

PERAET 2021**International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****A NEW BESTIARY FOR THE DIGITAL AGE**

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Abstract

This article explores the transhuman issues raised and promoted by “new art and through art” for the future digital era of the Singularity. The features and criteria ideologically conditioned by transhumanism legalize the “advanced art” of the future, which, however, more and more clearly reveals the old occult and magical roots or, as if by chance, harmoniously incorporates them into its vision of the world, as well as of a transhuman and a posthuman. Some artists and their apologists are specifically engaged in the development of provocative shocking art with the inevitable exclusion of a human and “human” by blurring the boundaries between the living and the dead, natural and artificial, good and evil, a human and other creatures and entities. The article examines specific examples and comparisons with transhumanistic attitudes, occult-magical practices and ideas of past centuries. The author comes to the conclusion that the mythologized ideology of transhumanism is being enrooted by means of art in mass culture and by the substitution of a human for a transhuman/a posthuman with a predominance of hybrid characteristics (zoomorphic, plant and cyborg ones), thus forming a utopian world of the future digital bestiary.

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1. Introduction

For more than half a century, the world has been developing a very definite trend towards transhumanism with its techno-technological reductionism, which is successfully changing society through mass culture and through art. Ideas about a human are easily and uncritically transformed by means of art in a playful emotional format. The “game” imperceptibly turns a human into a chimera, a hybrid, bringing it closer to the “high” ideal of bestiality cyber art. In the XXI century, a new standard is being formed, however, it only pretends to be new, in reality it is older than the European civilization, and in religious terms it clearly fits into the parameters of occult and magical practices, which, under the slogans of tolerance, replace all existing attitudes towards spirituality mainly in the New Age format. Transhumanists lean towards this spirituality and “guru-artists”, joining them in the ecstasy of psychedelic parties and in the vastness of such virtual venues as Second Life. In mass culture, a number of products featuring high-tech superheroes, mutants and monsters, is growing. A posthuman is surprisingly similar to creatures from myths revered since ancient times in occult magic circles. Modern images of hybrids and clones are mirrored in the phenomena of a transhuman and a posthuman “reinforced” by implants, avatars and cyborgs. “The goal or meaning of culture and art is the expansion of the space of consciousness, search, discovery, in addition to the visible, tangible and invisible world” (Drikker & Makovetsky, 2020, p. 548). Digital technology has been able to accomplish what was previously entrusted to magical skills. For clarity, let us turn to the analysis of the works by such artists as Marina Abramović (“grandmother of the performance art”) and Patricia Piccinini.

2. Problem Statement

We would consider the problem of identity and embodiment of the transhumanistic concept of a transhuman and a posthuman in contemporary art, as well as the presence of occult-magical ideas and practices in the latter. The particular emphasis will be on the phenomenon of hybridization with its bestiality component in the project of NBIC-technologies convergence programs “Human Enhancement (HE)”.

3. Research Questions

Is it legitimate to identify and critically analyze the future of digital civilization and the future of a human (a transhuman, and later a posthuman), human corporeality and consciousness in the context of hybrid, bestiality design in transhuman art?

4. Purpose of the Study

It is necessary to single out the main criteria and characteristics of the promoted new art in the context of transhumanism and its aesthetics from the point of view of the value component and the future existence of a posthuman in order to understand the immediate prospects of the transhumanist project.

