



Play As Subversion: Video Games In The Age Of Transhumanism

Shalini Harilal

Abstract

This paper discusses the contemporary relevance of video games within the larger context of an increasingly technology-oriented societies. The argument proposed is that an optimistic view of the future as imagined by transhumanism could lead to an anticipation of radical goals like prolonged lifespan and immortality which, at present, remain unattainable, thereby creating a disconnect between expectations and outcomes. This paper argues that video games act as platforms for subconscious attempts at subverting this disconnect by providing players with the opportunity to create and/or inhabit game avatars. The existence of players within virtual game worlds as avatars is compared to the act of creating horcruxes in the fictional world of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series where horcrux is a contraption that helps overcome death. By comparing the notion of horcrux to the habitation of game avatars, this paper argues that a video game is a potential site for the manifestation of figurative precautionary measures against death. These measures are posited as subversive mechanisms because the rhetoric of technological advancement disregards the intensely personal nature of dying. The paper argues that figurative video game *horcruxing* is a subjective coping mechanism which is in a way subversive to the official transhuman narrative.

Keywords: *Death, Horcrux, Philosophy, Posthuman, Transhumanism, Video games*

Death as an experience does not easily lend itself to any definitive understanding. Despite the ubiquitous nature of death it lacks conceptual clarity even as a prime subject within different schools of philosophy. One's encounter with death is a supremely personal experience. The death of the individual/death per se has a fixed place in the human imagination. It is difficult to imagine a time when it might not have been a source of concern for humanity. The opening argument

traces the timeline leading to technology-anticipating societies and the perceptions of human existence and death that have changed alongside them. It is a near impossible task to generalize with precision the changing notions of death as conceived across history. A cursory glance however, at monotheistic religions, provides one way to put into perspective whence certain widely accepted observations on human existence and death have their origin and their evolution.

Varied observations reflect upon the vagueness attached to the concept of death even as they continue to raise many questions, one of which is, is death an avoidable event? Is ‘to die’ really the same thing as being lifeless because then why would people “fear the dead”?¹ Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, points out that death happens to an individual in one’s aloneness; it is not enough that it has happened to millions of others. As Paul Gerner observes in Heidegger’s *Being and Time: An Introduction*:

Death is something which each of us must take upon ourselves. Death is the possibility of being which is most my own. In so far as death ‘is’ it is essentially in each case mine... In a sense all the possibilities of my being are mine but that possibility which is death is a distinguished (ausgezeichnet) possibility. It is that possibility which is most my own. (123)

While Heidegger dwells upon the individual and personal experience of death and dying, Camus echoes a similar thought in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

I come at last to death and the attitude we have towards it. On this point everything has been said and it is only proper to avoid pathos. Yet one will never be sufficiently surprised that everyone lives as if no one “knew.” This is because in reality there is no experience of death... Here, it is barely possible to speak of the experience of others’ deaths. (19)

Even though Camus begins on the note that the absurdity that lies in the universe’s utter indifference to human existence should lead

¹Pointing out to the lack of a thorough understanding of death, Freud notes that “biology has not yet been able to decide whether death is the inevitable fate of every living being or whether it is only a regular but yet perhaps avoidable event in life” (13) and that the knowledge of human mortality is never quite “grasped” by anyone. Regarding common reactions to death, Freud further observes that despite the refutations of animism as primitive, the prevailing reaction to death is one that largely complies with that of “savages” and that “the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us” (14).

one to the only philosophical question of any bearing, that is, suicide, he later argues that the real mettle of the philosophical mind lies in one persisting in this absurdity. In other words, where reason fails, even philosophers and scientists tend to take a leap of faith into the non-rationality of religion. Death as in the final cessation of being involves little or no human agency owing to the simple fact that people die, and perhaps for this very reason, it insists upon the need for a theological and spiritual understanding of life.

