

# #27

# ON SIGHT, TECHNOLOGY, AND SCIENCE FICTION: TRANSHUMANIST VISIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN DYSTOPIA

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**Abstract** || This article examines a number of practices of observation as represented in contemporary Canadian dystopias in light of technological developments as seen by transhumanist thought. It argues that the transhumanist scopic practices that underlie their science-fictional imaginaries are in fact dystopian, and, as such, it takes examples from dystopian literature to illustrate how the nature of sight and seeing in the techno- and image-mediated context presents dangerous pitfalls for subject formation, identity politics, and agency. The article distinguishes between “vision” as a body of ideas and “sight” as the actual ways of seeing that may be reciprocal and create bonds of affectivity or, in the case of the transhumanist predicament, be instead founded on *watching* as the one-sided commodifying alternative.

**Keywords** || Transhumanism | Dystopian Fiction | Canadian Literature | Vision | Sight | Human enhancement

### **Sobre la vista, la tecnologia i la ciència ficció: visions transhumanistes a la distòpia canadenca contemporània**

**Resum** || L'article explora una sèrie de pràctiques d'observació tal com estan representades en les distopies canadenques contemporànies interrogant els avanços tecnològics des d'una òptica transhumanista. S'argumenta que les maneres de veure d'aquests imaginaris ciència-ficticis són, de fet, distòpiques. L'article pren exemples de la literatura distòpica per a il·lustrar com la naturalesa de la visió i l'acte de veure, en un context de sobresaturació de la imatge i la tecnologia, presenta derives perilloses per a la formació del subjecte, la política d'identitat i l'agència. L'article distingeix entre «visió» com a cos d'idees i «vista» com les formes concretes de veure, que poden ser recíproques i crear llaços afectius o, en el cas transhumanista, basar-se en canvi en la mirada com un instrument d'objectificació.

**Paraules clau** || Transhumanisme | Ficció distòpica | Literatura canadiense | Visió | Visions | Millora humana

## **Sobre la vista, la tecnología y la ciencia ficción: visiones transhumanistas en la distopía canadiense contemporánea**

**Resumen** || El artículo explora una serie de prácticas de observación tal y como están representadas en las distopías canadienses contemporáneas, interrogando los avances tecnológicos que allí se muestran desde una óptica transhumanista. Se argumenta que las formas de ver de estos imaginarios de ciencia ficción son, de hecho, distópicas. El artículo toma ejemplos de esta misma literatura para ilustrar cómo la naturaleza de la visión y del acto de ver, en un contexto de sobresaturación de la imagen y ubicuidad de las nuevas tecnologías, presenta derivas peligrosas para la formación del sujeto, la política de identidad y la agencia. El artículo distingue entre «visión» como conjunto de ideas y «vista» como formas concretas de ver, que pueden ser recíprocas y crear lazos afectivos o, en el caso transhumanista, basarse en cambio en la mirada como un instrumento de la objetificación.

**Palabras clave** || Transhumanismo | Ficción distópica | Literatura canadiense | Visión | Visiones | Mejoramiento humano

## 0. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It has already been half a century since Francis Fukuyama (2003) explored the possibility that the biotechnological revolution that was at hand at his time of writing could potentially trigger a movement towards a “posthuman future.” This future would be “posthuman” in the sense that those who would populate it could no longer be classified as humans under Fukuyama’s standards, insofar as they would have lost the “human dignity” that is the trademark of “human nature” (2003: 6). Fukuyama, who argued in his book in favour of the regulation of emergent biotechnologies which, in his opinion, threatened to transform “the stable human nature throughout human history” (2003: 13) with dire consequences for mankind and its future, rallied against those who sought to employ these same technologies for this particular end. In particular, transhumanist philosophers like Nick Bostrom, David Pearce, Max More, and Natasha Vita-More have led the call for the adoption of biotechnologies for what they believe to be the improvement of the human race.

