap presented by Charles Percy Snow between the humanist and the exact sciences (SNOW), a third culture should be born in order to close the breach between these two main fields of interest. According to the Spanish cardiologist, Andrea Kallmeyer Mayor, this third culture, of posthumanism, should represent the binder between humanism and technology since, with the help of technique, the human being is capable of improving nature within a habitat which does no longer respond to the physical and natural needs.

"The new posthumanism culture will not supress our attempts of understanding nature", nor will it give up on "Heidegger's purpose of humanity" (HEIDEGGER, 2013), but it will be reformulated in the context of technological progress, given that it is also human culture, the fruit of his imagination and knowledge (KALLMEYER MAYOR, 2019).

4. FINAL THOUGHTS

The moderate-optimistic perspective created by the debates on the topic of the future of the human being projected by trans and posthumanism, disappeared like fog following the end of the 30th edition of the Congress of Apollonia University. There is still a long until we become immortal. For now, as much as knowledge progressed, we are still vulnerable in front of a simple virus. It is certain that science and its practical applications will not prevent such a threat to life, but one thing is certain: until we become immortal, we are still people. For a few months, regardless of how intelligent and inventive we are, we did not find another way to survive than to retreat to the hive. The emergence of new threats to the human being as well as the exponential growth of the discoveries of science and technology forces us to be prepared for the great confrontation with the future.

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