Questions concerning the nature and origin of life, the existence of a creator or lack thereof could thus only be discussed from within various theological frameworks. Scholars posit the age of Enlightenment as roughly the time that brought about refreshing changes to this intellectual stagnation since it placed emphasis on the faculty of human reason and its potential to help break the world free of the irrational and the superstitious. This way of placing the human being at the centre of the world had its other consequences in framing questions regarding existence and its limitations. Where human reason is viewed as the supreme faculty, no longer could the beginning or end of existence be explained away at the hands of an external, non-rational, theological agency. Jonathan I. Israel, in *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*, places this period of intellectual reawakening from 1650 to 1750 pointing out to the largely hegemonic presence of monarchic and religious authorities in all matters concerning the populace across Europe and how there was a drastic change in this regard with the onset of the Enlightenment:

So great indeed was the cultural ascendancy of the dominant or state churches in their respective zones of hegemony that confessional theology long remained the principal and overriding criterion in assessing all intellectual debate and innovation... As the supremacy of theology waned, non-theological accounts of man, God, and the world, that is, the New Philosophy, especially Cartesianism, penetrated with such novel and unsettling consequences that rulers...found themselves compelled to intervene. (23–24)

With the cultural shift thus brought about, divine control over human life was strongly challenged. It follows that the conception of human life radically changed and any understanding of the death of the human person was consequently altered. The conception of the death of the body, within the framework of certain monotheistic religions has consistently been associated with a creator who having created all life could also destroy it at will. Even though the singularity of

death as an experience was unavailable to the individual until the actual event happens, the inevitability of death was accepted and often associated with the intention and will of a divine being. Enlightenment scholars including Jonathan Israel point out, among other things, such factors as the increasing accuracy and acceptance of scientific discoveries like the Copernican model of heliocentrism and the later support it had from Galileo to have been of pivotal significance in challenging the theological monopoly over all epistemic systems. When institutional religions narrate the origins and telos of existence, human life is clearly a consequence of supernatural forces rather than an individual being the origin of one's own meanings and purposes. It has been pointed out that this epistemological shift initiated by the Enlightenment has a natural successor in the philosophy of transhumanism (Bostrom 1–3; More 4). Where existence is no longer explained with the help of religions, contestation over the inevitability of death is rational and no longer blasphemous.

Transhumanism is a philosophy that looks at technology with much optimism. Death, among other things, is seen as a limitation to the experience of life overcoming which is therefore desirable and worth seeking. Transhumanists believe that the human person, as he/she is today, is a work in progress and there is nothing wrong in interfering with natural processes. Assuming an active role in our own evolution can be achieved by making use of advancing technologies in the fields of Genetic Engineering, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Artificial Intelligence, Cryonics, etc., to name a few (Transhumanist FAQ). Max More, futurist and founder of the Extropy Institute, defines transhumanism thus: “Transhumanism is a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values” (1).

Humanity+, the official website of Humanity+² organization, traces the history of the term “Transhuman” as it is understood today, back to the futurist FM-2030 (F.M. Esfandiary) who used the term transhuman in the sense of a “transitional human” (1972). Optimism towards future technologies is rooted in the concept of technological singularity, a concept popularized by writer Vernor Vinge. Singularity here is understood as a hypothetical point in future time which maybe brought about by supercomputers or above-human intelligence that

²Originally known as The World Transhumanist Association, Humanity+ is a non-profit organization that “...aim(s) to deeply influence a new generation of thinkers who dare to envision humanity's next steps” (Humanity+).

