

Crimes of the *Present* Future. From *Trans*-humanism to the *Post* of Humanity and Society

by Dario Altobelli

Abstract

The debate on transhumanism has been going on for some decades now. Two positions have animated the debate for a long time, one in favor, the other against, but now both seem to be superseded by reality. Proof of this is the expanding market of biotechnology, the mass use of experimental drugs, the multiple technical implementations in the body, the radical transformation of fundamental anthropological aspects such as nutrition and sexuality, and so on. In this perspective, two major issues arise for critical thinking: 1) What exactly does the *transhuman condition* consist of? 2) What are the characteristics of transhumanity and of the social forms connected to them? To begin to answer these questions, a socio-cultural study perspective is adopted by examining Cronenberg's recent film, *Crimes of the Future* (2022), as a work capable of putting such philosophical and sociological questions on an aesthetic level. On one hand, a point of critical attention is identified in the metamorphosis of corporeality and in the fundamental practices connected to basic human needs as nutrition, sexuality, sleep. On the other, in the background scenery we can glimpse forms of an alienated and nihilistic sociality/society represented in the artistic and performative sphere. The film seems to suggest that humans and society are involved in a process of unstoppable *disappearance* and represents the time preceding a complete transhumanism in which the human form will be definitively compromised – properly *murdered* – in its entire physical and psychic complex. Cronenberg highlights the decisive question that seems to escape widespread social perception. Far from being a horizon or a prospect to come, taking the prefix in an etymological sense, *trans*-humanism is a phenomenon of *transit* towards the *post* of humanity and society and it is already the condition of the present time: it is our *present* future.

Keywords: Transhumanism, Cronenberg, Metamorphosis, Body, Society

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic god. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but these organs have not grown on him and they still give him trouble at times.

Freud, 1930/1989, p. 738.

The transhuman condition

The debate around and on transhumanism has been going forward for dozens of years “below the radar”, shall we say, particularly since the 1990s (e.g. Lilley, 2008; Hansell, Grassie, 2011). For quite some time it was a debate limited to certain specific intellectual and cultural circles, most of them from the Anglo-Saxon and continental European areas; in its various forms, it promoted images and imaginaries, representations and depictions, of a humanity “passing onwards” towards a new anthropological form closely linked to the technoscientific sphere. Although different outlooks can be found within this movement, certain elements are common and recurrent.

Transhumanism is basically “a liberation movement advocating nothing less than a total emancipation from biology itself” (O’Connell, 2017). As has recently been observed,

First named in its modern incarnation by FM-2030, transhumanism is an increasingly pervasive movement and an important actant, especially in technology policy and bioethics debates, whose members seek, broadly, to hack the human biocomputer to extend life, increase welfare, and enhance the human condition (Pilsch, 2017, p. 1).

Among its structural and recurrent elements we see, first of all, a blind eagerness for technique and technology in their most advanced, sophisticated forms, primarily in terms of technoscience applied integrally and “invasively” to the human being. It is an approach to technoscience that may be defined as an extreme form of *technophilia*, and it frequently reaches fanatical heights.

Secondly, there is a widespread idea of a necessary and, so to speak, “natural” direction in the evolutionary history of the *Homo Sapiens* species. Based on this presumed “necessity”, according to the transhumanists, the human species is heading towards a radical techno-biological evolution. In their view, the main issue is to govern this process, this transition, this transformation, and to do everything to further it. It is to be encouraged by any means, whether by hastening it whenever possible, accelerating technoscientific development ever more; or by spreading its contents of ideologies and values throughout the population; or lastly,

by politically supporting in social reality and public debate this bio-technological evolution of the human being, both as an individual and as a species, with active interventions in the financial, political, juridical and cultural fields.

The third common aspect in the transhumanist stream, therefore, concerns the specific aim of taking this techno-biological “advancement” to the inner “flesh” of the human being. According to transhumanism perceived through the diverse accents and priorities of its various representatives, the objective of an ever-closer connection of the human being with the technoscientific domain is the search for immortality, the cure of all diseases, the boundless growth of the human faculties. The human form, according to this concept, is limited, insufficient, imperfect, merely “too human”. This is why it must simply be surpassed, transcended, superseded.

