

THE MAN OF THE FUTURE: TRANSHUMANIST STORIES (VIA THE FILM DISCOURSE)

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Abstract

The present article attempts to investigate the impact of digital technologies on the life of the human being from the perspective of philosophers, sociologists, writers and, respectively, the reflection of these ideas in the world cinema. McLuhan's idea regarding human extensions represents the starting point in the universe of the future transhumanist. The foray into the science fiction film is supported by the Israeli philosopher Yuval Noah Harari's suppositions in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*.

Keywords: *transhumanism, science fiction film, digital technologies, super longevity, super intellect, supreme happiness, virtual universe, technological singularity, artificial intelligence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Transhumanism represents a modern trend which analyses the possibilities of new sciences and technologies in the process of improving the mental, psychic and physical skills of the individual. The concept of transhumanism was introduced by the British biologist Julian Huxley in 1957, the birthyear of transhumanism.

Also, the 1950s mark the launching of the television era, which completely change the life of the society and of the individual. The effects of television are researched by the theoretician Marshall McLuhan, who introduces the term *global village* and predicts the World Wide Web (30 years before its appearance), comparing the human world with a computer, with an electronic brain.

The Canadian philosopher prepares the field for transhumanism, analysing the changes that take place in society and in the life of the individual according to the development of technique and technologies, which he ultimately perceives as human extensions, starting with the watch, the car, the radio, the TV set and others.

If a few decades ago a problem with electricity blocked the entire activity, nowadays the activity blocks if Internet disappears. The ideas presented in his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* became a benchmark of the modern world. The theoretician redefines the media as being "any and, at the same time, all the technological extensions of the human body and mind" (MCLUHAN, 2011). For example, in McLuhan's conception, the machine – *the mechanical bride* represents "more than the horse, it is a human extension which turns the rider into a superman" (MCLUHAN, 2011). A special place in these researches is occupied by the new means of communication, the television, which led to a new revolution in the life of the individual and of the society. Although television took over people's minds after some decades, the Internet spread the world in no time.

In the 1950s, the American researcher, Percy Tannebaum, referred to one of his studies by saying that *a tree falls down in a wood and if this information is not presented on TV, then did it really happen?* His attempt was to highlight the role that television played back then in the life of the society, a role which is similar to that of the internet, from the present day.

Transhumanism was also influenced by the concept of the American futurologist Alvin Toffler, presented in his book, *Future Shock*, in 1970, a shock produced by the flaw of information; by Turing's test on *thinking machines* (1950), which represented the basis for the idea of *technological singularity*.

Therefore, transhumanism becomes the ideology of time, which develops at the same time with technologies. The rapid development of information technologies leads to a fourth

revolution, which refers to the complete digitalization of the real world. Information is not the only one which is digitally stocked, but also the present-day human being, who is surrounded by various machines and technologies, which become indispensable to him. By creating and developing techniques, man becomes dependent on them, as component parts of the individual.

During the '90s, together with the new progress of information technologies, which changed the life of the human being and of the whole society, there was a new explosion of transhumanism, present in various researches. Some of the most significant ones are signed by Steve Fuller (1959). The American philosopher and sociologist is directly interested in the issues of transhumanism and most of his works (*Humanity 2.0: What it Means to be Human Past, Present and Future* (2011), *Preparing for Life in Humanity 2.0* (2013)) are directed towards the issues of technological modernisation and how it can improve human potential. Fuller attributes cinema formulas to the reorganisation ideas of the human body in order to prolong life, present in the documentary entitled *The Future of Work and Death*, also proving that technological singularity can be reached in the next 30 years.

The Israeli philosopher, Yuval Noah Harari, in his book entitled *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, presents the changes that humankind was subjected to, from the perspective of the development of technique and technology: "the great human project of the 20th century – the eradication of hunger, plagues and war – aims at preserving a universal norm of welfare, health and peace for everyone, with no exception. The new projects of the 21st century – achieving immortality, happiness and deification – also hope to be in the benefit of all mankind. But these projects aim more to overcome, than to preserve, the norm..." (HARARI, 2018).

Transhumanism expands its concepts in two main directions: the first one, towards the improvement of the human being with the help of digital technologies; the second one towards the replacement of the human being with algorithms, with synthetic, nonbiological entities.