transforms life as it is lived today (Transhumanist FAQ). What earlier belonged to the realms of fringe, pseudo-sciences in the forms of alchemy and black magic is by express invitation placed within the folds of the legitimate sciences in the 21st century. Assessing the position of this transitional human/transhuman vis-à-vis religion, scholars provide compelling evidence to suggest the possibility of the origin of religion itself in the evolution of human brain. Doyle, in a very relevant chapter on religion in relation to transhumanism, traces the history of scientific and psychological literature over the centuries that have succeeded in establishing links between religious experiences and the function of the human brain. He notes the presumed relation between the frontal lobe and primitive religion and the relation that ecstatic religious experiences have with TLE (Temporal Lobe Epilepsy), for “arguably, if one were to look for the seat of religion in the brain...one would begin with the frontal lobes, as the frontal lobes are among the “newest” brain structures from an evolutionary view-point” (154), and the relation that ecstatic religious experiences have with TLE. Essentially his work throws light on various attempts by researchers to link the human ability to conceive complex ideas constitutive of religions with biological processes developed through evolution (158). This link serves the purpose of subsuming under the transhumanist argument a point of view on the evolutionary development of humans that have religious instinct as a part of it. In other words, human being is indeed a ‘work in progress’ as even the capacity to conceive religions is one acquired over the course of evolution. It is necessary to understand the concept of the posthuman to fully grasp the direction of the transhumanist movement. A posthuman is the hypothetical future being who would be the evolutionary successor to humans if and when the necessary technological intervention in natural evolution is performed ethically and intelligently. The transhuman, it follows, is truly the intermediary link between humans and posthumans (Humanity+). According to transhumanists, the three possible ways to become posthuman are: Cryonic suspension: Transhumanists recommend signing up for cryonic suspension. It is a process whereby the legally-pronounced dead body is preserved at extremely low temperature under laboratory conditions. At a later point in the future, when medical technology is advanced enough, the bodies could be brought back to life (thawing). Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Arizona, USA is known for performing this procedure from as early as 1966. Ted Williams, the American baseball player is one among the cryonically preserved. (The Alcor Life Foundation website provides case reports of cryopreservation); Incremental Augmentation: By using this option, advances in medical and AI technologies are incrementally added to the human body and the posthuman,

that evolves from this process, would be a consequence of cumulative additions of technology; Upload: “Uploading (sometimes called “downloading,” “mind uploading,” or “brain reconstruction”) is the process of transferring an intellect from a biological brain to a computer” and is a hypothetical option (Humanity+). Once uploaded, the upload can choose to sever connection with a biological/robotic/prosthetic physical substratum, exist as a brain in a machine and communicate with others in virtual environments. (Humanity+; More 7; Walker 37–51)

Transhuman, in the sense explained before, occupies a liminal space between life and death. “Recent studies into the biochemistry of physiological (apoptosis) and pathological (necrotic) cell death in mammalian organisms have led to new insights into the concept of death on the micro scale (at the cellular level) as well as at the macro scale, i.e., the death of the entire biological organism” (Doyle 7). There is an acknowledgement and awareness within the medical community that death is “not an event” but rather a process which therefore can be tinkered with. “Sometimes called “absolutely irreversible death” or “information-theoretic death”” is where the “...destruction of the brain has occurred to such an extreme that any information it may have ever had is irrevocably lost for all eternity. This, some people argue, is the only real (irreversible) form of death” (8). A case in point is a recent experiment, published in April 2019, by Yale researchers on slaughtered pigs in which brain activity was revived in “decapitated” pigs to a certain extent several hours after their presumed death. Nevertheless no sign of consciousness or sentience was detected (The Guardian). This research is relevant to the extent that it questions accepted notions of death as an event and opens up the possibility of encountering death as a process in stages whereby the fundamental notions of transhumanism stand validated.

In the context of the proposed argument of this paper, death is examined through the listed characteristics:

- Death is an antonym to free will which is an important aspect of the living human body (Rigor Mortis, the third stage of death, literally means ‘stiffness of death’).
- Imminence – death is characterized by unexpectedness and inevitability.
- Personal – Death takes the individual in her aloneness, it is a subjective experience that each one has to go through on her own.

- Unity – Death takes the individual in her wholeness. Brain death and such references to parts of the body becoming dysfunctional ought to be strictly understood by their medical definitions and not as emotionally and practically comparable to the death of the entire being, causing eventual decomposition and disappearance which as of now is unavoidable outside of theorizing.