The outcome of this profound bio-technological evolution is of course considered and discussed in all sorts of ways. Frequently overcome by a sort of elitist superman frenzy, many upholders of transhumanism care not a scrap about issues concerning the destiny of humanity itself, i.e., about what is to become of the whole of Earth’s humanity. It is no coincidence that in more explicit statements certain eugenic scenario, as “reasonable” as they are “obvious”, are not excluded, scenarios envisaging the effective coexistence of two different human species: one “empowered” and launched towards its own transcendence, a species limited in number and assigned to management and government; the other, the greater part of humanity, governed as a mass of the living, bereft of qualifications and impeded by belated, antiquated biological forms, almost stationary on an evolutionary trail decidedly slower and totally inadequate for a world in accelerating transformation.

With respect to the topic briefly recalled, there are two main positions that have long been animating the debate in public and intellectual opinion (Savulescu & Bostrom, 2009), one simply in favor of it (Bostrom, 2005), the other against (Fukuyama, 2002). On the one hand, the transhumanists themselves with their followers who see and enthusiastically support any adoption by humans, however extreme, of the most advanced technoscientific resources; on the other, thinkers who stress the dangers of this type of transformation, envisaging dystopic scenarios and warning against the acritical support of such a movement and its visions. It is also worth mentioning a parallel line of reflection, fundamentally optimistic

and progressive, which theorizes the “post-human” by identifying significant elements in the human-machine hybridization that pave the way for original new forms of life, with potential positive outcomes for individuals and society (Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999).

This is no place for a critical return to such a lively debate as I tried in other places (Altobelli, 2025). I will rather start from a position of what seems to me an empirical, verifiable fact. This is my first thesis: we find ourselves today at a time when this discussion has entered a new phase. Transhumanism is no longer an idea, a vision, a dream (or a nightmare): what was, and for years and decades has been, a hallucinatory utopia has been decidedly superseded by reality today (Krüger, 2021) and takes on the outline and contents of what is a real ideology. As we shall see at the end, summarized across the whole topic, transhumanism is in fact basically the crystal-clear expression of the delirium of omnipotence inscribed within the West’s project of Modernity founded and sustained on modern science. And further, it is also and above all the most creative and mobile ideological front of the global capitalist system at the moment when – thanks to the technoscientific power exercised throughout reality – it reaches the point of no return in the incessant transformation of the eco-socio-anthropological environment in a gigantic prosthesis of capitalistic abstraction: the techno-bio-social megamachine, interpretable in different ways as an advanced and evolving expression of bio-capitalism (Codeluppi, 2008) and cognitive capitalism (Fumagalli et al., 2019), or along the line of techno-capitalism and “accelerationism” (Land, 2021), and so on.

From this viewpoint, the day of the “Black Mirror” appears over. For a very long time, that famous series dealt with transhumanist topics and issues in fictional terms. The world is effectively a “Black Mirror” episode come true: see the recent “Common People” episode from the seventh season (2025), a sort of brief treatise on contemporary sociology, perfectly and explicitly depicting the present state of bio-techno-capitalism, transhumanism and today’s forms of domination over the human being. In other words, any belief that the question of transhumanism can still be considered a philosophical issue or hypothetical figuration is, to my way of thinking, a serious cultural and political mistake.

We need to seek an understanding of the present social reality in which we are living. As Dupuy, among others, observed some years ago, there is at a general level an “incipient convergence of nanotechnologies, bio-

technologies, information technologies and cognitive sciences” (Dupuy, 2013, p. 51) which are transforming the human and social landscape in every field. Sociologically we note the ever expanding market of biotechnology, the mass use of experimental drugs, the multiple technical implementations in the body at every level considered in clinical and in plastic surgery, both to favor an integral, totalitarian bio-capitalism in which the human is the asset and the asset is the human (think of the subcutaneous microchips as incorporated devices, their debatable, absurd use ranging from cashless payments to activating gadgets), and also to extend generalized mass surveillance over the entire human population, right up to the radical transformation of fundamental anthropological aspects such as nutrition and sexuality, and so on.

This is the current state of the contemporary world that a concerned Ulrich Beck (2016) saw as entrapped within a radical, profound “metamorphosis”: a world which, day after day and bit by bit, is losing any kind of relation and continuity with the whole previous history of humanity.

This leads us to a simple proposition and a second thesis, quite clear and linear: we are already transhuman, we are experiencing a “transhuman condition”, because we are crossing (we have already crossed) the anthropological thresholds on every fundamental level of the bio- and socio-anthropological constitutions of the human and we are at the borders of forms of a still unrevealed post-society. Accepting this perspective, among the many problems that claim immediate reflection and a sensitive awareness of the times in which we live, two major issues arise for critical thinking:

- 1) What exactly does the *transhuman condition* consist of?
- 2) What are or would / could / might be the characteristics of transhumanity and of the social forms connected to them?