According to the human improvement theory, which basically means the shift of the current

individual from version 1.0 to version 2.0, which will radically change his nature, we speak about three main aspects to which the human individual aims at:

Super longevity (super longevity or even immortality)

Super intelligence (super intellect)

Super wellbeing (supreme happiness and contentment).

Referring to each of these aspects, modern science is able to propose some concrete results, proving the role of information technologies in this process of changing the human being. Scholars are not the only ones who are preoccupied with the future of individual, but also artists, who come up with their own visions regarding the future evolution of humanity. All these transhumanist aspirations are exploited by modern arts, including the world cinema (CADARU, 2017), that, together with the television, constantly promotes the cult of the young and handsome man, proposing a wide range of products and services to achieve this state. From the perspective of the new technologies, the modern era begins with George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977), followed by the film *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), where the computer is used for editing.

2. SUPER LONGEVITY OR IMMORTALITY

The human being has always lived with the idea of immortality. In mythology and in popular folklore we notice this subject interpreted in various ways. We offer the example of the well-known story from the Romanian folklore, *Youth without old age and life without death*, belonging to Petre Ispirescu, in which some philosophical concepts are dealt with: youth – old age, life – death, as well as the human condition in society. Another significant story is that of *Ivan Turbină*, belonging to the Romanian classical writer, Ion Creangă, a story in which Ivan, who possesses superhuman powers, fights death.

Nowadays, the preservation of youth and longevity belongs to medicine and its inventions, such as genetic engineering, regenerative medicine and nanotechnology, whose contribution in the process of perfecting the

human body is quite obvious. Transhumanism uses an entire set of technologies in order to improve the human body, such as: synthetic organs, cloning, prosthesis, implant, doping, plastic surgery etc.

The 20th century medicine offers body modelling/perfecting services, starting with the surgeries for changing the face (or even the sex), maintaining youth and beauty (plastic surgery) and up to organ transplants in order to save or prolong human life. And if medicine uses organ transplantation from donors, then the fantasies of art creators have gone much further.

In Geoff Murphy's film, *Freejack* (1992), after a novel by Robert Sheckley, the transfer of the main character takes place. Alex, a race driver, shifts into the future (from 1991 to 2009), in order to be used as a body donor. It is assumed that in the 21st century technologies reach a level in which the transfer of conscience (spirit) from an old body into a young one is possible and the identity of the donor is liquidated.

The 2004 *Casshern* film, created based on the anime series of the Japanese producer, Kazuaki Kiriya, promotes the idea of the existence of some neo-humans created by neo-cells, human cells used to regenerate human tissues.

In this context, the idea of cloning people appears more and more insistently on organ donation, which is part of a technology for the improvement of man, promoted by transhumanism, which will take it to the next level. Since the cloning of Dolly, the sheep (in 1996), the next step of the experiments will inevitably be in humans. We see this subject debated in various movies.

The underground secret laboratories in which both the stars of show-business and rich people are cloned (for the so called "spare parts," transplant organs) in case of illness are presented in the 2005 film "The Island", directed by Michael Bay. Here, the clones are kept under strict medical care and they dream of going to the Island, if they win the lottery. In reality, winning the lottery means the transplant and the death of the clone. The film presents the story of a new clone model, *Lincoln Six-Echo*, who preserved the memories of its sponsor, an impetus for revolt against the imposed regime (food, white clothes etc.). Curiosity takes him to the hospital where

he witnesses the birth of a clone, whose baby is handed over to the original mother, and the clone is euthanized. Finding out the truth about "going to the island," he tries to save himself together with Jordan Two-Delta, a young lady who was preparing for such a departure. They end up being his sponsors and they try to prove that people are just the same...

There is much more drama in the history of the characters from the 2010 movie *Never Let Me Go*, directed by Mark Romanek, after the 2005 novel *The Remains of the Day* (2005), written by the Japanese author Kazuo Ishiguro. Teenagers Kathy, Tommy and Ruth live in boarding house, isolated from the world and it is not until they turn 18 that they discover the horrible faith that awaits them. Although they experience the same human feelings of love, jealousy, pity etc., they come to terms with their fate as organ donors.

The context of preserving youth is also present in Andrew Niccol's 2011 film, *In Time*. The action takes place in 2161, when genetic changes allowed mankind to stop the aging process after the age of 25 with only one condition: not to have any debts. Instead, "the lifetime" replaced money and everything is paid in time (monitored with an arm implant). If the watch reaches 0, then that person has no more time left and he or she is going to die.