5. Research Methods

The methodological disposition of human-technology is represented in science by 1. bioconservatism (radical and moderate) and 2. techno-technological reductionism. Transhumanism develops within the framework of the second approach (aka technological radicalism) with its interpretation of innovationism and progress within the framework of controlled evolution. The representatives of the first approach are F. Fukuyama (Dolin, 2017; Dydrov & Neveleva, 2019); J. Habermas (Atanasescu, 2019; Cooke, 2019; Haker, 2019), Kutyrev (2016), Rostova (2020), etc. The second is represented by transhumanists, partly posthumanists, with their system of implementing the NBIC technologies convergence program and the “Human Enhancement” (HE) project: Roco and Bainbridge (2004), Fuller (2018), Haraway (2017), Göcke, (2019), etc. The methodology of transhumanism is developing; for example, Fuller (2018) developed one of the “engines” - the principle of Proactivity (he calls it an imperative). The principle calls for a radical transformation, “intervention” in natural processes with a possible irreversible effect for the sake of discoveries (Fuller, 2018, p. 17). Fuller, like many transhumanists, considers the concepts of “a human” and “a personality” to be formal concepts that do not have any ontological basis. Fuller (2018) explains the criticism of the classical theory of evolution by the fact that it is passive and slow, it has no purpose; therefore, it is necessary to control evolution (p. 10). A critical look at the above methodology draws attention to the ideological play on words and negligence in clarifying terms, concepts and basic principles, as well as to disregard of real processes and laws of nature. And what is important within the framework of the given article, there is the increasing manifestation of the occult and magical spiritual foundations in transhumanism, including the issue of human hybridization. Transhumanists declared that a human is not a finite creature, but a transitional species, whereas Haraway (2017) went even further by declaring that people have long been cyborgs and have never been people. Haraway (2017) identifies three boundaries - barriers: between a human and an animal, an organism and a mechanism, and physical and non-physical. The idea of the illusory nature of borders is further complemented by the idea of the superiority of hybrids/mutants and that a human sacrificed oneself to them and became their slave. There is a real war for a human: anthropology against misanthropy, led with the artistic means as well. However, in reality the problems are growing. The experimenters nicely describe the beginning, but they are not interested in the further suffering of the object (see the story that inspired the Piccinini’s first work “Protein Lattice” (1997). She saw in a journal a photo of a rat with a grown cloned human ear, the cartilage cells were taken from the boy, and the rat supplied its skin and blood (Piccinini, 1997, para. 3). Hybrids age quickly, die, and are susceptible to disease. Cyborgs and mutants are bridges that are expected to solve the problem of incompatibility. But there is still the problem of hostility, rejection from society, people feel a catch, they are afraid, and it is evident in different concepts, for example, in the term “ominous valley”. Transhumanism actively uses elements of occult-magical theories of the spiritual nature of human, animals and the universe. If traditional religious systems always prohibited and warned against the danger of mixing and breaking the human, occult systems have tried to do the opposite, dreaming of creating another monster or a posthuman. The result of controlled evolution by means of “HE” is the death of a human and the monopoly of hybrids. Now it looks like an interesting game, but human users do not

understand the seriousness of the situation, they just “play”, implementing the possibilities of imagination. It is stimulated by various means including advertising and fashion (see Koneva, 2019, pp. 290-291).

6. Findings

Let us consider some recent creative examples and single out the characteristic features of the artist's style and, at the same time, general attitudes of artists sharing the ideas of transhumanism. Long before the appearance of social networks, online communication and selfies, there was a performance that could both function as art and, what is more important, could turn art, as in ancient times, into a really sacred occult and magical ritual. There is only significant difference: if ancient people were aware of participating in a ritual, nowadays, viewers often do not know that they are in the center of a “shamanic” or magical rite. The process itself, being also the result of creating an art object online, and art as a part of an occult rite/ecstasy affects the viewer in the same way as a magic ritual previously did. Let's take the works by Marina Abramović. Her spirituality developed under the influence of such authors as A. David-Neel, H. Blavatsky, Buddhist mystics, and occultists. Using her body as an indicator of pain, for example, during the performance “Thomas's Lips” (1975), a naked Marina Abramović ate honey with a silver spoon, drank a liter of wine, and then cut a five-pointed star on her stomach with a blade, whipped herself, lay down on ice cross and, as a result, lost consciousness. Another case is “Nude with a Skeleton” (2005), Abramović, again naked, sleeps with a skeleton, as if imitating the Tibetan practice of sleeping or contemplating a corpse to comprehend the spiritual meaning of death and frailty. “In shamanism, fainting is a symbolic death ... (scourging is one of initiation rites) ... filled with sacred meaning ... attributes, ritual nudity and rhythm help to bring the audience into a kind of trance state...” (Malysheva, 2015, pp. 243-244). Already the first performances (the Belgrade creative period) displayed a clear provocative component (naked female body and objects of torture around), where the audience often simply acted according to the algorithm, but the conclusions, as expected, were made about the animal nature in man (see her performance “Rhythm 0”). Later, during her relationship with Uwe Laysiepen (the Amsterdam period), their duet performances also reflected a “new spirituality”; for example, during the performance “Relations in Time” (1977), Marina and Uwe sat with their backs to each other for 16 hours, then the audience was launched into the hall, they were supposed to feed the artists with their energy. During the performance “Imponderabilia” (Bologna, 1977) both naked they stood at the entrance to the museum, opposite each other, and the audience had to turn facing one of them in order to enter the hall. By the way, critics write about the creativity and courage of M. Abramović, but no one has studied the state of health of the audience, their shock when they were abused, or even emotionally “raped” with “art”. During another performance “Balkan Baroque” (1997), the artist sat on a pile of animal bones, scrubbed them of the remains of meat and sang folk songs (see Malysheva, 2017, p. 352). During the New York period, in 2010, Marina presented the performance “The Artist is Present” which lasted 736 hours with evident magic and sacrificial techniques. Items such as bones, blood, meat, nudity are integral parts of magical practices. There is also special numerical symbolism: 72 objects in “Rhythm 0” (a sum total is nine), or 6 hours for mocking her body, or the name and the performance itself “Rhythm 5” (Belgrade, 1974) during which she went to center of a burning five-pointed star and lost her consciousness. The 13