Biotechnology, defined as a “new paradigm in the life sciences and medical research,” sits “at the intersection of bioscience and computer science [...] between genetic and computer ‘codes’” (Thacker, 2003: 72). The emergence of biotechnological advancements in this reconfiguration of “life as code” can be traced back to the 1970s (Cooper, 2008) and the cybernetics revolution that was cemented in the 1980s (Hayles, 1999). The transhumanist movement is born roughly a decade after that, in the 1990s (Ferrando, 2019: 27), with a view to advocate for “increased funding for research and development of medical and technological means that might extend human life and improve memory, concentration, and other human capacities” (Bostrom and Solomon, 2005: 4). Transhumanists see the betterment of the human form as a moral imperative as well as, simply, technology running its course for the achievement of progress, which also implies an amelioration of human deficiencies. The definition of the “enhancing technologies” that are involved in this process of human betterment is broad. Bostrom and Savulescu argue that “[i]n one sense, *all* technology can be viewed as an enhancement of our native human capacities, enabling us to achieve certain effects that would otherwise require more effort or to be altogether beyond our power” (2009: 2, emphasis in original). The view that all technology constitutes an adaptation that increases human capabilities is not necessarily contested by critical posthuman scholarship, which has instead highlighted how technology plays, in fact, a co-constitutive role in the shaping of what we know as “the human” as well as of the bio- and geosphere. This is done through the establishment of interdependent relations of mutual creation and feedback in a zoe-geo-techno-mediated context (Braidotti, 2013: 103; 2019: 44), which lead to a breaking down of ontological differences that reveals matter as flows of becoming within a natural-cultural continuum (Haraway, 2016). Instead of embracing this zoe-techno co-constituency,

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transhumanists exceptionalist Enlightenment roots of the movement (Ferrando, 2019: 33) and hope that science will enable a “post-human” transformation that sees us become “beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have” (Bostrom, 2003: 493).

The curiosity surrounding the going “beyond the human,” however, far precedes the apparition of transhumanism as a coherent movement. It has, in fact, a rich and long-spanning literary history, beginning with Dante Alighieri and culminating in the coinage of the term “transhumanism” by Aldous Huxley’s brother Julian Huxley (Ferrando 2019: 29). In the current literary landscape, the most obvious example of looking “beyond” our present subject (and Earthly) position within literature is certainly to be found within the science fiction genre, which has often concerned itself with what is “more” or “better” than human—and is potentially coming to replace it—as well with the consequences of such a paradigmatic shift. The science-fictional technological imagination has come to permeate every corner of our existence and, arguably, has rendered our own world science-fictional (Schmeink, 2016: 18). Conversely, with the increased sophistication of technoscientific knowledge, and especially after the development of genetic manipulation techniques, imagined futurities have also found themselves to be, if not surpassed, very frequently matched by available technologies in their depictions of the societies to come, as transhumanist themselves note (Bostrom and Savulescu, 2009: 18).

Francis Fukuyama, too, made explicit the link between these post-human<sup>2</sup> futurities and the speculative imagination in titling the very first chapter of his book “A Tale of Two Dystopias” while referencing Orwell’s *1984* and Huxley’s *Brave New World* (2003: 3). There is, therefore, some preexisting base from which to explore how representations of different kind of human enhancement procedures in contemporary dystopian fiction are attuned to the concerns of transhumanist (or, for that matter, bioconservative) philosophers today, and how these representations may reflect the ethical concerns at play in these biotechnological developments.

The role of sight and vision come into play in this argument as a necessary part of the philosophical discourse surrounding both critical posthumanism and transhumanism. In philosophical thought, sight and ethics have long been related. The very division between self/other may hinge upon the fact that although I cannot see myself (my face), I *know* myself (in *embodying* myself, I am certain of my being); whereas I can see the other, but cannot *know* them (I can never occupy the position that is predicated by their exact politics of location [Rich, 1994] and from which they, in turn, see and, in doing so, *construct* their world). The negotiation of the self/other binary, too, has been precluded upon the possibilities for acknowledgement that are afforded by sight. Most notably for critical posthuman studies, Derrida’s cat (2008) and Haraway’s cyborg ontology (1991: 150) have both considered the role of non-human subjects in the construction of human subjectivity, which is then understood as relational and,