The transhumanist philosophy doesn't merely remain in niche cliques; it is widely-known and on some levels anticipated. Biomedical gerontologist Aubrey de Grey points out to the medical foundation of a future where the human lifespan is fundamentally greater than it is today: "The problem of aging is unequivocally humanity's worst medical problem. Roughly 100,000 people worldwide die every day of it, and there's an awful lot of suffering that happens before you die. But I feel that the defeat of aging in the foreseeable future is a realistic proposition" (1). He also notes that gerontology as opposed to geriatrics, believes in prevention rather than cure. By tending to the damages caused by metabolism periodically, he argues, human life span can proportionally be increased. This goes against the current medical practices of treating the aged for specific ailments, and is apparently more of a solution to ageing (3).

Transhumanist philosophy both in its outlook and goals depends heavily on futuristic technology not unlike what is portrayed in technological utopian and dystopian narratives of video games and the science fiction genre of other visual and print media. One can think of films like *The Matrix series*, *Avatar trilogy*, *Interstellar*, etc., video game series like *Bioshock*, *Deus Ex*, *system shock*, etc., and TV series such as *Black Mirror* and *Altered Carbon*. Most of these narratives are set in the future, in an era of technologically advanced human societies. The fact that transhumanist philosophy works in tandem with much of the popular content in contemporary media gives legitimacy to a collective social anticipation for such ideas as prolonged life and the conclusive evasion of physical death. From a situation where such ideas as the overcoming of death were seen to be purely hypothetical and imaginary, there has been a marked shift to one where the event of its realization is soberly awaited. However, so long as the cessation of death hasn't been actualized, death would happen as before, inevitably and imminently. This onrush of the end, as we await the realization of these goals, is described thus by Damien Broderick:

And in the meantime? How tragic to stand under the shadow of the executioner's sword even as the pardon is being rushed to us! If its sharp blade falls, we are as dead and gone as any peasant or priest or king in the suffering, long history and pre-

history of the world. Plainly, the only prudent move is to do everything possible to forestall accidental or infective death during the next decade or three, and to adopt as many healthy practices as we can manage without altogether giving up on the vivid texture of life. (436)

It may be noted that there is a sense of urgency and of being positioned midway in the above quotation. The desire for the need to escape the eventuality of death is likened to awaiting a word of pardon under a rushing sword. In this mid-way position, the singularity promised by technology is visible only as a mirage. When a specific goal has been sufficiently anticipated, a non-actualization of it leads to an imbalance between the expectation and the result. This in turn could induce imbalances in the consciousness that allows itself to desire something. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi posits a condition called ‘psychic entropy’ to explain this chasm between what the mind expects and what it fails to receive: “Whenever information disrupts consciousness by threatening its goals we have a condition of inner disorder, or psychic entropy, a disorganization of the self that impairs its effectiveness. Prolonged experience of this kind can weaken the self to the point that it is no longer able to invest attention and pursue its goals” (37).

The situation brought about by a collective anticipation of an evasion of the experience of death is one that is capable of inducing such psychic entropy. For as yet, death has not been evaded and, therefore, the expectations engendered by a belief in transhumanist philosophies constantly go awry. A link is posited between the psychic entropy caused by the above described situation and player engagement in video games. Psychic entropy, as defined in the above quotation, leads to a ‘disorganization’ of the self which no longer is able to invest ‘attention.’ This is another way of saying that the self is no longer able to focus on productive ends and is fragmented rather than organized in a state of unity. While the ‘pardon is being rushed,’ human beings are to keep the physical body safe from being destroyed. In this situation there is an evident split between the idea and the practicality of it. This imbalance is bound to cause a fragmentation of the individual self as the efficacy of the physical body and the expectations pinned around it no longer synchronize at any given point in the present. However, this gap can probably be filled at any point in future.

