

Mutation in Human Nature. The Doll as a Posthuman Being and the Formless Metahuman as ‘Other’

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Abstract

Humans live and survive in an environment, that they constantly destroy. The human being incapable of seeing beyond its own limits, while the obsession with beauty standards and ideals, the aesthetics of the masses, and immortality, deluges its everyday life, and defines the inside and outside appearance. The human changes its nature while intervening in others' nature, ignoring the consequences upon its body, and creating a new being (or several), a new formula/ model, which is increasingly alienated from the human and the human genome. The concept of the doll which I introduce in the article, aims to discuss the challenges between the human figure and the “other”—which has many different interpretations- while using a term with historical and artistic value (the doll) that bridges the gaps between species, entities, humans, and animals etc. and leads the way to a new form of entity, infused with life and technology.

Keywords: Doll; Figure; Human; Posthuman; Metahuman

Introduction

From day to day, we face, subconsciously or not, a new kind of *doll*. Inside a display window, there are one or more mannequins dressed in high fashion clothes, fast fashion, or other fashion objects (such as the lobster look-like breastplate, made by Man Ray, 1890). The doll has had many faces throughout the centuries. There is no limitation. It is a space for experimentation. It's exempt from norms. Through the mannequin dolls, we see many different faces of the *doll*, not within any traditional definitions, but broadening and expanding its notion, use and significance, emphasizing the new forms of representation with contemporary and posthuman dimensions.

Every era, every place, culture and the different influences, stereotypes, and theories, build each time a new field where the doll is created or recreated, changed, distorted, or deconstructed, and ever-growing into a *posthuman doll*. I should clarify that my use of the definition posthuman, is not restrictive or absolute, but encloses other related, but at the same time juxtaposed, theories such as the metahuman, transhuman, critical posthuman etc. While holding a critical position, I want to analyse the doll in these theories and expand the different representations of the term (doll), which is used as an umbrella term, in different spectrums. The field of study of the doll is wide, having various characteristics, that depend on different factors (environment, era, culture, society etc.) wherein analysed. Hence, it is important to highlight its essence and urge for the redefining of the figure, the human condition, the body, and the *other* (used here for every out-of-the-norm entity or

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other existence, apart from the human), without any binaries or limitations, and interacted with their environment and other forms of existence. In this way, the doll encompasses all forms of entities, animate and inanimate, natural and artificial, that can be either *living or dead*.

In my current research, I study the large spectrum of the concept of the doll. From prehistoric times till now, the meaning of the doll has had various interpretations and uses. As we live in a constantly transforming world, the redefinition of terms and concepts is crucial. Dolls can be highly versatile as a term, while it has great historic and cultural significance. We can see hundreds of different dolls, each one fulfilling another purpose. The Barbie dolls have flooded, for decades, the display windows of toy stores, while they can look similar to the mannequins of clothing shops or when displayed as sex dolls or reborn baby dolls, replacing real babies. The doll is generally a figure, the posthumanist or metahumanist doll, is the modern term for the definition of the figure, and the doll, the character/hero, etc, which is situated within the fantasy/sci-fi world, and reality. It can be an art piece, a new kind of exhibit with different interpretations and aspects, which encapsulates the complexity and the multidimensional facet of the figure (human, animal, fantasy figure, artificial, object or subject, etc.). The posthuman or metahuman doll, are two differentiated perspectives of interpreting the *doll*. They both encapsulate diversity and highlight the importance of movement/moving/animate, acceptance, otherness, and complexity, while reconciling with the environment and all its cohabitants, without any clear boundaries separating them and making one superior to the other (Figure 1). But then, concerning the metahumanist doll, I want to clarify that I speak of an enslaved body, which in some way, it can be infused with life, but its movement is still limited in a technocratic space. If it breaks its restraints, then it may become metahuman.

Figure 1. Ram Shergill (2022). Posthuman Bodying, PhD work²



² See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2022/mar/posthuman-bodying-artwork-explores-relationship-between-humans-and-natural-world>



I want to critically discuss the concept of the doll, as an umbrella term which can have many different interpretations, read through a posthumanist view/scope, but also analyse it in other related theories, such as metahumanism and transhumanism. I do not intend to give a clear definition of the doll as a posthuman, metahuman or other product, but rather analyse it in order to understand and present its different significations, figurations and representations. The relation between the doll and the human is prominent. However, I want to prove the connection between different types of existence, the artificial and the natural, the animal and the anthropomorphic, and how the boundaries are limited and breached.

As Metahumanism seeks to understand and constantly rethink the importance of movement and the body, as well as challenging our human nature, supremacy and life, I believe that the doll is related to such topics and discussion, as it has many faces and one way or another, it is close to the fundamentals of an entity, of existence. It challenges the borders and limitations between species and forms of life, whether real or artificial (or fantasy and sci-fi). If only we think of the different body parts and how they are connected/tied one to another, the different moves and how much liberated or not are we to make those movements, like a doll, but on the other hand, the doll wants to be liberated, like a human.

What does it mean to be human or other?