<2> I use the hyphenated term “post-human” to distinguish transhumanist post-human futures from critical posthumanist ontologies, where posthumanity is achievable *at this very moment* without depending on paradigmatic chronological shifts that see our species be surpassed by technologically enhanced (post-)humans or go extinct (Braidotti, 2013).

because of this quality, also non-dichotomous, since no individual precedes their relations (Barad, 2007: ix). Transhumanist philosophers, by their very dealings in biotechnological lore, are also no strangers to the problems of ethics as well as their relation to vision and practices of seeing. In his brief section on “Transhumanism and Posthumanism” for the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Christopher Hook pointedly uses “correction of vision” as a paradigmatic example of a human shortcoming that is to be corrected with so-called “enhancing technologies” (2004: 2518) for the transcending of human limitations, which is again, as has been noted, the desire of the transhumanist movement (2004: 2517) as well as its stated goal (Bostrom, 2016).

Although, certainly, correction of vision seems like an obvious choice for the exploration of transhumanist bioethics in many a respect—perhaps because it represents a common and familiar use of prosthetics (glasses) to correct mostly benign problems (myopia, for example)—I believe that the politics and practices of vision may be met with a much greater depth of analysis considering their choice not as coincidental, but as structural of the transhumanist predicament. This article, then, seeks to examine a number of practices of observation as represented in contemporary dystopias—in our case study, contemporary Canadian science fiction—in light of technological developments as seen by transhumanist thought. The hope is that, in doing so, we are able to shed light on the conceptualisation of *sight* and *vision* as distinct phenomena and their standing within the current posthumanist convergence, on which “we”—humans and non-humans alike—are currently situated (Braidotti 2013), with distinct consequences for ethical behaviour, the development of agency, and subject formation.

## 1. The Panopticon

### 1.1. Panopticon and Spectacle

In 1787, Jeremy Bentham proposed a model for a facility that could serve a wide variety of purposes, from care to correction to education, which was predicated on the inspection of its occupants. To Bentham, “[i]t is obvious that [...] the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment have been attained” (1995: 34). The essence of the building was found “in the *centrality* of the inspector’s situation, combined with the well-known and most effectual contrivances for *seeing without being seen*” (1995: 43, emphasis in original). This not only ensured the anonymity of the corrective authority, but imbued inhabitants with a sense of uneasiness at the prospect of being observed that discouraged disruptive behaviour. So was the panopticon (from the Greek *pan*, “all” and *optikos*, “of sight”) born. Bentham was not in the pursuit of “ideal perfection” in the creation of the panopticon, because he thought it “unattainable” as it could not guarantee that

“each person should be in that predicament [being watched], during every instant of time” (1995: 34). For the structure to work, however, “ideal perfection” was of no consequence, as the concealment of the inspecting body effectively prevented residents of the building to know whether they were being surveilled, which is an effective dissuasive measure against both disobedience and insubordination. In other words, it was not a matter of actually seeing all, but that all *felt* that they were being seen.