To analogically illustrate this point, this paper uses J. K. Rowling’s concept of the *Horcrux*. In the sixth installment of the eponymous Harry Potter book series, Professor Slughorn describes

horcruxes to Harry Potter thus: “Well, you split your soul, you see, and hide part of it in an object outside the body. Then even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged. But, of course, existence in such a form...” (497). As long as *horcruxes* exist, the death of the body cannot be the end. The proposed point is that the act of creating a/multiple game character(s)/avatar(s) and engaging in video game play may be equated to the process of creating *horcruxes*. The fictional utility of *horcruxing* is not exactly an absolute evasion of death. Rather, the more the number of *horcruxes*, the more one evades the imminence of the event of disappearance. It is essentially the splitting of the soul into several pieces so that the single whole self does not vanish in the event of death.³

It is common knowledge that the effective distribution of the time available to an individual can result in accomplishing a number of tasks simultaneously, thus, producing the illusion of more time than actually available. In a similar manner attention/focus can be split in a way that enables selective memory possible, which ultimately helps in keeping the memory of daily drudgery at bay. However, a life lived in the virtual dimension allows for this attitude to manifest more efficiently as compared to other platforms. In *Life on the Screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*, Sherry Turkle points out the ability of real-time virtual worlds to make the individual rethink oneself in terms of one’s mind, body, and identity. Virtual worlds make possible parallel existence and in this sense they represent the postmodern life situation (47).

On a conscious level, a human who has active avatars in a multiple number of video games is efficiently splitting one’s time and attention into a different dimension and therefore to some extent escaping the routine reality. On a much less conscious level, the same process signifies an intuitive measure against death, rooted in the notion of the latter taking away the individual, in her aloneness. As previously noted, death confronts the individual in her individuality and takes from her this unity of the individual as a whole. It is precisely this principle which is used in this subconscious attempt to sabotage the death of the body. This process, which has been equated with the

³It is fitting to remember Freud’s argument for “doubling as a preservation against extinction” in the context of his discussion of Otto Rank’s concept of the Double/doppelganger as “an insurance against destruction to the ego” and as a “denial of the power of death.” He also talks about how this instinct of self-preservation is reflected in the language of dreams. The fear of castration is not represented directly; instead, other symbols stand in to represent the object (9). Clearly, such an “insurance against the destruction to the ego” occurs in a scenario where a person has multiple existences across game worlds.

concept of *horcruxing* here, is meant to undermine death by splitting or creating more parts of the self than can be taken away at once. It is important to note that none of this produces any corporeal results as the process is figurative. The act of engaging in multiple game worlds simultaneously through game-specific avatars helps challenge the non-availability of certain promises made by transhumanist philosophies. The player engages in '*horcruxing*'/doubling in her engagement with video games to gain a certain control, which is predominantly figurative, over her mental activities. Death is a personal experience and therefore any philosophy or ideological premise that assures a collective redemption from it can only be viewed with suspicion. The psychic entropy created by an inability of the mind to conflate the promise of overcoming death with the near impracticality of it in the present finds a subversive expression in video game play where the player potentially engages in creating and stashing away *horcruxes* (pieces) of themselves. To be more specific, inhabiting game worlds as characters is subversive precisely because the undercurrents of existence within game worlds in multiple forms point to a way of protecting the unity of the individual subject as it is no longer susceptible to death and disappearance when it is existing 'as many' as opposed to 'as one.'

In *Stories, Meaning, and Experience: Narrative and Enaction*, Popova observes that causality is a part of direct human perception. She understands human cognition of complex narratives with the help of Merlin Donald's concept of 'slow process' (qtd. in Popova 35–6), "...which runs at the background of human cognitive life, while the faster-moving sensorimotor one, responsible for the short-duration processes...runs in the foreground" (Popova 35). The 'slow process' mentioned before, may here be understood as the cognitive process in action, that unifies the player's multiple presences as game characters across platforms in a holistic narrative. Video games are essentially narratives of varying complexity which may be played and 'understood' in terms of the same concept of causality inherent in human cognition. The 'psychic entropy' resulting from the discord between expectations and reality is resolved at a figurative and mental level.

In "The Transhuman Inclination of Video Games," Robert. M. Geraci points out that all video games are essentially transhuman in nature because the game world is able to defy physical laws. This paper stresses the fact that the transhuman goal of defying death is perpetually set in the future and, therefore, figurative video game *horcruxing* is a subjective coping mechanism which is in a way subversive to the official transhuman narrative. Death might be overcome

in the future, but, until then, it is rushing towards the present and it has to be dealt with alone. Transhumanism looks forward to a future where the society would collectively evade death. But, the subjectivity inherent in the experience of death opposes the collective/communal nature of transhumanist optimism for the future.