Technologies of cloning, stem-cell engineering, cryogenics, Artificial Intelligence and xenotransplantation blur borders of animal, human and machines in what might be thought of as a new organicism (or even ‘organism?’) (Pramod, 2000). We witness a kind of mutation, a radical change in the figure, the shape, and the whole composition of an entity, the human or other, which is encountered triumphantly in modern life, but in nature, as well. Besides, it’s not by chance that technology and consumerism, for example, are very often, critically represented through the different kinds of figures and representations in science fiction and fantasy, from cyborgs and androids to bionics, machines and automatons, but also other forms of fantasy characters such as vampires or zombies, they all encapsulate another form of life, more or less human, and proving the thin lines between the “natural” and the artificial, the reality and fantasy, the human or machine, the living or the dead, etc. On the other side, the model (as in fashion), the piece of art as an object or a kind of figure, an animated or graphic novel character, or a fantasy hero, but also as a toy doll, or a newborn, or as a sex doll, they represent another aspect of the doll (body, form, shape etc), either darker and gothic—“Body gothic is interested in forms of corporeality that escape the ordinary” (Reyes, 2014)—or as mass production product and blonde! No reason to ask, do we live in a Barbie world?

As Kim Toffoletti (2007, 8) says, Barbie enables new formulations of the subject...(she) does not mask or reflect reality; they become our reality. This proves the turn to new ideals as well as representations and influences on the figure, and thus a posthuman figuration, which is highly imitating and a simulacrum of a real figure, which nevertheless, looks very human, (or) very authentic. Therefore, identity, singularity, and such, are slowly washing away, and the idea of real or artificial/fantasy, natural or Human-made, animate or inanimate, are blurred and confused. The meaning of the posthuman is extended and the notion of life is broadened, but also mutated and transfigured, in a way... The body though, as corporeal is surpassed and nature changes. As Katherine Hayles suggests (1999), the posthuman is not a threat to the human being—after all, it is the human being, or better said, an extension of the human being- but shows the will and, possibly, the urge for a strong relation between the two, and the breaking of boundaries, or the challenging

of their limits. But what happens when the “posthuman” gets more control over the “human world”? Does it already have it?

The posthuman represents a hyperreality condition, as Jean Baudrillard suggests, meaning that we are no longer capable, or we will not be in the near future, to distinguish reality from its simulation. That also means, we will not be able to see the difference between a natural and an artificial being. This hyperreality condition portrays much more than a penetration into the human body through different technologies. Consequently, what matters, and what I want to prove is the multidimensionality and significance which is given to the figure (doll) through the various representations, or else transformations and mutations, fuelled by technological and scientific development, and influenced by the different eras, civilization, socio-political matters, etc. and hence making a versatile, powerful, and unique being, that shakes the edges, the limitations and dualisms, such as human or not human, animate or inanimate, living or dead, natural or artificial, animal or human, human or fictional character, etc. Therefore, I want to highlight the significance of the doll as a field for reconsidering and rethinking the human, how technology is used and will/should be used in the future, how technology and the figure, as an entity, form, human or other, are intertwined, how we can observe and change accordingly the circumstances to create a liveable, better future for all. The doll, as an open space of representation, can reflect figurations of mutated or dystopian or corrupted realities and fantasies, which may contribute to a better understanding of humanity.

Everything seems fragile and fluid, which leads to Rosi Braidotti’s “What does it mean to be human?” (2013). Nevertheless, the boundaries between the body and the mind are blurred. The body, the mind, intelligence, and critical thinking, elevate our humanity, but what happens when the body changes, is infused with technology and is turned into a new kind of being, with various animal characteristics (animalistic), or else? And, what about its environment and interaction with it? These are some fundamental questions for the posthuman theory to rethink, which offer new interpretations and challenges. In *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), and all his works, Hayao Miyazaki illustrates the relationship between the environment, the human, and the animals. This relationship between them is unequal and the effects of human exploitation on nature are serious. His characters show the need for discussing fundamental matters, such as demolition, exploitation of nature, and machinery. In *Spirited Away* “No Face” character is an embodiment of the posthuman figuration. It is a humanoid being, neither human nor robot, neither dead nor alive. It is empowered by human weakness and symbolizes the marginalized, that seeks to break its bonds and change the world.

Sci-fi asks, what does it mean to be ‘truly’ human, or ‘merely’ machine or animal? Animal studies suggest that species borders do not exist, all species/beings should be treated as different and unique. All lives on the planet are interconnected, and one is related to the other. Borders between living organisms or things are breached. Humans are not so human after all, while the android, an artificial intelligence being, is becoming more and more human-like and conscious. Humans can take many different forms and are now placed in a far transitional stage. Alexander McQueen, the English fashion designer/artist, challenged the borders between animals and humans when he presented the fashion piece *It's a Jungle Out There*, making us wonder about the distinction between humans and animals or any other forms of life. His pieces prove deep worries about the limits between humanity, nature, and other lives. McQueen creates unique identities and personalities while challenging norms and showing his concern for human evolution. The Sarabande dress (2007) proves a sincere respect towards nature and emphasises its vital significance for life, and its close