Arguably, the panopticon initiates a tradition of discipline by surveillance that has been taken up by the so-called “new technologies.” In time, the changing mechanisms through which surveillance technologies have operated have led to a paradigmatic shift already noted by Gilles Deleuze in his insightful “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1992).<sup>3</sup> Deleuze described a movement from disciplinary to control societies enabled by the ability of new devices, like electronic collars, to bypass the spatial constraints of disciplinary institutions and still account for a subject’s movements at any given time, making enclosure redundant by the continuous tracking (1992: 7). The passage from a society of discipline to a society of control is also tied to the different organisation of life under advanced capitalism, which substitutes numerical for analogical logics (1992: 4) and, through the itemisation and commodification of their individual traits, transforms individuals in “dividuals” (1992: 5). As Western capitalist societies have increasingly organised around the processes of information gathering in both the private and public spheres, Deleuze’s original configuration has been updated for the 21st century (Brusseau 2020). Currently, the location capabilities of technological devices and the storefront of social media apps encourage customers (now remarketed as “prosumers”) to put themselves on display in the perfect panopticon that has become the World Wide Web. GPS technologies, with which many of our commodities are equipped, transmit our location and are used to track our movements for sociodemographic as well as marketing purposes, making it tempting to surrender to control as transparency promises that the market will fulfill our every need even before it appears (Brusseau, 2020: 21). Because states take part in the processes of the capitalist market, the practices of data trading have also come to increase the state’s infrastructural power, that is, its capacity “to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm” (Mann, 1984: 189) even as power has become de-centralised in capitalist democracies. New surveillance mechanisms update Mann’s main argument that the state’s autonomous power resides in its being, essentially “an arena, a *place*” (1984: 187, emphasis in original) by exponentially expanding its confines into the intimate core of the subjects’ lives. Security devices are posted in shops and streets to discourage unlawful activities, and the ubiquity of cameras has compromised the anonymity of the private citizen. Furthermore, the willing offering of subjects’ private data allows the state to permeate their private selves and makes opposition not just less likely, but less desirable by way of

<3> I am thankful to my reviewers for the suggestion to consider Deleuze and Mann in my analysis.

the “festive” marketing mood that these new power forms encourage (Brusseau 2020: 7). The corollary to this predicament is that, more than ever, we are sure of being *watched* (Zuboff, 2019), although the question remains open as to whether, in our dividuality, we are being *seen* (Brusseau 2020: 8). The distinction between “watching” and “seeing” has ethical significance, because, as we have advanced before, the reciprocity of seeing brings on the affective capacity that constitutes a relational ethics. Watching or being watched alone does not call on these faculties; in its one-sidedness, it is rather at risk of perpetuating the objectification of the watched, because there is no affective connection with that which is being seen.

The objectifying gaze is met in contemporary times with the overabundance of representation, which was hailed as the defining feature of what Debord called, in his seminal work of the same title, the “society of spectacle” (2018). “Considered in its own terms,” Debord writes, “the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance” (2018: 10, emphasis in original). The spectacularisation of life rests on its commodification as well as on the commodification of the resources that make life possible, *mediated by images* (2018: 4, emphasis mine). Because, in the “century of images,” these become the channel through which affective alienation is brought about, some exploration on the practices of image-making will be pertinent.

Horst Bredekamp used the metaphor of the Biblical deluge to explain the oppressively ubiquitous role of the image in contemporary times (2018: 1), an apt metaphor for a time loaded with dystopian fictions. For the study of vision, images, and representation, this article takes as a case study two pandemic narratives which also take up the metaphor of the flood and transform it to cases of widespread virality, which is not only our current lived reality but, as Roberto Marchesini (2021) has argued, a paradigm for our times. In Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy (comprising the books *Oryx and Crake*, 2013a; *The Year of the Flood*, 2013b; and *MaddAddam*) offers an account of the end of times brought about by a biotechnological deluge, the “Waterless Flood” (2013b). This is an apocalypse initiated by the distribution of the BlyssPluss pill. BlyssPluss is a sterilising medication aimed at curing sexual dysfunction while reducing population numbers. Because it protects from sexually-transmitted diseases, is a libido enhancer, and prolongs youth (2013a: 346), the pill enjoys great commercial success, which brings about a deadly pandemic once a virus that its inventor Crake has embedded in the medicine is triggered—hence the name “Waterless Flood.” Similarly, Larissa Lai’s *The Tiger Flu* (2019) also revolves around a biotechnologically-induced pandemic, as the “tiger flu” virus is spread in an attempt to revive an extinct species of tiger very valuable for the wine extracted from its marrow. Lastly, Margaret Atwood’s dystopian *The Heart Goes Last* (2016), although it does not concern itself with

pandemics, similarly engages metaphors of abundance and scarcity in the context of socioeconomic crisis and advanced technological development tied to neoliberal capitalist practices.