Engaging in the figurative process of *horcruxing* in the virtual dimension amounts to corporeal results to the extent that, the promise of overcoming death is a discourse regarding what is to come in the future and not the present. If the idea of the future is itself a way of perceiving time in the present, the corporeality of etching *horcruxes* in the virtual dimension in the now already exists simultaneously with the future of fast-approaching death. It is a question of recognizing the unprecedented intermediary nature of existence today and its ways of expressing itself. As death takes over the individual in the solitariness of one's self, it also results in the will of the body being handed over to death. Rigor mortis (stiffness of death), described as the third stage of death (Jalan), describes this condition. The very act of play as opposed to the stiffness of death on the virtual dimension signifies an intuitive reaction against this absolute giving up of the free will of the body.

As a case in point, *Simcity: Buildit* is a simulation game published by Electronic Arts that serves as example for an immersive game experience accessible to larger audience by virtue of being available on the smartphone platform. Unlike the original Sim series which let players create their own avatars and life situations, this variant is one that has an implicit avatar, not an explicit or 'present' character/avatar. *Simcity: Buildit* players are mayors of cities that they get to build from the scratch. 'Other' people/characters (AI) inhabit the houses and buildings you fashion in your city. The player agency in this game is therefore an implicit rather than explicit presence, despite which an immersive and constant engagement within the game world is a requirement. Any neglect by the player's 'mayor' character by being inactive in the game world for extended periods of time takes a toll on the city, from the sewer systems, transport, and electricity to law and order; everything suffers and the city falls into utter chaos and what more, the Sim inhabitants start to vacate your city; the product of your time, hard work, and sometimes real money. The necessity of consistent and constant presence of the player that this game demands for any substantial progress to be made cannot be overstressed. Being an online game which does not really have an end goal as such, the intrusion potential of this game in daily life is high because it can replace life itself; a quality many video games share.

Another example is *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, the third installment in the *Witcher* game series. It is an open-world game that gives players access to literally every part of its geography, neatly laid out in a map. In contrast to the *Simcity: Buildit* game discussed above, *Witcher 3* is not an online game, neither is it a mobile platform game. The player takes on the character of a trained fighter but the aspect of the game relevant to this paper is its open-world character. Although there is an overarching theme and goal that drives the main narrative of the game, none of its primary or secondary goals are either time-bound or sequence-specific. The game lets the player roam around the geography of the game world without necessarily being involved in a quest; that is to say, one can exist within the game riding horses, swimming across lakes, picking medicinal flowers and making potions and the like. A player can choose to simply exist within the game space as an extension of it without exhausting the possibility of existence by “finishing” quests and getting to the end of the story. This example is relevant because gameplay in *Witcher 3* allows for existence in a virtual game world as a character susceptible to an exemplary level of customization, without exhausting the possibility of being. In both *Witcher 3* and *Simcity: Buildit*, the act of ‘horcruxing’ is particularly ‘safe’ owing to the ongoing nature of these games, a characteristic they share with many online games as well. At this juncture it is also important to mention that the option to re-spawn or to regain lives in video games is a general characteristic that makes them a site of coping mechanism as they are figurative measures against the onrush of death. The two games mentioned above are peculiar to the extent that their narratives are ongoing and therefore the death of the character is quite impossible in the same way as in certain other games that explicitly offer the player a number of chances of life to get a quest right.

The question arises as to why videogaming is a better way to *horcrux* against death than any other life activity. The duality between mind and body, and the potential of the mind to outlive the limitations of the body have always been speculated by philosophers. This process of letting the mind drift is a characteristic of reading, viewing, and browsing the cyberspace in general. Qualitatively, in video games, the mind/body divide is actualized to its maximum potential. It is important to make this distinction between traditional art forms and video games with regard to the flexibility these media allow in exercising this disconnect. In reading and viewing, the identification with a character and adventures in the *textworld* are accomplished as someone else. In games, the virtual mind and the body that engage in play belong to the player, regardless of what character one plays. The attachment to the *game world* is through the avatar in the game, but

the avatar is ontologically dependent on the player unlike in other scenarios. It is the avatar that makes *horcruxing* in the game world possible.