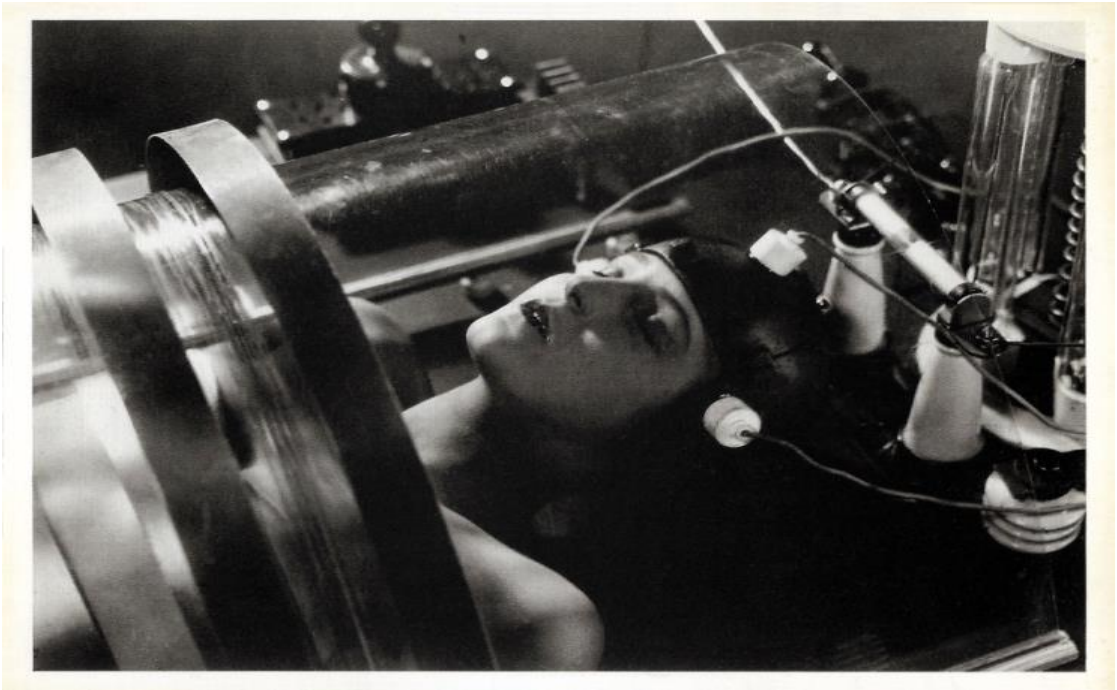
connection between the human and the natural world. Is it metahuman to think that there are no borders, no distinctions and categorical differences between humans, the animal kingdom and nature?

The human being could be moving towards a posthumanist entity, as posthumanists suggest, like Katherine Hayles (1999) “we have always been posthuman” or maybe better, as S. L. Sorgner (2022) affirms in “we have always been cyborgs”. The human form changes. From one stage to another, the posthuman is getting stronger, more unique, and rich. Through the posthuman element, the body has new dimensions, while at the same time, the notion of the body is redefined... “posthumanism both shapes and is shaped by attempts to change the way most people think about humans and humanity” (Dedeoğlu & Zampaki, 2023). “Posthumanism is... a way to understand and access what’s happening. In this sense, I define Posthumanism as a philosophy of existence” (Hassan, 2021). On the other hand, identifying the doll as a metahuman figure, offers new perspectives and possibilities, while thinking of the form/shape as movement, a figuration that wants to exceed its limits, go beyond its controlled existence and ask for alternative ways of life, and coexistence of all entities natural or “other”. The doll embodies in a unique way all these concepts, emphasising the multidimensional of the body and the figure, as well as a certain mutation, moving from one condition to another.

The posthuman and metahuman urgency

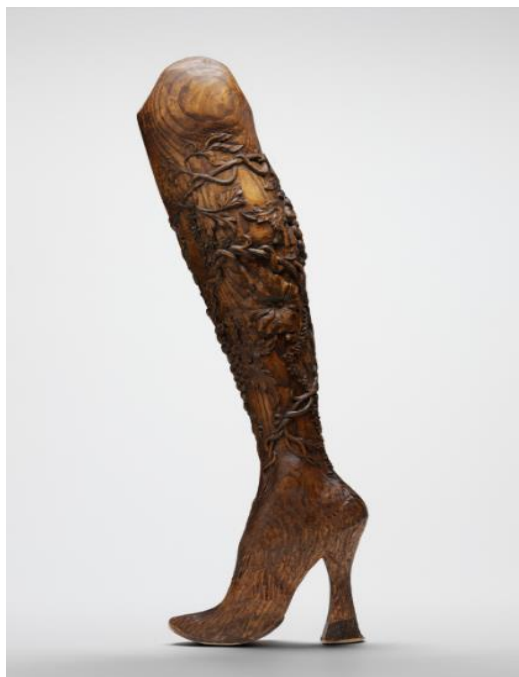
Mutation comes from the way of living and the choices we make. Mutation answers to every interruption of the course of nature, and the devastating intervention of the human being on the long-suffering planet. Not only is our nature seriously affected, but the human being itself. From modernism to posthumanism or other, the human condition changes rapidly. J. G. Ballard (1930-2009), the acclaimed contemporary writer of science fiction, expresses his worry about the human condition and evolution, while it seriously affects the planet and all life. He depicts the necessity for “*land ethics*” while showing the great exploitation of nature and the idea of human superiority. And as Aldo Leopold (1949) said, “when we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect”. In his vision, humans and land are intertwined. Ballard, in his part, deconstructs anthropocentrism as a condition that separates and deepens the gap between the human and its environment (nature, animals, etc). In this way, the human being should lose its superiority and atomism and move towards a reconciliation with the planet and itself and in the direction of higher ideals. Human exploitation in science fiction and fantasy has been generally illustrated through a dystopian and obscure standpoint, rather representing forthcoming mechanized devastation and the domination of technology and its controversial creations. *Metropolis* (1927) is one of those key sights that can be interpreted in both ways, as a thriving example of technological advance, or on the other hand, as a dark smog covering humanity and multiplying its non-human makings (Figure 2). So, now comes a big question: when does human domination and power end and what can we do to alter our human weaknesses? We need a turn towards new ways of thinking and new possibilities, and becoming(s), with respect to our surroundings. We need to redefine ourselves, and the meaning of our existence, towards an interactive relationship between the human and the non-human. There is an imminent need for opening up our bodies to the unknown and exploring all limits and possibilities. In this way, human interaction with technology and others, changes, and we as humans (or maybe not so human) become something else, something other.