Going back to the proverbial deluge, Bredekampf has suggested that the entertainment industry is to blame for “the flood of images” (2018: 1). Arguably, in no other product of the entertainment industry is the “flood of images,” and its accompanying commodifying practices, more prevalent than in TV. Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy depicts a number of television-watching practices the analysis of which bears interest in light of Debord’s comments; however, to keep to the theme of transhumanism I would like to highlight the spectacle of “Painball.”

Painball was a facility for condemned criminals [...]: they had a choice of being spraygunned to death or doing time in the Painball Arena, which wasn’t an arena at all [...]. You got enough food for two weeks, plus the Painball gun – it shot paint, like a regular paintball gun, but a hit in the eyes would blind you, and if you got the paint on your skin you’d start to corrode, and then you’d be an easy target for the throat-slitters on the other team. [...] For a long time they’d kept the Painball Arena secret [...] but now, it was said, you could watch it onscreen. There were cameras in the Painball forest [...]. Some teams would hang their kill on a tree, some would mutilate the body. Cut off the head, tear out the heart and kidneys. That was to intimidate the other team. (Atwood, 2013b: 117-118)

Painball showcases how, with modern technology such as video cameras and streaming, the panopticon has become a more flexible structure dissociated from its initial formulation as a self-contained building, as Deleuze (1992) and Brusseau (2020) have shown. Painball taking place in a forest, too, and as a form of statutory punishment, shows the corruption of the posthumanist natural-cultural continuum of *zoe* and technology for the far more deadly combination of bare life and surveillance. Its reproduction as a reality TV programme, too, exemplifies the tension at the heart of scopic practices within and without technomediated life. In a reversal of Bentham’s panopticon, however, Painball is meant to dissuade from misbehavior not those who inhabit it, but *only those who are out of its structure*. Within the Painball arena, throat-slitting and mutilation are permissible tactics of intimidation that not only discourage the other team from all-out confrontation or retaliatory action (as ultimately each man fends for himself) but show spectators (who are outside of the structure but inside the surveillance mechanisms of the state writ large) the prospects of life outside of state protection. In MaddAddam’s technocratic governance, life as *hominī sacer* (Agamben, 1998) is an overexposed life in more ways than one.

## 1.2. Panopticon and Virality

In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Michel Foucault recuperates Bentham’s panopticon. At the beginning of his chapter on panopticism, Foucault delineates the measures to be taken in case of a plague

outbreak, which involve different measures of thorough scrutiny and surveillance. Pandemics bring about and institutionalise a series of rituals of exclusion which rest on the absolute apprehension of the body/ies of society by the state, setting out a number of rules and procedures the observance of which is enforced and enacted through constant observation.

Foucault writes that “[t]he plague-stricken town, traversed through with hierarchy, surveillance, observation [...] immobilised by the functioning of an extensive power” is “the utopia of the perfectly governed city” (1995: 198). This immobility is brought about both by the strict containment conditions enforced for health and safety purposes and the bureaucratic excess that polices the bodies of citizens. For the state policy, this state of immobility is “utopic,” because, like in Bentham’s structure, it allows for perfect control, all of the time. In contemporary Canadian techno-dystopias, the representation of pandemics has highlighted, however, not the rigidity of quarantine conditions designed to contain the pandemic *and* police subjects within the state of exception but, instead, the mobility of individuals within disease-infested scenarios. *The Tiger Flu*, for instance, is predicated on the displacement of anthropomorphic, genetically-engineered Kirilow Groundsel across quarantine rings in order to find a surviving starfish, eventually identified as protagonist Kora Ko, to help her restore the health of her posthuman community. Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy is similarly concerned with mobility, as we follow different survivors at different points in time, whose displacements allow them to secure valuable resources for their survival as well as flee from eventual threats. This is not to say that modes of observation/observance are not in practice, as, in both cases, individuals are thoroughly surveyed and catalogued. But when virality becomes the primal relational mechanism, and individuals are swept in webs of mutual contagion, hybridity replaces self-containment as a paradigm, and so the fantasy of isolation breaks down (Marchesini 2021).

