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The Transhuman Body in Science Fiction Literature

Phd Thesis
Summary

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Summary:

The future that the authors of postmodern science fiction show the readers is a technologized one, it is uncertain and heavenly – it depends notably on the point of view. It is certain that this sort of future in populated by bodies, which have nothing to do with the human being (*Homo Universalis*) or with *Homo sapiens*, as we know them. This aspect is not, by far, valid only in science fiction stories. The current societies head for a direction encountered in these fictional scripts and one of the causes of this approach is the blend of technology and the outcomes of its intervention.

Acting directly on the human biology, technology will offer the new human being (*Homo technologicus*) the chance of emancipation, of augmenting the capabilities of the body and mind – through the use of prosthesis (temporary or permanent, external or internal) or even through the transfer of the mind into a computer. The price of this emancipation is, unquestionably, making the human biology artificial.

The research is imperatively an interdisciplinary one. To follow the steps of *Homo sapiens* and *Homo universalis* to becoming artificial (from all points of view), one cannot refer only to literature. Moreover, the questions that science fiction literature raises, do not aim at a future that is projected into an imperceptible temporality, but one, which the man stepped in the day he invented the Internet.

This means that, for example, the cyborg (especially the medical cyborg) is not only a fictional character or device anymore. The cyborg exists through its figure today, culturally and socially trying to reconfigure the man's perspective on the world. For this reason, in our analysis, we will not make use of instruments of literary analysis alone. Theoretical instruments and concepts from different fields will be used: cybernetics, psychology, anthropology, medicine, neuroscience and philosophy.

The hypothesis of this study indicates the problem of the disjunction between the mind and emotion and the way it reveals itself in the science fiction literature. The moment when it determined, culturally speaking, a change of perspective regarding the man's reference to his own body is being tracked. Being based on the three ideas of separation, that the man instilled in himself throughout the centuries, separation of nature, separation of God and separation of self, the moment of this change is our concern, since it motivates the way the man refers to his own body nowadays.

Therefore, it cannot be stated that the human body is the organism that keeps the conscience or the mind awake. The human body becomes an object itself, a *pièce de résistance* that cannot be modified in any way by technology. The main viewpoint of identifying and analyzing the transformations of the object-human body and the process of becoming artificial is the transhumanism.

Investigating science fiction novels that were published after 1980, the research tracks and analyzes some forms that the object-body takes. We will discuss, in this aspect, about cyborgs, the android body, the robot body, the transfer of the mind into a computer and artificial intelligence.

The paper consists of three chapters: 'The body: Anthropocentrism and enhancement', 'The post/ transhuman body' and 'Leaving the body'. The naming of these chapters is not random, it is thought in such a way that it tints the metamorphosis which technology subjects the human biological body to, following social and cultural facts and aspects suggested by postmodern science fiction literature.

The first chapter, 'The body: Anthropocentrism and enhancement' features the moment the human body (the biological one) becomes object. The ways it connects to technology and, as a consequence, it opts out for becoming artificial are presented and closely examined. Either we regard this transformation into artificial from the perspective of the critical posthumanism, or we look at it from the position of transhumanism, it is the inevitable way to the post (trans)human body.

Beyond the issue of the object-body, the chapter analyzes the relation between body and technology and the repercussions that are caused by technology that is directly applied to the human biology. A body turned into an object is the body that could have other objects attached to it (bionic prosthesis, chips, implants etc.) so that its functions are

augmented. In the first place, this is done for medical reasons, and then, for personal purposes – with the hope of perfecting the human body. The wish of augmenting the functions of the human body means, at the same time, the highlight of the inferiority of the organic to the artificial.

In the second chapter, 'The post/ transhuman body', the views of the critical posthumanism and transhumanism related to the body, are outlined. Besides the ideas of Kevin Warwick and Hans Morvec, another transhuman direction will be brought to discussion: the Singularity (Vinge). This is the point where a distinction between the postuman body and the transhuman body is made in the study. Not leaving aside the issue of the emotion-mind disjunction, that is operated and preferred by transhumanism, one of the hotspot of this study is the issue of emotion (of the emotional body).

