

Posthumanism and its Reflection on Visual Media

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Abstract

This article discusses modern philosophical ideas of posthumanism and transhumanism and their effects on visual media. The fundamental issue these theories raise is posthumanism, which asserts that scientific discoveries or evolutionary processes can change, transcend, or eliminate humanity. Another definition is the practice of this belief as expressed through the arts, sciences, or philosophy. A typical scenario is one where robots or computers rule over humans. Posthumanism is a highly eco-conscious movement. Due to the development of advanced technologies, virtualization, artificial intelligence, etc., the modified social reality requires understanding the moral, ethical, normative, and legal causes and effects of humanism and technology.

A posthuman future scenario includes an immortal human virtual life rich in fresh, exceptional experiences of both real and simulated realities and the complete symbiosis of humanity with superintelligence. This simulation dream has already been nearly realized, one medium where this concept has been explored in movies. The posthumanist movement and its various themes have been examined in several Hollywood movies. This article overviews posthumanist theory and discusses how it has been a significant theme in recent movies and other visual media, including many films and animations. It also examines how movie directors use plot and narration to approach and apply this subject, with a few examples of films and television shows.

Keywords: Posthuman, Posthumanism, Transhuman, Transhumanism, Visual language, Media, Bio-human, Digital subject, Nomadic subject, Cyborg

1.0 Introduction

Posthuman has several definitions. The term "human" refers to the species Homo. 'Post' is a Latin word that means 'after' in English. Therefore, the term "posthuman" denotes a period following the emergence of humans. According to modern science, several human species have existed over the last three million years. Each species and subspecies of the genus Homo has gone extinct, causing this to occur repeatedly (Peter. W, 2012). In "posthuman" eras, knowledge of every extinct human species is available. For news and entertainment, one can read fiction writers or theories about earlier Homo species (Yuval, N. H, 2011).

There are concerns when the discussions restrict to "posthuman" in the sense of Homo sapiens. Ancient humans no longer exist. Our knowledge of archaic posthumanism, which predates even before language development ('prehistoric' times), comes from religion, history, and mythology. The remaining primitive

humans should protect by preventing them from being completely eradicated by the modern human species.

Modern posthuman knowledge is referred to current events, entertainment, and science fiction (Norah C and Mike S, 2010). There are "posthuman" events, posthumans in and of themselves. Imaginary hypothetical posthumans living in the future are common in science fiction. Posthumans are a subset of cyborg technology. The period in which humans currently live is known as middle posthuman knowledge. In dystopian fiction titled "Late Posthuman," all modern humans (apocalyptic, Artificial Intelligent (AI) - controlled) are fully cyborgs Garand A, 2015).

Posthumanism

The posthumanism concept was developed in the 1990s by writers like D. Haraway, C S. Lewis, C. Hales and R. Braidotti. However, Hassan first introduced the term, 'posthumanism,' in his article Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture (Irene S and Lewis W, 2020). Posthumanism includes various aspects such as postmodernism, technology, poststructuralism, feminism, and postcolonial studies (J Lorimer, 2009). The tendency to de-Anthropologie discourse without much emphasis on altering human biology is one aspect of the philosophical idea that unites it despite its fragmented nature.

The unusually high degree of interdisciplinarity distinguishes posthumanism from other theoretical movements. A similar but different posthumanism is emerging in several academic disciplines. Both older disciplines, like philosophy, physics, geography, and sociology, and newer ones, like media, science and technology, gender, and animal studies, examine it. Due to its use across various disciplines, the term "posthumanism" and the theories surrounding it use different names (J Lorimer, 2009). Another word, "turn," that refers to movement has several ambiguous tags, such as material turn, which contrasts with linguistic turn, speculative turn, or ontological turn (Basak A and Safak H, 2023). Cyborgs, monsters, actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology, or the media are just a few different paths; these "turn" and ways of thinking can be taken. Even though they are all very different theories and lines of thought, posthumanism can somehow group or connect them. According to Badmington (2006), the word "post" in "posthumanism" refers to something separate from humanism rather than something that comes after it. The term "post" challenges humanistic paradigms of thought and clarifies what it means to think unconventionally and subversively. Ironically, humanities are still often incorporated into humanities.