The virality of the image is also a testament to the fantastical nature of detachment in techno-mediated times. As has been mentioned, Crake and his best friend Jimmy, who narrates the development of the apocalypse in the first book of the MaddAddam series (2013a), get together to watch porn and masturbate. In one of their sessions, they come across the image of Oryx, a young girl of Asian origin who is later tracked by Crake and brought to New New York, where she becomes both Crake’s and Jimmy’s lover. Before the Waterless Flood, the image of Oryx in the sex tape obsesses Jimmy’s; after, alone in the post-apocalyptic world, Oryx’s image continues to haunt him and taunts him with his solitude as well as with his inadequacy to deal with the present crisis. While occasionally serving as a coping mechanism for Jimmy, the vision of Oryx is nevertheless a reminder of her and Crake’s own transhumanist vision for the world. Oryx’s haunting is a reminder of Jimmy’s oath that he would care for the humanoid creatures that remained after the apocalypse (2013a:

378), over which Oryx watched. These caring/watching duties become transferred to Jimmy as the survivor of the apocalypse, and pose questions of scopic practices in the dystopian retelling of the creation of man.

## 2. Prometheism and Myths of the Second Creation

In Genesis, Man is created in God's "image." Although interpretations as to what the "image" of God is are rife in theological discussion, and this paper cannot hope nor seek to adequately cover them, the mimetic impulse that has led to centuries of anthropomorphic imaginations of God has successfully bypassed the crucial fact that God has no corporeal existence that can be apprehended and replicated. Indeed, God's very use of the plural of majesty ("Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" [Genesis 1:26]) as well as the slippages of the Elohimic multiple (Keller, 2003: 173), the separation of God from its image ("in the image of God *he*"—who?—created them" [Genesis 1:27]), their clash with the singularity of the Biblical fact ("So God created mankind in *his* own image" (1:27) and the overflowing multiplicity of "*mankind* [...] *male* and *female* *he* created *them*" (1:27), there is more than enough ambiguity to question the univocal Western representations of the Christian God as singular—let alone also white and male. The chimeric ambivalence of the Imago Dei can be credited for the inevitable failures of man's attempts to replicate it, which is when monstrosity enters the proverbial picture. The impossibility to replicate God makes monsters of men in more ways than one: not only can man only hope to be a subpar embodiment of divine potential, but, in his<sup>4</sup> attempts to reenact the moment of creation, man, too, becomes a monster, an unpracticed God whose own unnatural offspring cannot but be as incomplete.

The inevitability of failure to replicate God has not stopped man from trying to do so—at least in literature, that is. In Greek mythology, Daedalus and Prometheus spearheaded the efforts to rob the gods of their creative prowess and, with it, their exceptionality (a divine exceptionality that notably excludes woman's procreative powers [Braidotti, 1997: 72]). The promethean spirit has come to stand for man's creative spirit, and, thus, has encumbered Prometheus as the patron saint of new technologies: "Prometeo sería el artífice de la segunda creación en lo artificial: a imagen y semejanza [...] suya y la naturaleza artificial" (Molinuevo, 2009: 203). Of all carriers of the Promethean torch in literature, none is better known than Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, who, as a technological Pygmalion, has become paradigmatic of the myths of the second creation in the literary and scientific imagination. The myth of the second creation has long been a phallogentric dream, which has reached new (though perhaps not final) heights as the biogenetic revolution has progressed. According to Rosi Braidotti,

<4> The use of the masculine pronoun is intentional. It highlights that the particular humanist subject construction of M/man, inherited precisely from Judeo-Christian tradition, envisions the paradigmatic subject as white, male, heterosexual and able.

On the imaginary level [...] the test-tube babies of today mark the long-term triumph of the alchemists' dream of dominating nature through their self-inseminating, masturbatory practices. What is happening with the new reproductive technologies today is the final chapter in a long history of fantasy of self-generation by and for the men themselves [...] capable of producing new monsters and fascinated by their power. (1997: 71)

In Margaret Atwood, the wielding of this power also hinges on monstrosity as both cause and consequence of the Promethean impulse. Because human society “was a sort of monster” incapable of learning from its mistakes (2013a: 285) and it had jeopardised the health of the planet and thus the possibility of survival, a “superior method” (2013a: 358) was devised to replace it. The connection with Frankenstein's monster is made explicit as the community of anthropomorphic clones—“the Crakers,” after their inventor—is referred to by survivors of the plague as “Crake's Frankenpeople” (2014: 28).

