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The rising of extramodernity and its cultural metaphors: savages, cyborgs, and robots

El surgimiento de la extramodernidad y sus metáforas culturales: salvajes, cíborgs y robots

David Ramos Castro

Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze the notions of savage, cyborg, and robot, placing them in the historical and sociocultural context of the representations of Western modernity and its relations with otherness. It relies on an interpretative and critical method based on the discussion of a multimodal corpus (bibliographical, but also allusive to cinema and music), which takes these three figures as cultural metaphors of modern historicity that reaches up to contemporary technoscientific versions. Throughout the paper, the ideas of civilization and progress, the imaginaries of the human articulated by posthumanism and transhumanism are reviewed, and the notion of extramodernity is proposed as a way of grasping the cultural dilemmas of our time. In conclusion, the validity of an anthropological humanism different from the rationalist and Eurocentric one is defended.

Keywords: Cultural Anthropology; Cultural History; Technological change; Humanism

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Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es analizar las nociones de salvaje, cíborg y robot, situándolas en el contexto histórico y sociocultural de las representaciones de la modernidad occidental y sus relaciones con la alteridad. Se apoya en un método interpretativo y crítico basado en la discusión de un corpus multimodal (bibliográfico, pero también alusivo al cine y la música), que toma estas tres figuras como metáforas culturales de la historicidad moderna que llega hasta las versiones tecnocientíficas contemporáneas. A lo largo del artículo se revisan las ideas de civilización y progreso, los imaginarios de lo humano articulados por el posthumanismo y el transhumanismo, y se propone la noción de extramodernidad como forma de captar los dilemas culturales de nuestro tiempo. En conclusión, se defiende la validez de un humanismo antropológico distinto del racionalista y eurocéntrico.
Palabras clave: Antropología cultural; Historia cultural; Cambio tecnológico, Humanismo

Introduction

In Western cultural history, figures such as the savage and the primitive played a prominent role in the link that Europe established with the conquered places and their cultural differences (Borsboom, 1988; Jahoda, 1999). The West's relationship with its own identity, as well as with the otherness that helped shape it, cleared the way for such figures to be attributed a supposed stage of historical and cultural development that the West, on the contrary, claimed to have already surpassed thanks to a process of civilization unheard of elsewhere (Heraclides and Dialla, 2015). Likewise, and as part of its modern cultural imaginary, the disturbing figure of the savage was also in tune with the history of the nascent scientific anthropology throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a history that was revealing a particular attitude towards the contrast offered by societies alien to the canons of Western life that the West had been encountering as a result of its imperial enterprises since the sixteenth century (Weber, 2015).

Over time, the errors of the evolutionary conception were exposed (Deliège, 2006) and the savage ceased to be seen as a figure of anthropological value and rigor. Nevertheless, its allusion did not lose ideological force, so that other equally captious visions of the relationship with otherness emerged to take its place and formulate new strangeness (Bartra, 2018, 2019). It is in this scenario that cyborgs and robots appeared as two versions of an alterity that, although not entirely novel, since it appeared involved in various cultural and aesthetic episodes in the West, had undoubtedly gained increasing prominence in recent decades under the influence of technoscience and its new images, which embody a turbulent inner relationship within our species (Sibilia, 2010; Le Breton, 2017).

We can understand the notion of technoscience as the result of a "convergence between nanotechnology, biotechnologies, information technologies and cognitive sciences" (Echeverría, 2005, p. 10), something that is relevant, since it indicates the same activities that will later be associated with the transhumanist project. As opposed to the possibility of speaking separately of science and technology, the advantage of referring to technoscience lies in the possibility that this notion offers us to notice the fusion that occurs between science, technology and power. For Hottois (1991), who some consider to be the father of the term, scientific activity can no longer distinguish between the basic and the applied, as it is now integrated into a new technoscientific

unity involving actions imbued with power and never entirely innocent. This nexus with power and capital explains, in turn, why the development of technoscience took place around the Big Science that had developed from the 1940s to the 1970s, and subsequently flourished in the heat of the new private incentive for research and development that arose from the 1980s onwards (Echeverría, 2003, 2005).