All these and many other movies are focused on this topic and they aim at dealing with ethical problems of the clones and of transplant.

3. SUPER POWER

The films about superheroes, individuals with outstanding physical qualities, who fight against violence and aggression, enjoy the greatest popularity. An example could be the films from the *Superman* series.

In order to increase the power of the individual, of his mobility and speed, transhumanism proposes the use of exoskeleton. It represents something similar to the outfit of a diver which increases physical strength and it is especially used by militaries. We discover fighters in exoskeletons in science fiction movies such as: *Matrix* (1999, the Wachowski brothers), *Spy Kids*, (2001, directed by Robert Rodriguez), *Aliens*

(1986) and *Avatar* (2009), the last two directed by James Cameron. Here we can also include the 2014 military sci-fi film *Edge of Tomorrow*, with Tom Cruise and Emily Blunt, a screening of the Japanese novel *All You Need is Kill* by Hiroshi Sakurazaka, whose action takes place in the future and being centred on the fight against aliens. Here, all fighters are dressed in exoskeletons.

4. SUPER INTELLIGENCE

Simultaneously with a young and beautiful body, a super intelligence that can face the information flow is also required. Nowadays, the individual does no longer worry about remembering data, information or even decisions, but he resorts to algorithms. The individual does no longer look at the sky in order to find out the probable time and he doesn't turn to dictionaries and encyclopaedias anymore when he is interested in a word or phrase. He finds everything in a few seconds, on the Internet. On the one hand, the Internet offers the individual immediate access to all information, helping him save time and energy and, on the other hand, in the given conditions, the human intellect gradually degrades because it does no longer put in much effort to know, analyse, study, memorize etc. That particular brain rests and it stops thinking. Therefore, according to artificial intelligence, the individual loses his field of activity. Since many mental activities are placed on the computer, some professions disappear, while others are replaced by algorithms which fulfil the tasks hundred of times faster and without any difficulties or errors.

The first step towards stimulating the activity of the brain is represented by the series of psychostimulatory products for the central nervous system, used especially by students. In order to turn the human brain into genius, transhumanism proposes a series of ways supported by nanotechnologies and by the direct brain-computer connection. Super intelligence might be especially attained through a brain implant, among which the so called exocortex – an external information processing system which might act as a neuro prosthesis for the brain

cortex. Since the concept of exocortex can be largely understood, his functions are already fulfilled by the Internet, smartphone and various other gadgets that surround the modern individual and that he feels addicted to. His greatest addiction is to the computer screen, iPhone, smartphone, tablet etc., which are associated with a black mirror. The individual is reflected in it, experiencing various new feelings.

The large range of possible and impossible scripts, when it comes to the exaggerated use of the new technologies and of its effects, is presented in Charlie Brooker's 2011 series, *Black Mirror*. The approximately 22 series reveal a world in the immediate future, in which the individual is connected to various digital technologies, which predetermine his life, to a smaller or greater measure. Each series has its own history, starting with the mobile phone addiction and ending with the implanting some cameras in the eyes that can follow life through the eyes of the character (White Christmas, 2014).

The subjects on the effects of the brain implant, which reads, scans and manipulates information with the actions of the individual become more and more serious. The outcomes of each episode are surprising due to their unexpected results for the life of the human being.

In the search for the new technologies that defend children from the cruelty of the surrounding world, the heroine of the 2017 *Arkangel* episode, introduces three microchips into her three-year-old daughter's brain. This so-called parent control centre presented a number of functions, among which the discovery of the child's whereabouts, the resending of the images that it sees, as well as minimising the more or less violent images of reality. Therefore, the child became incapable of understanding reality and the surrounding world. The cruellest thing was the fact that the implant could not be eliminated from the brain...

The histories of the Black Mirror series are usually not very optimistic. In the view of filmmakers, the excessive use of digital technologies and experiments with them go bankrupt. However, the theory of transhumanism supports the attaining of a super intellect through the integration between man and machine, the integration with information technologies that

help the individual become superhuman. The possibility of a man-computer symbiosis was firstly exposed in 1960 and it was an idea which belonged to Raymoud Kurzweil, an American inventor and futurologist, who claims that the *technological singularity* is based on a strong artificial intellect and on the individuals' transformation into cyborgs. A cyborg represents a brain-machine-microprocessor hybrid.