To begin to answer these questions, I have adopted a socio-cultural study perspective by examining David Cronenberg’s recent film, *Crimes of the Future* (2022) as a work capable of putting such philosophical and sociological questions on an aesthetic level.

Transhuman scenarios in Cronenberg’s *Crimes of the Future* (2022)

I will not recall the film’s plot, only its main theme. The human, in the way we still commonly understand it, is disappearing every day; it is

trapped by a process of radical evolutionary transformation. It is, properly speaking, in an anthropological and sociological transition phase and is completely conditioned by its – literally “incorporated” – dependence on bio-technological devices and technoscientific resources; and it lives – or rather, it survives – in a world turned upside down by the effects of all this, effects absolutely with no form whatever of control. This is a prelude to an accomplished transhumanism when the human form was to be definitively compromised in its physical and psychic complex: the finishing point, dramatically narrated by the film, is the death of the human as the expression of the *Homo Sapiens* species, its transition and its landfall in a post-humanity. All this is fully depicted in the film which tells the story of the leading figure, a singularly gloomy performer artist, Saul Tenser, who is moving beyond the human condition and is himself experiencing an “accelerated evolution syndrome”.

In dramatically pessimistic tones, the film shows the current “human transition” and suggests at least two possible readings of the phenomenon.

The first deals with the integral alteration of the human starting from his constituent, fundamental attributes – nutrition, sexuality and sleep – that define him as an individual of a well-determined living species and connect him to his wider natural environment and to other living beings. Thus, in the metamorphosis of corporeity and the body according to Cronenberg’s aesthetics, the film identifies a powerful key to understand the phenomenon in question. “The body is reality”, Tenser’s partner and surgeon tells him at one point; and the phrase might be taken as the motto of the Canadian director’s work.

As regards nutrition, the eight-year-old boy Brecken Dotrice represents humanity’s possible future as a literal consumer of plastic. Brecken is, in effect, the first baby born who possesses the genes necessary for him to swallow and digest plastic, something he finds particularly delicious. Other characters in the film, led by Brecken’s father Lang, perform underground surgery on themselves to speed up this transhumanist evolution. He and others embrace plastic consumption and even make plastic chocolate bars to share with each other.

Furthermore, the protagonist himself, Saul Tenser, is no longer able to feed himself independently. He can still “eat” only through the use of a “machine” that “feeds” him. But eating does not bring him any pleasure. It is torture, literally a painful practice, something that no longer feels

part of his “humanity”. The film, unsurprisingly, will end on the pleasure he feels and the “peace” that he achieves once he surrenders to his “new nature” and at long last eats his plastic bar.

As regards sex and sexuality, one of the film’s most meaningful phrases – another motto – is “Surgery as a new sex”. In this dystopian world, humans have become totally numb. There is still the “old sex”, but people no longer practice it because in general they no longer feel anything. Sexual relations occur through extreme forms of sadomasochism, with the mutual infliction of pain through incision-making machines; the practice of technology-mediated mutilation makes feasible a perception of tactility by now physically impossible and renders the emotional and physical connection between the lovers “plastically” achievable only in the form of a generalized violation of their own body and in submission to the spectral, annihilating domination of the machine and of technoscience. It is effectively and specifically the machine that is pleased, it is the machine that touches the body of the other, it is the machine that speaks, as Tenser says in one dialogue. In their sexuality and similarly to other expressions of their biological, outdated basic needs, humans are utterly enslaved by incurable anthropological sterility and can only express themselves in the fetishism of technoscience.

One last point for consideration: sleep. The characters also have beds and chairs that adapt to their body to maximize personal comfort. This furniture is nightmarish, with a skeletal-looking structure and tentacle-like arms that leech on the skin. Sleep, too, is no longer a “natural” human activity. Not even rest seems to have any place within this grim transhuman horizon. One can only sleep attached to a machine, only contained within its womb; or else one can sleep awkwardly, absolutely uncomfortably, on floor or on pallets without warmth and coziness. Or again, as we gather from the film, one can sleep not at all, one can spend the night at performances and events, or else meandering through deserted, spectral spaces, funereal scenarios of a society on the brink of collapse.