Transhuman monstrosity is connected not only to the promethean drive but to the same reproductive practices that have made the female body suspect across history. According to Braidotti, “[t]he fact that the female body can change shape so drastically is troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to see is the primary act of knowledge and *the gaze* the basis of all epistemic awareness” (Braidotti, 1997: 64, emphasis in original). Indeed, the physical and functional disparities between humans and Crakers that mark the difference between their “orders of being” also become spectacular: “Perhaps it's like hearing a lion gorge itself, at the zoo [...] and, like those long-gone zoo visitors, the Crakers can't help peeking” (Atwood, 2013a: 116-117). Like the Robert Neville of Matheson's *I Am Legend*, Jimmy because monstrous because of his embodied difference, that singles him out as frail and uniquely vulnerable among a new population of enhanced creatures.

The spectacle itself also creates and generates its own forms of monstrosity, which takes us back to the Painball games as explored in the last section. Because Painball survivors “have long been known to be not quite human” (Atwood, 2014: 448), when some of the female survivors are raped by Painball convicts—now liberated as their isolation in the Arena has staved off contact with the virus—and become pregnant, concern is expressed that “a child with such warped genes would be a monster [...]. The mother couldn't love it” (2014: 449). In failing to wipe out the Painball convicts, Crake's eugenic program has ultimately failed to excise abnormality from the body of society; in fact, the techno-mediated spectacular rites have contributed to the presence and continued existence of monstrosity that seems to be encoded in the genes. Not only do these glaring shortcomings compromise Crake's transhumanist visions for a better Earth; this spectacle also perpetuates the epistemic bias towards the gaze that renders women, and by transhuman extension, their offspring monstrous: business as usual.

### 3. Transhuman Is, Transhuman Eyes

With the invention of image capturing devices and the advent of image sharing technologies, which have been briefly discussed above, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has exponentially multiplied the number of eyes available to see, and so to shape, the world. Photo and video cameras offer a clear example of these new technological narrators which complement or substitute the human storyteller and allow for cyborg possibilities of narration. Beyond the technological artifice, the transhumanist predicament not only concedes, but encourages room for non-human subjects to take the lead as protagonists and narrators of their own storylines after the overcoming of the human kind as we know it. The focus is no longer on the technoscientific seeing chimera (like the man with the camera), but on the biotechnological unified seeing subject (for example, a transhuman population with new eyes).

The “I”s whose eyes are looking at the new post-human predicament can be of a very different nature. As in the case of the Crakers, they can constitute a new population that is biologically separate from humans as we know them, and so has its own physiological characteristics that cannot be compared to human abilities. However, technological advancements can also be used to modify human subjects and transform their seeing practices, which also renegotiates their identity in their dystopian settings.

In Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*, a novel medical procedure is devised whereby individuals are treated with a laser that affects their brain structure and, upon waking from the operation, makes them fall madly in love with whatever they first lay their eyes on. The technology is introduced thus: “The camera moves to a very pretty woman in a hospital bed. She’s asleep. Then her eyes open, move sideways. ‘Oh,’ she says, smiling with joy. ‘You’re here! At last! I love you!’” (2016: 326). Here, we are seeing double: a camera is recording an operation that drastically transforms the operated individual by affecting their ability to see. “Opening one’s eyes” is no longer a metaphor for awareness, but signals a profound disconnect with one’s individual predicament. The seeing eye—the camera as well as the organ—is doubly commodifying the unwitting woman, who is simultaneously made an object of technoscientific experimentation and of the male gaze. The situation is complicated by the fact that the woman in the video “imprints” not on another human, but on a non-human *object*: a teddy bear. This example of an “enhancement technology” has dismantled the subject/object ontological barriers by radically equalizing both, not as autonomous subjects, but as mutually dependent objects. To spectators of the video, however, proof that this technology works is ripe with potential, as it “works on anything with two eyes” (2016: 327).