minutes long film “Balkan Erotic Epic” (2005) is based on studies of ancient Balkan rituals that establish a connection between the genitals and sacred meanings” (Ignatieva, 2014, p. 245, 247). In “Spirit Cooking” cannibalism was imitated. “The communist star will be repeatedly carved on the artist’s belly ... Marina, lying down, tells a story: her face is thrown back - we see it upside down, which can already be interpreted as something negative (as in Tarot cards)” (Malysheva, 2017, pp. 352-353). The star can be interpreted as a more ancient symbol, especially in an inverted state - this is already an occult pentagram.

Now we will consider the work of the sculptor Patricia Piccinini; she turns to biotechnology, showing the “illusory” boundaries by blurring/crossing organic with inanimate, natural with genetically modified, real with fantastic. Technically using a style of hyperrealism that helps her “realistically” embody various modifications of hybrid forms, she hopes for the approval of society and acceptance of the alternative of coexisting with mutants and, more importantly, of people becoming transhumans. She considers her monsters beautiful, defenseless and harmless; using the same ambivalent methods and tricks in order to create the desired impression in the viewer, she “... creates images that are ... seductive and aesthetically attractive” (Toffoletti, 2007, p 140). For example, her advertising presentations feature monsters at homely and disposing environment; hybrids are often female (defenseless females with cubs), next to them are children, i.e. the situation suggests their friendship (see “Still Life with Stem Cells” (Piccinini, 2002)). The audience could perceive the image in the same way as children do - uncritically, friendly, and emotionally. Adult mannequins are often presented as ideal. Here P. Piccinini tries to block all those natural reactions that arise in a human in regards to such creativity. Realism is achieved through anatomical similarity with the use of silicone, modern biomaterials that imitate human skin, wrinkles, freckles; the artist also uses human hair. Most viewers, however, unequivocally call these hybrids ugly, disgusting, and their feelings are at least mixed. Toffoletti (2007) analyzes individual works of Piccinini from the perspective of gender studies and posthumanity. Thus, the first work “Protein Grid” is interpreted as “... erasing boundaries ... The interconnected biological systems of humans and animals are made possible by both the tools of technoscience and the malleable qualities of digital imaging. ... Her images raise the fundamental question of what constitutes identity, difference and being in the posthuman era” (Toffoletti, 2007, p 134). Piccinini (1997) states that the only thing that makes ‘tissue engineering’ weirder than ‘civil engineering’ is a residual humanism that maintains materiality as a moment of absolute difference between things. Aside from this romanticism, there is really no difference between a human and a rat (para. 4). But such programs and methods do not guarantee a true fusion; moreover, there is a certain algorithm: first a breakdown, then a basic change in organisms, and afterwards, binding of these two broken “structures” together. As a result, both systems suffer, losing individuality and self-sufficiency. The borderline and the situation of gross breakage-intervention remain. Hybrids are a reminder, a testament to the disaster that happened, someone’s game crippled the original prototypes. Such hybrid innovations are already parasitizing, proceeding from the fact of their creation (something arose at the expense of and out of another, and another suffered a loss).