The process of storing the human mind into a computer, process that is claimed by transhumanism, raises a lot of questions. One of this involves the emotion. If transhumanism struggles to convince that the mind is superior to the biology, emotion, instinct, sensuality, neurosciences prove that there is no reason in the absence of emotion. At this point, the study exposes a complete discussion about the location of the emotion and its importance, starting with the theories of Charles Darwin to more recent times: Daniel Goleman, Antonio Damasio şi Lisa Feldman Barrett.

Once the problem of emotion is dealt with, the emotional intelligence and the rational intelligence are weigh up and we discuss if the two elements of the brain are real or they are just projections that the *Homo sapiens* brain makes. At this point, the dispute between Goleman and Barrett escalates. The first one claims that the emotions are innate, whereas Barrett says that the brain generates them.

Anyway, from the dispute of reactive brain-predictive brain we can conclude that no matter the validated position, a human brain is created and develops in a biological body, which triggers the idea that a machine will never be able to think like *Homo sapiens*. Contrary to the opinion of transhumanists, there is no conscience 'on something' or 'of something' in the absence of a body that would be acknowledged.

It becomes clear that the process of *uploading mind* (storing the human mind into a computer) is utopian or put into practice only in a science fiction circumstance, artificial intelligence (AI) being the new sustainable figure of the genre.

The last chapter, 'Leaving the body' focuses only on the analysis of some science fiction novels. Since the paper follows the impact of technology on the human body, we carried out a detailed approach on the novels written by William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, Orson Scott Card, David Simpson, Paolo Bacigalupi, Daniel Wilson and the series of stories written by George R. R. Martin. As the analysis advances, the works of Mary Shelley, Isaac Asimov or Philip K. Dick are mentioned with the aim of configuring the way the transhuman bodies modify their own structure from one phase in the science fiction literature to another.

If it goes without saying that the cyborg character or artificial intelligence belong to the category of *Homo technologicus* (after all, we talk about a prosthetic human body), what regards the other transhuman bodily typologies, things have to be clarified.

Thus, if in the case of storing the mind into a computer, the human mind is extracted from the human brain and placed into an artificial space, the space of infinite possibilities, in the case of robots and androids, the argument states that: the robots are created so that they can posses human mobility (humanoid robots, that are robots who act like people, but don't have the physical appearance of a human being), whereas the androids are made after the human anatomy, aesthetics and thinking. The confusion with people is at stake. Otherwise, an android that is capable of passing the Turing test – distinctively of what literature suggests – must be regarded, according to transhumanists, as a human being.

Summarizing the considerations about the four types of transhuman bodies that appear in the examined novels, we emphasize the following:

I. the cyborg is a hybrid creature (human and artificial, detachable prosthesis (deck) or permanent (chip), capable of having access to the cybernetic space or able of being in a better shape than a body that doesn't have a prosthesis;

II. the robot and the android are inorganic creations, the difference between them is that the robot has the aspect of a humanoid machine (without

thinking like man) whereas the android has human appearance and a simulated human behavior;

III.   artificial intelligence cannot operate in the real world without a body;

All types of transhuman body, discussed in this chapter belong to the category of *Homo technologicus* because they are bodies modelled after the human thinking and the human body. They are not created as a unique species, different from men, animals or plants, according to some theorists; they are considered expansion and corporeal emancipation mechanisms or agents of human intelligence augmentation.

Regardless of the place that the cyborg, the robot, the android or, the newer artificial intelligence occupy in the progress of the events from one novel to another, beyond the nuances that they are given to them by the vision of each writer, they bring into discussion an emancipated future of *Homo sapiens* that promises the relief – in the tranhumanist area– not only of the ordinary responsibilities of ensuring a job, but also of the own body. What technology pledges is the idea of a paradise. It is, of course, a created paradise, not a regained one.

In such a project, either we discuss literature or the inventions and products of the current technology; there is no known finality, not even when Singularity would be attained. Transhumanism must be regarded as a continuous transformation of the human conscience and human body, beyond literature.