Figure 2. Still from *Metropolis*, F. Lang, 1927



There are many different forms of mutations, in the use of technology in life, and there can certainly be positive or promising results. The combination of art, fashion, human life, nature, and technology in Sputniko's (Korean artist), *Nanohana Heels*, is one of those vibrant examples. She gives a new perspective, on both life and art, in respect and in accordance with nature. This pair of shoes becomes something more than its initial purpose. By offering a challenging idea of creating a pair of shoes that plant rape seeds (Nanohana) into the soil through mechanical high heels. Using the heels, rapeseeds are automatically planted as the user walks (Kushino, 2012), Sputniko represents an alternative and emergency for planet restoration, while also creating a piece of art, which lies between different fields, and challenges limits. When does the object (a pair of shoes) become animate and infused with movement and the power to recreate life?

Figure 3. Bob Watts and Paul Ferguson for Alexander McQueen, No. 13 (Spring/Summer 1999). Carved ash wood³



When nature becomes over-mutant, and technology reigns, the whole world is affected and we, as humans, are not so human after all. When I think of prosthetics and technological mechanisms related to the body, I cannot but discuss Julia Ducournau's *Titane* in film, and Aimee Mullins's prosthetic leg(s) (Figure 3) in McQueen's *Runway* (1999) and how technology can coexist and even dominate the body (or live inside it). On the other hand, the closing piece of the 1999 McQueen runway, featuring Shalom Harlow, highlights this long discussion of the interaction between the body (and the fabric/piece, in this case) and technological mechanisms which enhance the body and create a new piece of art. Is she a posthuman (metahuman or other) doll, and how is this defined? Notwithstanding those prostheses and other such (beauty products, transplants, etc.) have become objects of technology and art, open to continuous interpretations, the question of extending enhancement in human beings remains. Is this invading human nature? Is it not a positive choice for people with disabilities? What is the ethical problem that might rise? "If the increasing acceptance by consumers of cosmetic surgery and other associated technological interventions to modify the body over the last decade are at all indicative of future trends, then the next 50 years will see ever more radical plastic surgery" (Burrows & Featherstone, 1996).

Looking at disabled bodies, and the possibilities for making their lives easier, as well as beautifying their appearances, while making unique pieces of prosthetics, I think of the probability of more and more people being seduced by such products and wanting to have one. How posthuman or maybe more transhuman is this? Or only a science fiction thought? With the incessant rise in technologies, sci-fi worlds would seem more probable than ever before. Techno-heaven awaits you. You will be resurrected into posthuman immortality when you discard your body, digitize your mind, and

³ See <https://www.vam.ac.uk/museumofsavagebeauty/mcq/prosthetic-legs/>

download your identity into the artificial brain of a computer, writes Daniel Dinello (2005), presenting the never-ending conflict between the technological utopias that scientists dream of, and the other side of the impact of technology in life, which sees the human as an immobilized entity controlled by the A.I. The recent magazine of *Manière de Voir* (Pieiller, 2022) proves again our worry for the future and the human condition, emphasising the impact of technology. In the 2013 “The Immortals at the southern point of Europe”, a new direction is clearly gravelled, “we won’t permit the birth of people who are mortals. They are not needed” (Hanrahan, 2012). Notwithstanding, the idea they want to communicate is the immortality of the soul and living with non-corrupted ideals. In this way, I believe that such an example can become a breeding ground for reconsidering human nature, through liberal and radical ways of thinking, approaching fundamental matters, and addressing questions and apropos answers, toward embracing a new, posthuman, possibly, metahuman being, or other (named as a metahuman doll (figure, model, android, human-like, etc.)) (Sampanikou, 2022, 57–63). In this case, I believe the metahuman theory is situated within the context of my affirmation, and in constant juxtaposition and rethinking of mutation and immortality. I want to prove how challenging the figure is, and how it is constantly deconstructed and redefined. I want to prove the strong connection between the natural and the artificial, the animate and the inanimate, the doll and the human form, that ask for evolution, and constant becoming.