2.0 Posthuman Representation in Visual Media

Posthumanism and its various themes have been explored in several Hollywood movies. These movies often depict advanced technology and its possible effects, raising concerns about Humankind's potential for advancement and limitations. This film genre encourages viewers to reflect on the nature of humanity and its place in the universe through intellectual stimulation and entertainment. This article discusses how posthumanism theories are used in some Hollywood films. A few posthumanism-related topics covered in these movies include Body Without Organs (BWO), cyborgs, and interactions between humans and posthumans (Mengqian C, 2018). The audience can become accustomed to live-action films more quickly than animated ones. These films' settings and environments were created to resemble our current environment. As a result, it draws the audience into the film, and afterward, they might start to doubt or

second thoughts on the place of humans in the current wave of technological innovation (Judy E, 2019, Mengqian C, 2018).

As technology has advanced in the twenty-first century, the question of our humanity has become more pervasive. Our technological capabilities have grown exponentially, and technology has started to resemble human bodies more. By the end of the 20th century and into the new millennium, cyborgs, a fusion of machines and an organic human body representation, are thriving. Western audiences have been fascinated by the Cyborgs in blockbuster films, possibly due to the subliminal awareness that human culture appears to be transitioning into a posthuman world (Hayles K, 1991). This is partially a result of the realization that the machine is rapidly advancing to a point where it may soon outperform its creator's abilities.

It is interesting to observe that, when considering the presence of cyborgs in contemporary film, both representations of machines and technologically enhanced organic organisms emphasize their superiority to humans in every way. The viewer is drawn to the characters' human characteristics in most cyborg representations (Mehdi M et al, 2018). This may play into a mental inferiority complex in humans who worry they might fall behind their posthuman counterparts. Hollywood productions like, *Be Right Back*, *Avatar*, *The Matrix*, *Terminator*, and *Inception* are examples of works exploring posthumanism themes. Many of these movies portray a future where a technologically advanced human race fundamentally altered humanity. This technological advancement raises concerns about what it means to be a human in a world where technological advancements have outpaced our biological capacities (Jenna A and Lee R, 2018).

2.1 Movie 1 - *Be Right Back*

An episode of a British science fiction anthology series (*Black Mirror*, 2013) known as "*Be Right Back*" is an excellent example of how posthumanism theories can be applied in television. The episode explores the relationship between technology and human emotions, the blurring of the lines between humans and other species, and how technology has influenced how humans view death.

The show *Be Right Back* centers on Ash and Martha, a young couple who are both social media addicts. Ash was killed in a car accident the next day they moved into their new home. Due to Martha's intense sadness, she begins communicating with and expressing her emotions to Ash's robotic clone. The clone can mimic Ash's voice and personality using Ash's previous online communications and social media profiles. The movie depicts Martha's internal struggle and conflict when interacting with Ash's clone. Ash is a BWO clone, which is an organ less body. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze first projected the concept of a BWO (SEP, 2022). In Gilles' opinion, everybody has unique traits and routines. However, the BWO permeates by unformed, unstable matter that flows at various rates (Meenu G, 2018). Deleuze and Guattari assert that the BWO offers a smooth space for movement (Lysen F and Patricia P, 2012).

Martha contemplates her emotions in the clone Ash. Even though she is aware that the clone Ash is only displaying the traits of data created by the system, she still desires to deceive herself into believing that Ash is still with her. Deleuze and Guattari define BWO as: "On it, we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it, we penetrate and are penetrated; on it, we love (Buchanan I, 1997). Martha expresses her love for the device. Clone

Ash is a body, not an organism. He can only mimic behavior and not act like a real person. It is strange how the clone Ash and Martha were connected. Martha wants Ash, the clone, to act as much as possible like Ash; however, when she explains to the clone Ash what the real Ash would do in specific situations, she starts to feel less like the real Ash. Eventually, Martha finds herself in a challenging, uncomfortable situation. Ash, the clone, was transformed into a thing, a pet, and a toy to her. Although Martha knew that Ash was a clone, she had already attached too much emotion to this BWO and could not let it go.