If this is the main motive around which the film develops, in the background we can consider a second possible reading focused on glimpse forms of an alienated and nihilistic sociality/society represented in the artistic and performative field. Art too, from free expression, becomes a sadomasochistic self-representation focused on a body perverted and altered in every way by surgery and any kind of intervention, whether physical or psychical. The protagonist himself, Saul Tenser, is an artist

whose talent is to “self-generate” organs through a painful, self-defeating process. He self-produces organs that are cysts, tumors, metastatic bodies etc. to be removed during the artistic performance in front of an alienated, morbidly sick audience.

The obvious metaphor of artistic creation as a painful process investing the creator’s identity here reaches a point of extraordinary dramatization when the work of art and the creative process so conceived become the tumoral output of a malign body within the physical body of the artist. The accomplishment of the work consists in the removal of the foreign body in the presence of an audience of peeping Toms. And all, I should stress, in a society of *voyeurs* with their devices ever at the ready to film the great show, the great performance, the great artist at the moment of his aesthetic gesture, and then to post it on line.

Three questions on transhumanism

In his harsh touch, Cronenberg represents both the figure of transhumanity and the ongoing process of transformation of humanity. A process that we could define as a *true crime* and for which there is no redemption. Cronenberg highlights the decisive issue that nowadays seems to escape widespread social perception. Far from being a horizon or a perspective to come, as previously mentioned, transhumanism is already the condition of the present time: it is precisely our *present future*. In this sense, all we have to do is to add the *trans* prefix in the etymological sense and to simply consider transhumanism a *transit* phenomenon towards the place of a post-humanity and post-society.

I said a true crime, a real crime: I will explain why by referring to three queries that the film manages to pose, directly or indirectly, but which evidently need particular consideration. The three queries are the following and have in part already been foreshadowed: the passage across the “anthropological threshold”; the power of technoscience and its iniquitous link to capitalism; the ideological profile of transhumanism.

Crossing the “anthropological threshold”

As already mentioned, this expression indicates having reached and

far overstepped the limits of the biological, psychic and social constitution of the human as founded in genetic inheritance, biological structure, and inter-person relations, thanks to pervasive, generalized bio-techno-scientific interventions. While the ways and means of this passage are on-going – and Cronenberg’s film reflects upon and bears witness to them – they impact on all the environments of the human and of the living. The result is the progressive definition of a new human species: a *trans-* and *post-humanity*.

The scenarios opening before us urgently require reflection that is, however, totally absent from public and political debate, and even from scientific discussion. The consequences of the process under way are to be calculated at different levels: the level of species, of population, and of the individual.

At the species level, forms are heralded – indeed are already clearly seen in today’s panorama! – of human societies similar to a beehive society, an insect society, a society of organisms mutually and unthinkingly interconnected thanks to pervasive communication technologies, now an integral part of the cognitive and emotional equipment of the masses (e.g. Han, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). This impacts directly on the second level of human populations and their government in terms of the management of a zoologized human population which can be handled with no ethical, juridical or political bounds, as the issue of experimental anti-Covid drugs demonstrated so dramatically; populations therefore to be manipulated, transformed and even suppressed in line with the most antiquated, infamous research in the bio-technological field. Lastly, at the third level of the individual, we see that day by day the human person is losing central place and importance, even recognizability, under the iron heel of an unscrupulous technoscientific apparatus with no sense of moderation in the hands of powerful, inexorable economic-financial interests.

The power of technoscience and its connection with capitalism

Technoscience is supposedly formed from the encounter between modern science in its general epistemological and methodological properties and values, and technology, i.e., the field of application and development of scientific issues. Far from being something pure, disinterested and community-based in search of knowledge, technoscience can be

defined as the apparatus or complex within which are found institutions public and private, civil and military, and academe and publishing, research programs and projects, and so on. It is a far-reaching apparatus completely harnessed by the capitalist logic of profit; it is its military arm capable of penetrating the collective consciousness by reason of an assumed authority which is in fact without foundation whether epistemic or logical, and it exclusively benefits the architects of the capitalist system in its most ferocious and hallucinatory forms such as the so-called “4.0 industry”.

For it and with it, the integral transformation of reality, the world and life becomes possible, to the extent of recreating them in their every aspect and in all their content. Whether the issue be to seek immortality or the capacity to “program” living beings, whether it be to implement nanotechnologies or to modify the human anthropological constitution towards bio-engineering and bio-technology to the point of surpassing it with trans- and post-human forms, whether the intention be to control the weather, to synthesize whole ambiances of natural life such as nutrition and reproduction, or else to colonize cosmic space – the *leitmotiv* of all contemporary technoscience is found in the utopic dimension and in the affirmation of pure *power* (Severino, 1989).