Discussing human overexploitation and the holocaust (del Val, 2022) in our modern world, we inevitably reach a point of either no return or the absolute necessity of radical change. We face various kinds of mutations, mostly as a result of the human obsession with appearance, beauty, and living forever (immortality, anti-ageing, etc). The body changes, and so do we. What if there is a way to avoid destruction and coexist with all beings, humans, and non-humans? And what are these non-humans going to be? Technology has already taken great power not only in fields such as medicine, manufacturing, etc. but also, in the arts. Technological apps steal the show and leave the artist behind while creating 100% digital “art”, that looks totally “real” (as if it were made by a human), limiting the authenticity and uniqueness of the painter, sculptor, etc. Then, there is the ultra-realistic humanoid robot, AIDA... Victoria Modesta, the pop singer, and iconic female figure, whose prosthetics, fashionable prosthetics, to be precise, turn her into an icon and also bring about the discussion of cyborgian realities and human mutations, is a great example and a field for further discussion and experimentation. So, are we going to be wearing and changing legs, in the near future? Are we going to use them to “heal” our body, and help our body to live better, or is this going to be our new reality and everyday life (normality)? And are we going to use prosthetics like changing clothes? In this way, I believe we explore the limits of our bodies (in fact, I believe, there are no limits) and we move continuously towards a world of differences. The body is open to change. What is the body? The body has great historical and cultural significance. It is related to great pieces of art if only we look at some of the greatest artworks ever made. Now, it is a field for further representations and interpretations, and reflecting upon the “corporeal”, and our own existence(s) (Sampanikou & Stasienco, 2021, 161-162).

On the other hand, android/humanoid/or other such beings might develop more sensitive and friendly functions/characteristics that will become more adaptable/compatible with the environment, and respectable towards other species and nature. However, another scenario is that we, humans, end up being victims of our own makings, living in a “Terminator(s)” world, which will rise as humans are washed up on shores, while they have only cared for their look and eternity. While discussing the human condition, and its interaction/relation with others, the environment, etc., positioning it in an open space, comes the fundamental question; what makes something



human? The above interpretation shows a connection between all aspects of existence and the main aim is to prove how such readings can be a breeding ground for posthuman research, highlighting the human possibilities and importance of reconsidering our condition, in the age of constant interaction with technology, not to forget the rest of the world surrounding us.

Posthumanism is a broader theory that encapsulates other similar theories. Like posthumanism, metahumanism provokes and challenges normalities, notions, and reality. It shows the detrimental aspects of human colonisation of the planet, which as it proves, is highly problematic. A relevant and prophetic reading in fiction, about human exploitation and a “racialized future” (Sohn, 2008) is described in *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (which) “intervenes in and disrupts imperialist fantasies of an uninhabited and virginal jungle, unruly, in need of outside regulation, and ripe and available for development” (Bahng, 2008). As Jaime del Val points out in the latest manifesto, there is an emergency for reconsideration and radical change of human ideals and priorities. Del Val highlights the significance of the power of the body in order to achieve this. A body distanced from consumerism and modern capitalist societies in close relation to nature and its origins. Del Val’s artistic interpretation in the “Metabodies”, is an open field for symbiosis exploration, and new movements “...proposes a formless field ontology in times of hyper control, where at stake is to mobilise plasticity, capacity for indeterminate symbiosis and mutation” (del Val, 2022). Meanwhile, Marc Quinn, the British artist, speaks of his own view on planetary emergence and new body relations, choosing a unique installation, where he places an infant body, hanging slightly off the ground, with his artwork *Planet* (2008), showing the inseparable connection between human being and its environment/planet, as well as in other pieces, where he challenges the boundaries of the body and the human. Astrida Neimanis (2017) offers another spectrum for the concept and ecological ethics, giving emphasis on the importance of water, which occupies the biggest part of our planet, while she introduces us to other figurations of the body, the body of water and showing its relation to the world/planet. In our everyday life and contemporary world, we witness the erosion of boundaries between humans themselves, but also between humans and machines/non-humans, as well as the blurring of limitations between reality and illusion, reality and illusion, nature and technology, dehumanisation, and scientific advance.

Gods and goddesses: Eternity and immortality in religion and humanity

In *How the Dead Dream* (Millet, 2007) or Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915), we witness a unique challenge to the human form, the transition from something to another, the passing from the human condition to the anxiety and thought of a future being or the future of the human being. Posthuman thrives in a fantasy world, but what happens when it becomes our reality? From sci-fi stories, *Blade Runner* (1982), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), and *Watchmen* (1986) graphic novels, to cyborgs, androids, and human enhancement procedures, body modification is omnipresent. On the other hand, graphic novels and other tales are full of half-human figures, with excessive, overdeveloped, highly intelligent, or weird (not common) characteristics, representing an ultimate transhuman archetype of human evolution, joining hands with technology and its promising (or not) creations. Are we, humans (or so-called), overcoming our nature or just suspending our total distraction, while holding the illusion of continuing progress and control over others? Are we losing our bodies? Our humanity and connection to the world? The answer is the “Technology God”. Humans have been looking at technology and science as a saviour, which sooner or later, would “update” humans and the whole world. Clearly, technology and science have indeed played a huge part in all kinds of enhancement, advancement, and development, but it has also awakened some of humanity’s greatest, scariest, and darkest fears. Not only the rise of A.I. and other technologies but also the