The significance of engaging in the process of *horcruxing* within games is that there is a disconnect between mind and body, and to even have a perceived dissociation with the body, which is the reference point for defining death, is to also temporarily distance oneself from the approach of death, metaphorically. This experience of disconnect is important because death is conceived within the framework of the body; if and when body processes stall, including the functions of the brain, death is certified. In non-virtual/real-life *horcruxing*, body, the point of reference for understanding mortality, accompanies the mind everywhere.⁴ The transhumanist assumption, described by Robert Freitas, is that the human body is designed to destroy itself:

Red cells carry oxygen to our tissues and remove carbon dioxide. Respirocytes [respirocyte is an artificial mechanical red blood cell just 1 micron in diameter having 1/100th volume of a natural red cell.] do too, but would be made of much stronger diamond-like materials, not floppy lipids and proteins as we find in living cells. (70)

The human body is made up of “floppy” material, intended for destruction with the passage of time. The transhumanist vision is to replace the floppy body material with “diamond-like” structures, and other substrates more durable and strong. The non-durability of human body is its inherent character as it is not built for endurance but to naturally become decrepit and eventually disappear. For this reason the death of the individual is fundamentally understood as the death of the body. As a game avatar is ontologically dependent on the player, it is not just the mind of the player that doubles itself in a virtual world but also the body.

While Geraci argues that video games in general have a ‘transhumanist inclination’ because they defy the limitations of the real world, others like William Sims Bainbridge draw this connection by appealing to a similar point that game avatars provide us the experience of becoming more than what we are:

Avatars point out to us that enhancement is not merely a mat-

⁴Multitasking is a way of effectively utilizing time and in real-life one does spread oneself thin by donning several roles, being part of several fan clubs, organizations, etc. In such *horcruxing* activities, body accompanies mind regardless to say.

ter of increasing the effectiveness of a person in taking action, but also can mean an altered form of consciousness that expands opportunities for experience, and escape from the conventional system of moral restraints. Especially noteworthy is the fact that one individual may have many different avatars, thereby becoming a *multiplex* or *protean personality*. (91)

It would not be out of place to point out that this characteristic of video games and virtual worlds in general should be seen as corollary to the technological revolution that qualifies contemporary times. Video games is one of the most representative art forms of this century precisely because it captures the plurality, the changing quality of life today. Human beings today are more ‘protean’ and less constrained by cultural, political, and biological limitations than ever before in history. The point is that the power of the game world to mediate virtual transcendence of human limitations should be seen in tandem with its rise as an art form to match the times that produced it which is essentially a product of globalization.⁵

Video games like all art are ultimately a cultural product and therefore, are in a reciprocal relationship with the social and political order. In their definition of the transhuman, the Transhumanist FAQ 3.0 of Humanity+ website notes:

One might ask, given that our current use of e.g. medicine and information technology enable us to routinely do many things that would have astonished humans living in ancient times, whether we are not already transhuman? The question is a provocative one, but ultimately not very meaningful; the concept of the transhuman is too vague for there to be a definite answer. (Transhumanist FAQ)

There is a necessity to draw a qualitative distinction between what constitutes the transhuman and what does not. One of the more obvious links that connects video games to transhumanism is avatars and their metaphorical relevance to the field of neural-computer interface,⁶ a field that is expected to make most transhumanist goals come

⁵Human beings are no longer bound by the restrictions of time and space to physical locations, and interactions happen over virtual spaces, therefore, video games is an art form reflective of this age because narratives also play out on the virtual world where people collectively engage with stories in spite of time-space constraints in real-time (MMORPGs).