Since then cyborgs and robots have become the protagonists of the new technoscientific metaphors of our days. Their existence, and not only their reference, has further complicated the anthropological panorama by moving the frontiers of the human being to distant and undefined confines (Cerqui & Warwick, 2008; Aguilar, 2008). In this change, the relationship with otherness has intensified the crisis of the representations of the human ascribed to humanism, which several currents of thought have been denouncing for decades: some as part of the pernicious consequences of anthropocentric modernity, others because of the anthropological limitations that do not allow the development of a particular type of transhuman posthumanism.

This conjuncture of technoscientific otherness and humanistic challenges has today shaped renewed imaginaries that manifest a growing anthropological discomfort. This uneasiness resonates in questions about the meaning that anthropology itself may or may not have in a posthuman world, or about the defense that can still be made of an anthropological humanism that is not anthropocentric. These are questions that take up the discussions on modernity based on current realities, and that allow us to think about a different notion from those that have been proposed so far as alternatives to modernity (postmodernity, hypermodernity, transmodernity or overmodernity). The aim of the article is then to analyze the notions of savage, cyborg, and robot, placing them in the historical and sociocultural context of the representations of Western modernity and its relations with otherness in order to grasp the historical, dynamic and ambiguous movement in which we recognize our troubled present time.

Methodology

Considering the theoretical objective of the article, an interpretative and critical method has been applied. For this purpose, a set of books and works related to the topics presented in it have been analyzed and compared mixing them up with some specific references to cinema and other aesthetic allusions. All this as part of an approach that conceives culture as a multimodal space of signification (Adami, 2023), and that takes texts as plural forms of social expression that cannot be reduced to linear narratives (Higgs, Nita and Trede, 2009). The hermeneutic-interpretative method is shown in this sense as an appropriate research strategy, as well as a way of sociocultural criticism (Lorenzo, 2021). Accordingly, to better understand the contradictions and conflicts of our time, the three figures (the savage, the cyborg and the robot) have been interpreted as interrelated cultural metaphors. In this way, the methodological relevance of tropes in relation to cultural symbolism and social meanings is underlined (Turner, 1974,1999; Fernández, 1974).

Development

Savagery, evolution and progress

In 1877, Lewis Henry Morgan published *The Ancient Society,* a work with which he wanted to propose a general theory of human development from an evolutionary and comparative approach, something that is not only reflected in the full title of the book, *Ancient Society. Research in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarium to Civilization*, but also in his opening words:

> The latest research on the origin of the human race comes to show that man begins his life at the foot of the ladder by working his way up from savagery to civilization by the slow accumulations of experimental science. (Morgan, 1971, p. 77)

Evolutionism was born in a particular time, very interested in the natural sciences and the origin of the various forms of life. But that same interest led it to formulate excessive analogies between biology and human societies, something that undoubtedly favored the colonial enterprise, which saw in the advance of techno-industrial civilization an unequivocal trait of progress and Western superiority over the lifestyles of other human groups. Progress was the key to keeping that belief alive, and so it was for Morgan, who saw it as a natural consequence that had led humanity from savagery to civilization.

In the face of progressive optimism, the savage merely cast a long and ancient shadow that came from an old torment of Western individuals. The savage, based on a pseudo-empirical category, in truth fulfilled the task of offering the West an otherness with which to oppose itself and against which to reaffirm its own image of civilizational superiority. However, that notion, through which Europeans believed they were describing the savagery of others, was nothing more than an image exported from their own cultural heritage. As Bartra (2011), states: "The so-called civilized man has not taken a single step without being accompanied by his shadow, the savage" (p. 7). And the myth of the savage was well before the European expansion of the sixteenth century. In fact, the young anthropology of Morgan's time only fell back on the false objectivity of a European subject who was really lost among his own specters.

That evolutionary progressivism suffered a severe shock in the First World War, when it became clear how the very advances that had been linked to progress could bring about unspeakable devastation. Such a discovery plunged the European into a deep spiritual crisis, and showed the rest of the world what it could expect from the future. In fact, there was not long to wait. The list of horrors was soon joined by the Nazi genocide, the Soviet massacres and the American crime on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an atomic massacre that was never officially recognized as a crime against humanity, and which still poses an unfinished debate (Tanaka, 2002).