In "Be Right Back," the concept of technology surpassing human limitations is also explored. The AI-Ash can converse with Martha and provide companionship, but it also raises concerns about when technology can imitate human emotions and whether it can replace a human (Effinger E, 2014). The idea that technology will eventually outsmart human intelligence is also explored in this episode. As AI-Ash learns to recognize and respond to human emotions, Martha starts questioning the nature of her feelings for the clone Ash and what it means to be a human. This makes people wonder how the human mind interacts with technology and whether it is even possible for the mind to exist independently of it.

2.2 Movie 2 - Avatar

The movie Avatar, directed by James Cameron (2009), exemplifies how posthumanism theories can be incorporated into Hollywood motion pictures. The film explored the interaction of people and nature, the blending of the human and non-human worlds, and the impacts of technology on how people view the world was explored in this movie.

A wide range of issues that the human race is currently facing is examined in this movie. Fundamental issues like first-world dominance (and the subsequent ensuing third-world destruction), the weakening of morality in a capitalist society, bigotry, and environmental issues such as global warming were discussed (Christine K, 2011). One of the biggest fears depicted in this film is the inferiority of the human race in comparison to the physically superior Na'vi, a fictional constructed language created for the film Avatar. Only by creating a technology that transfers a human's soul and minds into an organism genetically altered and enhanced, such as a Na'vi body, will it outperform the native Na'vi. The technology and machinery that humanity controls on Pandora can be disabled by a Na'vi body (played by Jake Sully, an Avatar character). Despite the use of destructive and powerful technology by the human military, the Na'vi can conquer humans because of their physically larger size than humans, their adaptations to the Pandora world, and their magical ties to their surroundings. To further reinforce the idea of posthumanism, Jake Sully eventually decides to take his avatar form rather than remain in his human form. However, through the interaction between machines and humans, only his character could decide completely submit to the Na'vi race.

Particularly in Foucault's studies (Foucault M, 1990), sexuality and sex are among the most frequently discussed subjects that apply to posthumanism. The incredible physical attributes of the Na'vi, a hybrid of human and animal, exude this sexuality and appeal to humans. They do not restrain their sexuality and lack social inhibitions from the human experience.

Cyborgs play a vital role in this film's story and underlying themes. In this movie, Jake Sully's avatars are cyborgs; the first changes from a pure machine into a human, and the second changes from humanity into

a technologically advanced organism. According to Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of a machine and an organism (Donna H, 1991). It can exist in both the real world and in fiction.

2.3 Movie 3 - The Matrix

Another best example of how posthumanism theories can be used in science fiction is the Hollywood movie, *The Matrix*, released in 1999. The film by the Wachowskis explores the concepts of virtual reality and the blending of the human and machine worlds. This film portrays a dystopian future in which intelligent machines have enslaved humans. The human population is imprisoned in the Matrix, a virtual reality machine-created world where humans live in a simulated world where the machines use their bodies as an energy source. Neo, the film's protagonist, is played by Keanu Reeves. Neo, a hacker, joins a revolution against the machines after discovering the truth about the Matrix.

The theme of the movie, *The Matrix*, challenges the traditional human-centered perspective on the world, so it is a foremost example of the application of posthumanism. According to the movie, humans are not the dominant species on Earth but rather just a source of resources for machines. Humans are relegated to a submissive position in a world where machines are the true rulers. Technology surpassing human limitations is another theme explored in this movie. In this movie, the machines have created an indistinguishable virtual reality from the real world and have the power to manipulate the laws of physics (Daniel K, 2012). In addition, the film explores the idea of technology surpassing human capabilities. Humans are trapped in virtual reality while their bodies serve as an energy source for machines. This raises concerns about the nature of reality and how technology shapes our perception of the world. It is unknown how the body and the mind relate to one another or if they can be separated.

2.4 Movie 4 - Terminator

The *Terminator* (1984) is James Cameron's movie series, in which posthumanism theories are utilized in a narrative. Artificial intelligence and the fuzziness of the boundaries between humans and machines are the themes explored in this series (Joel K, 2015). The movie is set in a dystopian future where machines have turned against humans and are in danger of eradicating the human race. A machine-created cyborg assassin (acted by Arnold Schwarzenegger) who planned to travel through time to kill Sarah Connor, the mother of the head of the human resistance, by going back in time. The main character, Kyle Reese (acted by Michael Biehn), is, sent back in time to safeguard Sarah and stop the emergence of the machines.