Now let us dwell upon clones. In “Still Life With Stem Cells” Piccinini (2002) has created a contemplative and gentle home scene in which a girl sits cross-legged on a large carpet on the gallery floor among many undefined biomorphic forms. These fleshy clumps ... Their folds and wrinkles resemble human ... these forms ... are products of stem cell research. Lulling them... in her hand ... the girl

shows maternal love for these mutant creatures. ... these products of biotechnological manipulation seem to be normal ... ”(Toffoletti, 2007, pp. 150-151). Piccinini’s goal is to dissolve the border, to change the traditional attitude towards cloning and this kind of experiments.

In the work “Game Boys Advanced” (2002) ... she created a silicone sculpture showing two little clone boys ... dressed in casual streetwear ... (but) ... there is something wrong with these boys. Their hair has turned gray and their skin is saggy and covered in sun spots. Boys are in a state of accelerated aging. ... they ... are ... products of unsuccessful cloning technologies. (Toffoletti, 2007, p 153)

The art of Piccinini is an attempt not only to create an apologetics for “improvements”, but to attract women who, on a sensory intuitive level, usually reject such phenomena, but at the same time tend to relate to the weak and the suffering. K. Toffoletti and P. Piccinini describe what is happening as innovation (see Toffoletti, 2007, pp. 163-164), but this is not new, it clearly echoes the ancient ideas of occultists.

Features of the transhumanistic concept of a transhuman and a posthuman: 1. Denial of integrity, uniqueness, autonomy, mystery in the very nature of human, hence the struggle with naturalness. 2. A human as a transitional imperfect species requiring modification and overcoming by more developed hybrids; 3. A perfect being is possible only through the convergence of NBIC technologies in conjunction with occult and magical methods. 4. Hybridization towards the growth of the animal instinctive principle as opposed to human characteristics. The heroization and popularization of demonology, the development of a digital transhumanist bestiary (for example, in computer games). There is necessarily hypersexuality and postgenderism, which, in social terms, hits the institution of the family, and in anthropological terms, it hits a human (Litvinsky, 2019; Rostova, 2020). 5. Introducing new values and aesthetic standards. Hence, the popularization of art methods that allow a human to reduce (to blunt) disgust and fear by increasing the phenomenon of a hybrid-construct in mass culture: a human-animal, a human-cyborg, a human-werewolf with a positive assessment. 6. Inclusion of elements of occult spirituality in art (the process is like a mystery, the artist is an adept, the audience is neophytes, see M. Abramović). 7. Implementation of scandalous provocative art: shocking, provocation, cheating, where the hero is an antihero. For example, a trickster is a joker that is impulsive, craving chaos. It is perhaps no coincidence that the modern media environment is flooded with tricksters who are the harbingers of disasters.

7. Conclusion

Having considered the issue of implementing the concept of a transhuman/a posthuman in contemporary art, having identified its main features, as well as the presence of occult-magical ideas and practices in art, one should emphasize the hybrid or bestiary nature of the creatures of the future. Transhumanist art needs critical analysis, since technologies are becoming more and more realistic and the question rests only on the ethical and aesthetic barriers of traditional consciousness. The mechanism for introducing transhumanistic ideas is as follows: 1. Small doses are added into the mixture of the beautiful and the pleasant. 2. Logical things are shown in a sensual way, and sensual things in a rational

way, i.e. the format of perception is changed. 3. Evil is shown in a complex ambiguous situation of choice. 4. The pure and the kind is being mocked. 5. The victim is diminished, and the maniac is exalted (hero-murderer). 6. The hypertrophied sexuality becomes a fundamental part of the ritual. 7. Religions are mocked in favor of occult-magical versions. 8. The boundaries in different meanings are blurred with the help of artistic techniques: metaphors, allegories, understatement. Due to “Human Enhancement” (HE), an ordinary human being or a human per se will disappear. Therefore, it is important to critically analyze such projects, including the aspect of bestiary design proposed by artists. Actually, under the guise of improvement, the degradation of a human to the state of a hybrid, a zombie, is put forward. The project is presented as a supernova, but the analysis of its foundations and comparison with occult and magical practices clearly indicates antiquity and restoration, including through NBIC Technology and New Age Spirituality. Transhumanists want to create posthuman monsters, convincing us of the safety and necessity of such technologies, but will this lead us to a better world?

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