The eyes are also central to new technologies that enable a further commodification of beings. These are the “Possibilibots,” sex robots that can be customized to look like any one individual. Ostensibly, this customization allows them to bypass the more impersonal quality of other types of sex devices. However, it is precisely their encounter with the gaze, and not necessarily their anthropomorphic build, that makes them fully impersonal commodities: “The Empathy Model he’d worked on could smile, but it was the same smile every time. Though what else do you need [...] [p]ut two eyes on anything and it basically looks like a face” (2016: 238).

The bottom line for the use of these technologies is not only social but economic: “it’s almost all margin once you’ve put in the front money. No food to buy, no death as such, and it’s multiple use squared” (2016: 239). It’s also what justifies their re-emergence, in different forms, at different points of the novel. In *The Heart Goes Last*, the transhumanist dreams of disembodiment that featured in *The Tiger Flu* in the form of mind-upload satellite technologies reappear as dismembered robot parts: “There’s no receptionist in the flesh at that desk, only a head in a box, but at least there’s a head in a box. Or a canned *image* of a head. Whether it’s live or not it’s anyone’s guess” (216: 83-4, emphasis mine). The dismembered techno-head uses an iris reader to grant access to the facility, and, for security purposes, “[i]t’s best to treat the heads as if they’re real” (2016: 84). Because characters cannot recognise the robot, whether it’s dead or alive, and whether it is seeing them, the robot’s eyes become suspect. Practices of recognition that rest on sight are, in the transhuman predicament, no longer a marker of mutual care and acknowledgement as critical posthumanism defends, but monitoring technologies for the discipline and control of individuals. The “seeing” that both characters and robots do is not mutually affective, but mutually suspect: both are *watching* each other, although only one, in capturing the *image* of the other, can identify—and so police—it.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the posthuman predicament, the gaze takes on different implications that, perhaps unsurprisingly, depend on the eye—or rather, the *I*—of the beholder. On the one hand, critical posthuman scholarship has taken more Derridean approaches to the act of seeing which call into question, to paraphrase Haraway (1988), the privilege of (partial) human perspective, and so focus on *sight* as a reciprocal event which gives entity and co-constructs both the seen and the seer, who, in approaching each other, fulfill both roles and thus occupy horizontal subject positions, irrespective of their (non) human status. On the other, transhumanist figurations have favoured *vision*—the divinely-accorded fantasy of future projections and domination—for the perpetuation of hierarchical power structures in the name of progress as a moral imperative.

Much can also be said about the pervasiveness of visual concerns in the age of transhumanism, which, by its very techno-forward nature, could feasibly have been expected to surpass that resistant biological metaphor of the eye in favour of different modes of apprehending reality that may capture it in its multisensory richness. Conversely, in a critical posthuman vein, too, the centrality of the eye is also a point of disenfranchisement for diversely able folk whose ways of perceiving transcend, bypass or negotiate the perspective afforded by the human eye. What's more, the emphasis on the *human* eye as the hegemonic relational perspective negates the validity of the sights of the non-human other, and, as such, perpetuates the hierarchical constructions that ought to be contested by the horizontality of seeing and being seen.

In the transhumanist predicament, scopic practices diverge between *sight* and *vision*. Transhumanist visions of progress, autonomy, and betterment, however, are often reliant on seeing practices that work only to the detriment of individuals by variously exerting control over their bodies, perceiving these bodies as abject, commodifying the seen, and/or depersonalising relationships and care. The science-fictional imaginaries of transhumanism and their so-called "enhancement technologies," then, have worked not so much towards the actual improvement of the human condition but have ultimately clashed with the exceptionalist transhuman claims as the subject/object dichotomy is crushed under the weight of the transhuman gaze. A revision of transhumanist scopic practices uncovers the dystopian nature of sight and seeing within this techno-mediated second coming (or creation) and warns of the dangers of uncritically looking at technological developments that hinder, in turn, our own possibilities for seeing.

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