In the series, machines are portrayed as more powerful and intelligent than people, capable of manipulating space and time to achieve their goals. This suggests that instead of being the dominant species on Earth, humans are merely a resource/source of information for machines. The theme of technology overcoming human limitations is also explored in the series. The first *Terminator* movie features a self-regenerating cyborg assassin that is practically indestructible. The movie also explores the idea of technology surpassing the human body; the cyborg assassin can infiltrate society by adopting a human appearance and mimicking human emotions and behavior.

The *Terminator* series is a prime example of how posthumanism theories can be used in Hollywood motion pictures. The movie theme poses concerns about the nature of life and how technology affects our

perception as it explores the theme of technology surpassing the human body and challenging the conventional human-centered view of the world.

2.5 Movie 5 - Inception

The concept of the mind, the blending of reality and imagination, and the influence of technology on how we perceive the world are all aspects of posthumanism theories explored in the film, *Inception* (Christopher Nolan). *Inception* is set in a virtual world where advanced technology makes individuals enter the dreams of others. The protagonist, Cobb, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, is a skilled extractor capable of entering into other people's dreams and taking their secrets. A wealthy, powerful businessperson hired him to perform an inception, which involves putting an idea into the target's head rather than extracting information.

The movie was a great example of posthumanism because it criticized the conventional, human-centered way of seeing the world. The movie's characters are seen to be able to use technology that can be used to control human thought to enter and exert control over other people's dreams. As a result, it can be inferred that humans are merely a source of knowledge for advancing technology and are not the dominant species on Earth.

Characters in the movie can enter and control others' dreams, thoughts, and emotions. This raises questions about the interrelationship and potential separation of the mind from the body. The movie explores the idea that technology is concealing the human mind, questions the conventional human-centered worldview, and raises issues regarding the nature of reality and how technology affects how people perceive the outside world.

3.0 Conclusion

Technology, rejecting anthropocentrism, and the collective subject are three main features of posthumanism (Lewis S Richard, 2021). Analysis of theoretical foundations of visualization trends in the media concluded that societal dehumanization results from a new system of social values based on ownership of media, channels, and information technologies. Similar to how texts are being replaced by visual content and clip thinking in journalism by post-humanistic trends. Digitalization has brought verbal text on par with audiovisual content in the new technological reality (Chaume F, 2013). On the downside, focusing solely on visual communication, one is thought to become estranged from literature and encourage the rapid, targeted advance of a common informational, aesthetic, and cultural code. In modern communication, media aesthetics are essential. The media's aesthetics, which emphasize the value of the human being while not precluding the development of humanistic traditions, are combined with a post-humanistic extra-emotional (Simakova, S., 2020). In these circumstances, infographics are a particularly effective media tool for transforming posthumanism reality perception processes.

Watching and recording how technologies are actualized, emphasized, and deified is now possible. Studies on transhumanism and posthumanism complement and correlate anthropological discourse and analysis rooted in Aristotle and ancient philosophy. The development of the anthropological potential of advanced technology implies philosophical and cybernetic anthropology (Pfaffenberger, B, 1992). Online

mythology, however, is growing as a creative subgenre; advanced high-tech sacralization often serves as a challenging ideology well-liked by many adept audiences in the information age.

All five movies discussed in this article are excellent examples that demonstrate how posthumanism theories can be applied in television series, motion pictures, and science fiction. These visual media creations explore the idea that technology surpasses human intelligence, challenge the conventional human-centered perspective of the world, and explore the relationship between technology and human emotions. A provocative episode of this series challenges viewers to reflect on their humanity in light of the advancement of technology and its potential to mimic human emotions. These movies encourage viewers to think about or consider their humanity over advanced technology and their relationship with the natural world.

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At the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that informatization and virtualization, digitalization, robotization, and computerization cover more and more spheres of human life — it is possible to record and state the actualization and accentuation of technologies, their kind of sacralization and dedication. Trans- and posthumanist studies correlate and complement anthropological discourse and rejection dating back to Aristotle and ancient philosophy. The anthropological potential of high-tech is also correspondingly increasing and multiplying, implying mainly philosophical and cybernetic anthropology. On the other hand, online mythology is developing as a genre of creativity. The worship and deification of robots and robotics are taking place. High-tech sacralization often acts as a competitive ideology in demand among a broad audience of adepts in our information age.

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