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PhD thesis summary

The body in the discourses of transhumanism and artificial intelligence. An anthropological perspective.

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The dissertation "The body in the discourses of transhumanism and artificial intelligence. An anthropological perspective" is a work in the anthropology of modernity. It is situated within a relatively new discipline - anthropology of technology (technoanthropology). Its subject is transhumanism - a controversial and emotionally extreme intellectual, cultural, and political movement advocating the need to use the achievements of science and technology to overcome the limitations and improve the condition of the human body. Transhumanist thought permeates western culture today, arousing both fascination and resentment and intellectual doubts, which resound more and more often in polemics between apologists and fierce techno-optimists' opponents. I locate the presented dissertation in the field of reflexive and interpretive anthropology. It has an interdisciplinary character. In the theoretical part of the work I mainly use the findings of philosophical anthropology and myth theory. In addition to the binary coding method traditionally used in ethnology (artificial-natural, real world-imaginary world), I find it fruitful to use the category of *rite de passage* and set many discourses in the context of new mythologies. In part two, dealing with transhumanist practices, I draw on cultural anthropology (especially thoughts on rituals, games and play, cultural stigmatization of the body, fetish, doll, mask, costume, double), visual anthropology (digital image, original/copy, simulacrum), anthropology of things, contemporary art theory, philosophy of technology, phenomenology, sociology (critical theory, symbolic interactionism) and social psychology (concepts of embodied cognition). In the third part, analyzing the performative nature of algorithms and their social impact, I draw on surveillance studies and "sociology of algorithms" research undertaken by STS (Social Technology Studies) scholars, and use the findings of critical studies of algorithmization.

The purpose of this paper is to present transhumanism - a relevant for contemporary culture current of thought, its intellectual program and leading authors. I have made the axis of thought and, at the same time, construction, the topos most relevant to transhumanists - the human body. I study it in two key aspects - theoretical thought and cultural practices. The body is a broad topic in modern anthropology, which offers research tools to conduct insightful analyses. In the perspective outlined by transhumanism, biological embodiment can be and should be changed in the course of dynamic technological progress. In the transhumanist discourse, the body appears as an ambiguous area, it is characterized by variability and indeterminacy, and is in a situation of limbo requiring a choice as to its future form. In the presented work I show the paradoxical status of the body in transhumanism. On the one hand it is treated as something that should be taken care of by subjecting it to various treatments and modifications, on the other hand it has the status of something unwanted because it is subject to the processes of "exhaustion", passing away.

In the first part, I present the functioning definitions of transhumanism in the source texts and commentaries, indicate its historical sources, present the main discourses (the issues of improving the human condition are considered from many perspectives), the main problems of interpretation, and explain how I understand the issue myself. I discuss elementary news about the currents of transhumanism, introduce the most important terms for the movement and the theses of thinkers making a systematic and conscious reflection on technological progress. The leading construct around which I present the history of the current is the body. Then I present the history of transhumanist ideas and the process of emergence of transhumanism as a social phenomenon, a symbolic activity and a cultural fashion developing in the socio-economic conditions of the West. In search of the genealogy of transhumanism, I present the author's division into "transhumanist impulses" (anthropological-philosophical, mythical, metaphysical, aesthetic, futurological) in the history of culture. I reconstruct the influence of historical discourses on the topics that transhumanism deals with today, in order to present in which contexts this thought is embedded and from which ideas it draws most deeply, making their processing and contemporary adaptation.

In the second part of the paper, I introduce the areas in which transhumanism is practiced today, which forces us to intensely ask questions about the type of approximation between the biological and the technological. I present two ways of transhumanism - organic and digital. To practice organic transhumanism is to develop and use technologies to transcend the biological limitations of the body (e.g., expanding perception and cognitive processes through new senses) to experience reality more intensely. Digital transhumanism involves the manipulation of perception and perceptions in new, completely digitally produced anthroposphere (virtual, augmented, mixed reality) which influences the formation of consciousness independent of the "adventures of the body" in the physical world. I begin with a presentation of areas of individual transhumanization inspired by the views of the proponents of the movement in question on the self-transformation of the body. I discuss phenomena such as avatarization as an act of turning out in social media or video games, the proliferation of wearable technology, the undertaking of creative experiments (the cyborg movement) and acts of self-actualization (biohacking) that exemplify organic transhumanism. Relevant to me, issues related to changes in the social perception of the issue of the body, shifting the boundaries of concepts and creating new ways of perceiving corporeality, are raised by new media artists working in the art@science paradigm. The transfer of art to scientific laboratories has resulted in the intensification of such artistic trends as bio art, robotic art, transgenic art and nanotechnology. Therefore, I will analyze the "technological turn" taking place on the ground of visual arts that shape images of the future body. Artistic activities interest me primarily with regard to images of the post-human body and the ways in which they are aesthetically conceptualized.

Along with the transformation of the human body (avatarization, technicization, cyborgization) there is a parallel process, postulated by transhumanists, involving the embodiment of artificial intelligence and the humanization of technology. The new products of transhumanist capitalism - interactive smart toys, social robots, avatars and voice assistants, virtual influencers, digital children, holograms of the dead - are increasingly perfect emotion-simulating artifacts that are becoming part of the lives of the youngest generations referred to as digital natives. I think that "secondary demiurgy" manifests itself today both in the form of a robot as well as a digital, hyper-realistic figure with which one can establish a relationship - these figures touch the ontological foundations of humanity making it possible to bring out the similarities and differences between humans and their artificial creations. I believe that the social inclusion of artificial corporeality nowadays consists in the placement of apparent entities (images without a subject) in the space of social media used to establish interpersonal relations. Therefore, in addition to discussing the robotic forms in which embodied artificial intelligence appears in culture (e.g., in the form of an android or fembot), I also introduce the author's analytical categories of so-called virtual influencers - human-simulating hyper-realistic characters possessing a digital body. In the next chapter, I present the processes that lead to the humanization of technology using the example of Replika - a chatbot that simulates emotions, which are very important in the communication process for humans.

A hallmark of modernity is the mediatization of experience, that is, experiencing the world and participating in it in such a way that is dictated by the media's representation, creation and sharing of images of reality. In this context, the creation of digital synthetic worlds (including the postulated Metaverse) affecting the transformation of corporeality will be discussed.

In the last part of the paper, I propose an anthropological perspective on the seduction of transhumanist technologies in the context of surveillance.

Technological solutions, i.e. artificial intelligence, are gaining today a dimension of supernatural power while the organizations creating, disseminating and controlling it are creating an "algorithmic culture" that fits into the narrative of progress and future proposed by transhumanism.

The work closes with a postulate to develop an anthropology of technology because I believe that humanists should act not only as interpreters but as co-designers of a world changed by science, in which computer science researchers have taken the helm.

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