Johnny Mnemonic can also be regarded as such a cyborg, the main character of the 1995 movie with the same title, a data trafficker who implanted a data stocking system in his head in order to transport it. The action of the movie takes place in 2021, when the entire world is connected to a giant Internet service.

The process of replacing the man with the cyborg leads to the danger of replacing the human being with algorithms. Man's quest for perfection with the help of technologies that are meant to prolong youth and beauty, making him more beautiful, stronger and more resistant will also lead to another level of development. As the Israelian philosopher points out: "Cyborg engineering will go a step further, merging the organic body with non-organic devices, such as bionic arms, artificial eyes or millions of nanorobots, that will be introduced in our vascular system and they will be able to diagnose problems and repair the damages (HARARI, 2018)." Harari supports the creation of "... *Homo Deus*, a completely superior human model. *Homo Deus* will preserve some essential human traits, but it will also possess improved mental and physical skills, which will allow it to deal with the most sophisticated non-conscious algorithms (HARARI, 2018)."

At the same time, artificial intelligence is analysed and developed. The insubordination of the machine in relationship to its creator is firstly approach in Stanley Kubrik's 1968 film entitled *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which introduced the topic of artificial intelligence in cinemas, including the issues referring to human life and the development of technologies. Artificial Intelligence represents Stanley Kubrik's last project and he began it in the 1970s.

The project was much later taken over by Steven Spielberg in his 2001 film entitled *Artificial Intelligence* (he won an Oscar for special effects).

This represents a transhumanist version of Pinocchio's story. It is the history of David, an android robot who dreamt of becoming a man. The producer triggers a war between two intellects, the man and the machine. Many producers target this utopic fight between man and machines. For example, the 2004 film *I, Robot*, produced by Alex Peoyas, and based on the stories of Isaac Asimov.

The invention of artificial intelligence unavoidably leads to a war between men and machines, a theme addressed over the decades in world cinema in both fiction and animation fantasy film. Here, we speak about the American film producer George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, which was awarded six Oscars. The film become a cultural phenomenon, which led to the birth of various TV series, video games and animated bands. George Lucas, in the animated series *The war of the clones* (2003-2005, 2008-2014) creates an overcrowded universe with all sorts of beings, including clones and robots/androids, which always confront each other.

5. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE VIRTUAL WORLD OF INTERNET

The digital era offered the individual new possibilities of getting in contact with the world. The Internet lures people with its unique communication opportunities and by imposing its I in a global universe, with the help of Facebook and of other social networks. The individual gradually shifts his life into the virtual world by uploading very personal information, photos, opinions etc. (a kind of intimate journal for everyone) and looking for feedback and likes, which become a sort of necessity.

Present generations no longer rely on television, where the viewer could identify itself with his beloved hero, but on the Internet, in a virtual universe where he himself represents that avatar, thought and build by his own self! This is the world of youngsters, under various aspects: with passions, activities, friends, communication, intimate life etc. They get closer to that state, in which the algorithm knows everything about them and it can easily manipulate them in various situations, without exerting any pressure. This

virtual world is currently accessible to children and youngsters, who spend many hours in front of the computer, radically changing their relationship with the immediate reality, and, in the future, it will gain some unexpected dimensions.

The virtual world becomes a new and extremely attractive territory for film-makers. We discover it in the film *Matrix* (1999), screenplay and direction by brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski. IT programmer Thomas, who lives a parallel hacker life under the name of Neo, seeks to find an answer to the question: *What exactly is the Matrix?*

This cobweb also attracted individual from various generations, who cannot exist without Internet. The computer, iPhone, phone take up all their time – either communicating, playing or working. This involvement completely absorbs a human being, just as it did with the character from the 2018 movie *Ready Player One*, directed by Steven Spielberg. The film's action takes place in 2045, the world is dominated by chaos and it is on the verge of collapse. The people from Colambus take refuge in the universe of the game OASIS. Here, in the virtual world of the game, the individual puts on the helmet of virtual reality and he can go everywhere he wants, meet whomever he wants and do whatever he wants. He can become whomever he wants: tall, handsome, he can change sex, race or he can come from another planet. There are numerous options available for him here. He becomes an avatar.