obsession with life improvement through life extension/immortality, anti-ageing, human perfection (body and mind), the incessant consumption of cosmetics and such products, plastic surgeries, transplants, etc. which amounts to high technological evolution and signify the body's deformation, deconstruction, alienation, and rethinking of the human existence, both of the body and of the mind. Cindy Jackson can be a classic model for such discussions, marking an eccentricity and unconventionality, that show a positive or negative, depending on the viewer, side of altered skin/body. It proves an out-of-nature form of body modification. So, what might a transhuman think of intervention in human nature? Should ageing be postponed or prevented? And what are the posthuman and metahuman considerations? Jaime del Val points out "ways of living need to be transformed" (del Val, 2022). Therefore, I believe the doll can play a great part in reinvestigating formations and motions (gestures, movement) as it is a multidimensional symbol with different shapes and forms, that challenges and surpasses any boundaries (of the flesh, the material etc.), moving towards a new condition, lying between the natural and the artificial, searching for movement and experimenting on the silhouette, creating remarkable possibilities for the human figuration and alternate moves. As Jaime del Val and Stefan Sorgner, write:

What is the Metahuman? The metahuman is neither a stable reality, essence or identity, nor a utopia, but an open set of strategies and movements in the present. It implies the need to deterritorialise strata of power and violence and induce new forms of embodied relationality by producing a frontier body that is operating on existing boundaries and redefining them. A micro-recherche considers the genealogies of bodies, movements and affects for the purpose of both challenging existing regimes and producing new forms of resistance and emergence (del Val & Sorgner, 2021/2011).

Transhumanism, on the other hand, has represented the ideals and the elusory dream of living forever. The Transhumanist Manifesto as written by Natasha Vita More, one of the main supporters of transhumanist theory and immortality, challenges human aging and death "aging is a disease" (2020), by proposing the enhancement of the human.

I am transhuman.

In an aim to integrate creativity and reason
for the purpose of self-awareness and longevity
—promoted by persistence
aware of odds, informed by risk,
alert to new discovery, welcoming challenge,
ever-changing—

I become.

Like in religion, transhumanists seek a higher purpose and ideals. Christianity, for instance, is full of examples of longing and expecting to be saved and live forever. How transhuman can this sound? We know that this concept is idealistic and refers mainly to the saving of the soul and not the body. It does not mean that the person will continue to live as it has before their death, but it is related to the living forever of their soul. Many believe that the body is very closely linked to the soul. Together, body and soul, create the movement. Religion does have some immortality aspects, but also it has been related to manipulative issues and absolute/dogmatic ideas. It can follow a certain



path, a specific route. Transhumanists seek new ideals, but posthumanists and metahumanists are against essential thinking. On the other hand, posthumanism and metahumanism can be significantly broad and propose new realities, according to the progress of humanity and the whole world. Metahumanism rejects immortality, as it can be a very narcissistic side of humanity and it is regularly related (right or wrong) to some extreme concepts and interpretations. In time, we will see that the concept of human enhancement will challenge and change the way we look at religion, immortality, and death. As Elaine Graham (2022) suggests, “it might be possible to regard religion as both inimical to scientific progress and human advancement and as the source of ancient wisdom that continues to inform understandings of what it means to be human—and by extension, posthuman”.

Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. (Albert King)

Bronfen (1992) asks, “how can a verbal or artistic representation be both aesthetically pleasing and morbid...”. We know that the dead body cannot realistically move, so it’s drained of life. But, as Foltyn (2008) writes, “We are creating corpse facts and fictions to revive, re-imagine, and “play” with the dead, and in doing so are experiencing some simulated corpses as real and some real corpses as simulated.” From animate, it becomes inanimate. Does this make it a better space for new interpretations? And what happens when technology has invaded the dead body through methods such as Cryonics, and plastination, or when the organs are used as transplants or such? In fact, it is significant to mention that ideas about death, the corpse, and nature, change. “We need to raise questions about the organization of dead bodies and death scapes...think anew about ethical relations, orientations, and actions toward life and death” (Krupar, 2018). We need new ways of theorising on death that would respect the environment, and the next generations to come, away from anthropocentric ideas, but towards a posthuman and metahuman reality and ideals. We need ethical and ecological projects, repositioning our bodies in the world and respecting the earth, “we offer an anti-anthropocentric project of an ethos for living in the Anthropocene” (Cielemęcka & Daigle, 2019). New directions for reflecting upon the dead, will show an alternative way of thinking about life. “Clearly, we are of two minds about the dead body, using and discarding it, displaying and secreting it, exposing and disguising it, revering and defiling it, viewing it as a site of amusement and solemnity and as sacred and profane” (Foltyn, 2008). With Izima Kaoru’s “deadly” photography, the sight of death changes, “...one way to play with the dead is to sexualize corpse imagery” (Foltyn, 2008) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Izima Kaoru (2003). *Landscapes With a Corpse, Ua Wears Toga* [photography]⁴



So, is technology the new universal God? And will we be liberated from the sight of death? Charlton D. McIlwain (2005, 9) claims that, like in many crucial matters of today's societies, we've seen some change and progress in the way we look upon death. As he writes, death goes from taboo to pop. If only we think of the TV shows and other representations of the "dead" in contemporary media, we understand there has been a turn in the way we discuss it (Figure 5).