The ideological profile of transhumanism

This, too, has been mentioned, and I will return to it at the end. The exact point at which the ideological function of transhumanism clearly emerges is when the dominant social order and the global capitalism, that is its continuous horizon of sense, of implementation and of realization in reality, are naturalized. The *inevitability feature* of technoscientific advance and the *naturalization* of the social order, starting from the capitalistic form of life (Altobelli, 2023a), are presented by the transhumanists as inevitable: an evolutionary “destiny”.

Before or together with transhumanism and for the whole of the twentieth century, many scientists, researchers, technologists and technocrats produced public discourses widely varying in tone and content, yet all sharing an inexhaustible faith in “progress” and in the emancipatory power of technoscience. For a long time, the whole of one current of thought within the technoscientific field exalted the potentials of the

results obtained in each sector of the applied sciences, directing them wholly to the welfare of humanity, albeit along the lines of a radical transformation of both the human being and society. Within this tradition we can see the over-stepping of the threshold between utopia and ideology in the technoscientific field (Altobelli, 2012) that seems to have achieved completion today. Transhumanism, as I have discussed elsewhere, is a utopia turned ideology (Altobelli, 2023b), perhaps the last in this centuries-old affair: here we see the complete development trajectory of an idea situationally transcending reality (Mannheim, 1929), promoted by emerging social groups connected to the technoscientific and economic spheres that they are themselves capable of producing and developing, within a social imaginary that houses bio-social neo-reality and diffuses it as being obvious and even desirable.

Some brief conclusions

To return to the questions I asked; firstly – What exactly does the *transhuman condition* consist of? – the answer might be that it consists of a passage, a transitory condition that is painful and senseless, violent and perverse, that denies the human, offends him, humiliates him in order to “supersede” him, i.e., literally to destroy him as he has been for thousands of years.

As for the second question – What are or would / could / might be the characteristics of transhumanity and of the social forms connected to them? – the answer suggested in the film is sufficiently clear regarding the fearsome, annihilating social scenario with which it culminates, in the only moments it shows of sociality, moments of artistry with tones and forms that are violent and grotesque.

The film thus seems to effectively show how human beings and society are – *today* – involved in a process of unstoppable *disappearance* and, in the narrative fiction, represents the last time preceding a complete transhumanism in which the human form will be definitively compromised – actually *murdered* – in all its physical and psychic complex.

There are evidently no definitive answers to the questions asked. Asked they must be, however, and formulated with regard to our present time. With reference to our contemporary societies, it has recently been stated, in a broad and widespread public debate throughout the world,

that:

the source of suffering, in fact, is located in the structure of a dystopian society, prisoner of the dark combination of *absolutism of commodification* and *ontology of immutability*. The first postulate aims to make the human person a mere commodity negotiable on the market, the second to suppress the tension towards the ethics of nature and the satisfaction of man's essential needs (Bradanini, 2023).

I have attempted to outline the features of this configuration referring to Cronenberg's masterpiece; I wish to add the remark that "the truly unthinkable side of our civilizational discontent is that we may well be the first human society to think of itself as the *last*" (O'Neill, 2004, p. 2).

With such an outlook, we urgently need to think and discuss what is happening as well as taking decisions that run contrary – that *must* run contrary – to the dominant order of things and to the gigantic interests at play. Among these: stopping or at the very least slowing down technoscience and any further development in a number of fields, from AI to robotics, from genetic research to space research. To recall the title of a famous story by E.M. Forster (1909), we need to "stop the machine". Just as we do not need a new cell phone or a "smart" city, likewise we do not need to place our lives inside pervasive and invasive digital networks, nor do we need to continue fueling the huge bio-medical and pharmaceutical industries that seek profit at the cost of our public health. To state the banally obvious: having a chip in your wrist to pay for a coffee or open a door, as well as to "monitor" your vital values according to the most forbidden and invasive bio-medical industry, is an idiocy as well as a cage from which you cannot escape. It is not difficult to understand. And it is in no way acceptable that certain "innovations" are imposed on humans "for their own good" without even a public, open and democratic discussion. Ultimately, personal freedom is the principle of humans and society.

To such a world, to such a transhumanism that is its sweetly poisoned candy, we can – we must – oppose an absolute refusal, a human refusal.

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