A new form of existence appears for the individual – the scanned one and passed into the virtual world, in the digital space. Such a universe is built by the Israeli producer Ari Folman, well-known for his animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) regarding the 1982 Lebanon war. The 2013 film *The Congress*, partially inspired from Stanislaw Lem' novel *The Futurological Congress*, presents the history of an actress at the end of her career, Robin Wright, who has to accept a proposal from the *Miramount* studio (a combination between *Miramax* and *Paramount*). In this film, computer animation takes the place of actors. The firm represents the era of the past. Currently, the animated image is up to date.

The individual's tendency of more and more entering the virtual space is seen by

transhumanism as the first step towards immortality. Transhumanism upsets the idea of Christianity that there is an eternal life for the soul, about heaven and hell (as Harari mentioned: "the new technologies kill the old gods and give birth to new ones" (HARARI, 2018)). In the transhumanist ideology, the idea/concept of "life after death" gains a new value. The idea of copying human consciousness and transferring it to a computer or to another body is materialized in the most absurd film scenarios.

In this context, we come back to some episodes from *The Black Mirror*. The conscience of a woman whose is in a comma is scanned and transferred to the brain of the husband, who always wanted to be by her side. This foreign presence becomes more and more tiring, until it is transferred to a child's teddy bear. Or the transfer of the conscience of a sick person with the help of an implanted chip in the brain of a doctor, in which all the senses of the sick individual will be projected.

In order to communicate with her husband deceased in an accident, Martha bring him back to the virtual world, loading in a computer the whole existing material from photos to audio and video materials. Communication with her alleged husband begins with e-mails, followed by audio and video conversations (phone) and up to the construction of a non-human robot with his face, which tries to replace him in everyday life (*Be Right Back*, 2013).

Another history on the transfer of the conscience of the individual in the virtual space is presented in the 2014 film *Transcendence: Life after death*, directed by Wally Pfister. A science fiction film on artificial intelligence, about a researcher (played by Johnny Depp), who builds a computer which obtains a state of superiority, overcoming the minds of the entire mankind and by gathering all the knowledge and experience gained throughout millenniums (meaning technological singularity). But before he finishes his work he is killed. His wife manages to upload his intellect onto the computer, where he masters the entire virtual network.

Another finally another episode from *The Black Mirror* series – *San Junipero* (2016). *San Junipero* is the name of a virtual city which represents nothing more than a graveyard of

souls (an eternal cemetery), where after the so called passing the individual enters the phase of eternal fun. Every individual has the option of dying in the traditional manner or of passing (through euthanasia) into a virtual world, in which he finds himself according to a special programme (5 hours per week), also seen as a therapy for the old or sick people.

These are only some of the great number of film that the world film created presenting the transhumanist ideology.

In order to finish the discourse on the film world from the transhumanist perspective, we shall come back to the ideas of the Israeli philosopher, who mentioned that: "In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution created a huge urban proletariat and socialism spread because nothing else managed to answer the needs, hopes and fears of the working class. Liberalism finally defeated socialism, only because it adopted the best parts of the socialist programme. In the 21st century we might witness the creating of a massive non-working class: people devoid of any economic, politic or artistic value, who do not contribute to the prosperity, power or glory of the society. This "useless class" will not only be unemployed, but it will be impossible to offer it any jobs (HARARI, 2018)."

The incredible development of digital technologies will more and more change the life of individuals and of societies. Where will it take? What is the future of the individual in a hyper-technologized era? Will he obtain the desired immortality and total happiness? The answers of philosophers and sociologists complete the imagination of arts people, who more and more base their work on the transhumanist thematic.

Finally, science fiction films offer us the grain of truth, which soon might be projected into reality, just as the enchanted mirrors in stories became real. Or those "portable communication tools and voice interaction with computers that existed only in the imaginary universe of the twenty-third century of the first television series *Star trek* (FIDLER, 2004)."

6. CONCLUSION

The evolution of the individual will unavoidably continue and it will obviously be influenced by digital technologies. That is why we may more or less agree with the Israeli philosopher Yuval Noah Harari, who mentions that: "The improvement of the Sapiens will represent a gradual historical process rather than a Hollywood apocalypse (...). In the pursuit of health, happiness and strength, people will gradually change one trait first, then another one and another one, until they will no longer be humans (HARARI, 2018)."

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