⁶As previously mentioned, among the three options transhumanists put forward to become posthuman, “upload” is the option that discusses the possibility of a neural-

true. But then it is sensible to remember that while technological changes affect the society holistically, the average human of today, according to this logic, would be transhuman regardless of his/her allegiance to this point of view. While it is important to acknowledge the existing literature establishing a link between video games and transhumanism, it is important to not confuse life with art. Human beings today are qualitatively far more transhuman than earlier; in video games it is more a case of art catching up with time by reflecting the qualitatively more transhuman.⁷

The human body as it is today is a limitation and it is hoped that a point in the future would take care of this issue once and for all. While in broad agreement with the basic tenets of transhumanism the paper bases itself on a cultural shift brought about by the transhumanist understanding of death. The point that the transhumanist goal of overcoming death is always set in the future cannot be stressed enough. This paper seeks to understand the affective consequences in the present of this goal set perpetually in future time. Figurative *horcruxing* does not intend to overcome death; it merely is a hologram of the desire for the “rushing pardon,” projected from deep within the mind.

In conclusion, given the contemporary relevance of video games within the larger context of increasingly technology-anticipating societies, the paper argues that an optimism for the future imagined by advancing technologies leads to anticipation of radical goals like prolonged lifespan and immortality which, at present, remain unattainable, thereby, creating a disconnect between expectations and outcomes. The possibility of a future evasion of death when internalized, leads to a conflict between the expectations of the mind and the ability of the body to fulfill them. This results in subconscious attempts by the mind to reinstate the lost balance. Video game play attempts to subvert this disconnect by letting players create and inhabit characters in virtual worlds where the disparity between a promise for collective evasion of death and the personal nature of death as an actual experience is challenged and subverted.



computer interface where the personality/avatar of an individual is transferred onto a computer system as a “brain in a machine.”

⁷Medical advancements have already significantly improved the quality and span of life; the use of prosthetic limbs, pacemakers, etc., make humans of today transhuman in the sense that these are incremental augmentations.

Works Cited

- Bainbridge, William S. "Transavatars." *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 91–99.
- Bostrom, Nick. "A History of Transhumanist Thought." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1–17.
- Broderick, Damien. "Trans and Post." *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 430–37.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Hamish Hamilton, 1955.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper Perennial, 1990.
- David, Nicola. "Researchers 'Reboot' Pig Brains Hours after Animals Died." *The Guardian*, 17 Apr. 2019, www.theguardian.com/science/2019/apr/17/scientists-reboot-pig-brain-hours-after-animals-died-yale-university-researchers.
- Doyle, John D. *What Does it Mean to be Human? Life, Death, Personhood and the Transhumanist Movement*. Springer, 2018, pp. 149–77.
- Freitas, Robert A. Jr. "Welcome to the Future of Medicine." *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 67–72.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." MIT.edu, 1919, web.mit.edu/allanmc/wwww/freud1.pdf.
- Geraci, Robert M. "Video Games and the Transhuman Inclination." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2012, pp. 735–756.
- Gorner, Paul. *Heidegger's Being and Time: An Introduction*. CUP, 2007.

- Grey, Aubrey de. "A Thousand Years Young." *The Futurist*, 2012, pp.18–23.
- Jalan, Mahak. "What Are The 4 Postmortem Stages of Death?" *ScienceABC*, 28 May 2018, www.scienceabc.com/humans/post-mortemstages-of-death-different-stages-the-body-goes-through-after-death.html.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Basil Blackwell, 1962.
- Israel, Jonathan I. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- More, Max. "Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy." *Extropy*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1990, pp. 6–12.
- . "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 3–17.
- Popova, Yanna B. *Stories, Meaning, and Experience: Narrative and Enaction*. Routledge, 2015.
- Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Bloomsbury, 2005.
- Rowling, J.K. "The Horcruxes." *Pottermore*, 2012, www.pottermore.com/explore-the-story/the-horcruxes.
- SimCity: Buildit. Electronic Arts, 2014.
- "Transhumanist FAQ." *Humanity+*, 2004, humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-faq/.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. CD Projekt, 2015.
- Walker, Mark. "Personal Identity and Uploading." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2011, pp. 37–51.
- "What is Cryonics?" Alcor Life Extension Foundation, 2018, alcor.org/AboutCryonics/index.html.