The body is the answer. Through movement the body becomes activated and breathing. I believe that a metahuman doll would encapsulate both representation and activation of the body. I see the doll not as another form of representation, but as another form of life and possibilities while creating different gestures, moves, postures and new entities. As mentioned in the metahumanist manifesto:

[...] the body deepens the view of the body as a field of relational forces in motion and of reality as an immanent embodied process of becoming that does not necessarily end up in defined forms or identities but may unfold into endless morphogenesis. Monsters are promising strategies for performing this development away from humanism (del Val & Sorgner, 2021).

⁴ See <https://www.widewalls.ch/artists/izima-kaoru/>



Figure 5. Izima Kaoru (2003). Koike Eiko wears Versace [chromogenic print behind acrylic]⁵



On the contrary, technologists hate the body. They want to liberate the immortal mind and transcend the flesh (Dinello, 2005, 24). Transhumanists believe in the significance of cancelling death. American computer scientist and author, Ray Kurzweil (2005), has expressed his belief in the rise of technology and its great impact on humanity, envisioning a transhuman world, with highly optimistic life extension ideas and developing technologies about the future of different technologies, towards a “better” way of living. Some believe that when the human body dies, so does the mind. The posthuman emerges by interrogating what it means to be human in a digital age (Toffoletti, 2007, 13). Posthuman is not only one thing but describes transition and transcendence from something to another. As in Chiharu Shiota’s *Tracing Boundaries* (2021) what we come to understand is that humans change, and adapt, everything might be more complex than ever before, but we as humans, have lost our true sense of living. We are consumed, not even consuming.

As the discussion on the body bubbles up, I think of Donna Haraway’s (2006) “who are my kin in this odd world of promising monsters, vampires, surrogates, living tools, and aliens?” (Paxton, 2019). How are natural kinds identified in the realms of technoscience?... I believe, at this point, the question of life is surfaced. The thin lines between species, beings, and others, are surpassed. The individual, as one entity (human or not), is related to other bodies, moving bodies. The question of movement and animation (animate) brings forward all discussions around the relation between different species and beings (natural, artificial) and shows the significance of the body and its various interpretations/representations, moving, inanimate or other.

⁵ See <https://metivieryallery.com/artists/44-izima-kaoru/works/>

Bodies in crisis: The necessity of a new “doll” ideal. The change of body modification and the turn of the human. From human to the emergence of metahuman

In my research, while trying to understand and analyse themes of mutation, transformation, and human/bodily changes, as well as critical issues of contemporary societies, such as immortality, cosmetic surgeries, consumerism, etc. I introduce the concept of a post(human) doll. The doll is not per se posthuman, metahuman or transhuman, but follows a critical view and lies in a neutral environment, open for discussion and interpretations. It is a perfect tool for human rethinking and understanding of the complexity of the form and existence.

As Natasha Vita More suggests, “our bodies will be the next fashion statement; we will design them in all sorts of interesting combinations of texture, colors, tones, and luminosity” (cited in Alexander, 2000). The body as an object, the body in water, the body in body horror, all these bodies are differently represented. All these fields of interpretation prove the body’s multidimensionality and versatility. Its body parts have unique definitions, and the body as a whole, creates a unique figure, a one-of-a-kind being. When technology comes forward, singularity might disappear and everything becomes part of a bigger plan, for instance, the hundreds of machines produced for certain purposes of different necessities, depending on the industry and various applications. However, when it comes to the *Alternative Limb project*, we witness a coexistence between organic life and technology, producing at the same time, a unique form of life. Jo-Jo Cranfield the British swimmer, with the snake prosthetic limb (Figure 6) is a great example of the distinctiveness of such a prosthetic, which has artistic and unusual characteristics. In her own words, “I’ve never seen the interest in having a prosthetic arm...however, an alternative limb is something entirely different; I wanted people to have to look at me twice with amazement.”

Figure 6. Jo-Jo Cranfield, swimmer, wearing the snake arm by Sophie de Oliveira, Alternative Limb Project⁶



⁶ See <https://thealternativelimbproject.com/limbs/snake-arm/>



We see that starting from the 18th century, with the first technological automatons, there is a huge interest in the creation of a new form of life, infused with science and technology. From classic tales to scientific examples, the relation between fantasy creatures, dolls and puppets, and mechanical bodies is apparent. Now, more than ever, we live in a technological society, awaiting (or not) a mechanised future. Examples such as the figures of Pinocchio or Frankenstein, representing a darker side, are ancestors of the early and mid-20th century futuristic imaginings and today's overdomination of technology in everyday life. Pinocchio has a fluid identity (Pizzi, 2011) and it shows the transition to a technological era, full of diversity, where the animate and the inanimate are interconnected, "the Pinocchio myth is used in the context of posthumanism in order to reflect anxieties and hopes for humanity's technological progress" (Panteli, 2022).

When thinking of the body, there are some other relational definitions; nature, architecture, and movement. Our bodies are natural but also very much related to technology. They consist of a mechanism. They live and they die, which means they are created, and they are broken. They can also be fixed. Just like a mechanical object. Our bodies can move, connect one to another, feel, and change. Movement is a primary characteristic for defining something as a body and as a being. Some might say that the dead body is an object, as it cannot move, that it has lost its existence, it does no longer exist, as it is not moving, it is motionless and absolutely still. However, what defines existence and life? I believe such contemplations diverge and so there is no dead-right answer. What we need is to expand our thoughts and interpretations and rethink human (and other) life and what defines it. To achieve this, we need new fields of research, where the concept of the doll can be an interesting area for experimentation and introducing new ideas. As Katia Pizzi (2011) mentions, Pinocchio's character/figure is both rhythmical and mechanical. How human and how technological does this sound? Some movements can be human and others mechanical. The character has a natural, but also a technological self. Perhaps, when it plays in animation or when read by someone in literature, the character comes alive. We, as humans, perceive movement, so the figure comes alive through our own eyes. Animation is a great field of experimentation for movement. Besides, its definition comes from the differentiation between the animate and the inanimate. The artist and philosopher, Jaime del Val (2022) says, "how we move is how we perceive... The more plastic our movements, the richer our worlds", so we can see that movement is a huge factor in the notion of life. Metahumanism differs from posthumanism in the significance of the movement. But I think the doll is very much related to movement, as well as plasticity and indeterminacy, which means it needs to be *coming to life* in one way or another. The doll combines contradicting elements as it is a diverse term that is connected with both life and death, the natural and the artificial. As I am trying to relate the doll with movement, which is a core metahuman issue, I can see a strong relation between the doll and metahumanism, as they are both plastic (want plasticity), they are versatile, always changing, moving and creating unique forms and figurations. The doll is much more than a representation of something. The doll is life and not just representing it.

Discussing the body, I think of its architectural dimension. Body architecture (Tavernor & Dodds, 2005) can be related to various fields and readings. This proves the body's plasticity and versatility. The body's architecture can be connected to the body's movement, but first comes the discussion on the shape, the form. Bodies are interconnected with the environment they live in and interact with. They change, and they adapt, some might be more organic than others, or more technological. But I believe there is one universal truth: all bodies exist with movement.

Conclusion: Cyberpunk, sci-fi, dystopias, and maltreated environment. Do we live a heads-up low cyberpunk reality, followed by planetary destruction?

We need to reconfigure our posthuman condition in the age of capitalism. The all-commercialised side of our everyday life is certainly depicted through different art creations, such as contemporary graphist, Banksy, and his art installation called Dismaland, representing the dystopian side of humanity. Like a “*Balladian*” world, a Blade Runner fantasy, and all the many other examples in the sci-fi world, Dismaland is brimmed with contradicted elements showing a fallen side of our existence and interaction with the world that surrounds each one of us (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Banksy’s Dismaland installation, 2015. Looking back at Banksy’s art project I believe we become part of “an allegory of fake gods and the gods of profit”⁷



We live in a transitional age, where we are overwhelmed by so many different realities, and we need to better understand and rethink our humanity and evolution. We as humans interact with our environment, but we also look like invaders, stubborn disturbers of the earth’s peace and quietness. We often look like strangers in a world that looks very much different from us. In a world that we always try to change, in a very egocentric way, and indifferent towards others. Humanity seems, quite often, on the edge and on the verge of an imminent collapse, which hasn't come yet. The concept of the doll that I introduce is presented here, as a tool for posthuman/metahuman “investigation” and experimentation, as it has many different faces and it can have many more in our near future... I believe that the triptych doll, body, and posthumanism can capture the essence of our reality, our everyday life, and our possible futures.

The human body, now more than ever before, is entangled with the non-human, even if that is a piece of fabric or a more complicated creation, involving technology, such as an android or cyborg. As humans, we don't seem so stressed about our environment, but we do care a lot about how we are going to use it to fulfil our needs and wishes. This sounds rather selfish. Art, on the other hand, can be a missing link between humans and the world, as it represents different perspectives. An art piece can be an altar for reflection and rethinking. It is alive when used by the world. The boundaries between the female marble, wax, or digitised figure/character and the human, are delicate. This leads to the question; how real or artificial, non-living, and inanimate such figures would look? What makes them related to human beings and what doesn't?

⁷ See <https://dismaland.co.uk/>



I believe that the concept I discuss in this paper, the posthuman and the metahuman aspect of the doll, is liberated from such limitations of human/animal, human/artificial, etc., and is oriented towards new perspectives and directions, which shows a coexistence between different beings (Hockenhull, 2021, 1-12) and the transgression of traditional and such, boundaries “The terms have been displaced: ‘it is not by chance that all the nature-culture thresholds are being thematized and transgressed in recent movies: incest, life/death (vampires, zombies, and other living dead), human/non-human (aliens, clones, demon seeds, pods, fogs, etc), and sexual difference (androgyns, transsexuals, transvestites, or Transylvanians)” (Botting, 2011). The doll appears, here, as an interface/connection of “species/beings/genres...” that is related to new «forward-looking», contemporary representations, upon the discussion of the figure, which is in between the natural and artificial, reality and fantasy, the human, and the cyborg.

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