The film about the life of Julius Robert Oppenhaimer, *Oppenheimer* (Nolan, 2023) can be interpreted as part of that same controversy and the persistent unease that the event continues to raise. At the same time, another film, *The Moon Killers* (Scorsese, 2023), narrated the death in

strange circumstances of more than two dozen people from the Osage Nation in northwestern Oklahoma during the 1920s. The film, based on the book of the same name by journalist David Grann, reveals the premeditated extermination of members of these native people after the sudden discovery of oil on the reservation where they lived. The envy aroused by this stroke of luck among some whites detonated the criminal plot.

Although both films relate very different crimes, there is a common genealogy between them that takes us to the reverse side of the advances of civilization. The crime against the members of the Osage nation continued to expose the dire implications of evolutionary ideology, which even unwillingly motivated abuses and ominous crimes based on a narrative that divided humans into savages and civilized, between the others and us. For its part, the American atomic bombing turned war into a universal threat that placed us all before an identical risk of terminal holocaust. Technology represented in this case by the progress of the arms industry had surpassed the instrumental plane of technique, placing us before a panorama never known before, which turned atomic-nuclear deterrence into the highest and most sinister dimension of the Hegelian myth of the mortal struggle for recognition, a myth that already revealed the inherent and foundational aggressiveness of Western modernity (Subirats, 1991, pp. 37-75).

The writer Joseph Conrad, younger son of the same time as Morgan, had portrayed that deceptive appearance of civilization and progress, which had established a criminal pact with colonialism and its arrogance in the face of otherness (Conrad, 1993). Justified as the legitimate struggle of civilization against cultural backwardness, the colonial enterprise concealed its interests, which were more concerned with the plundering of raw materials, the exploitation of local labor and the political control of the captured territories. Years later, after the Second World War, its heirs invented a related idea of development that reserved for most of the decolonized countries the stigma of endless underdevelopment, I mean, the humiliating euphemism of a development in eternal fulfillment (Escobar, 2014; Esteva, 2000).

In the realization of colonial logic, we cannot deny the collateral participation of anthropology, which had begun to finance its ethnographic work thanks to the resources that flowed from institutions sympathetic to colonial interests. British social anthropology, for example, was striving at the time to convince the colonial government of the crucial importance of its research to better understand the native thought of the occupied peoples in order to avoid interpretive errors that would favor disorder (Kuper, 1973, p. 131). It was an uncertain and naive argument, for those errors were not so much due to a lack of understanding between the different cultures as to "evidence of a flagrant disregard for popular sentiments", as the British colonial governor Lord Hailey pointed out. They were the result of disinterest in others "rather than the fruit of ignorance of local customs" (Kuper, 1973, p. 133). It was a crude observation, but one that offered a more accurate explanation of colonial bad faith than that proposed by anthropologists.

However, even if the resources came from colonial agencies, we cannot deny the tensions that existed between anthropology and the colonial authorities, whose relations were never entirely cordial. Likewise, it would be unfair to forget the subsequent self-criticism that anthropology

directed at its old complicities (Kuper's book is good proof) or its later efforts to combat ethnocentrism in order to better understand human diversity. It is enough to recall the following words of Lévi-Strauss, pronounced in 1960:

> If colonialism had not existed, the rise of anthropology would have been later, but perhaps anthropology would not have been incited, as in the role it has acquired, to question the whole of man in each of his particular examples. (Lévi-Strauss, 2004, p.35)

For Lévi-Strauss, anthropology, and colonialism had met due to possible historical reasons, which raised a greater awareness of the importance of cultural differences, and the understanding of the human being as a non-instrumental reality. For this reason, considered the French anthropologist, "our science reached its maturity the day when Western man began to understand that he would never understand himself, as long as on the Earth's surface a single race, a single people, was treated by him as an object" (Lévi-Strauss, 2004, p. 35). Faced with this new horizon of humanized expectations, one could wonder what remained of the old figure of the savage. Roger Bartra, who explored this question by investigating the new myths of cinema (Bartra, 2018), considered that such a figure, an old inhabitant of the European imaginary, could symbolically join the new realities of the cyborg, and the robot. Bartra identifies that symbolic relationship with the old struggle between identity, and difference, that the West had maintained for centuries, and that in our days is reproduced through cultural metaphors typical of a technoscientific era.

In this sense, alluding to the struggle of identity with the vast territory of otherness is a fundamental memory of modernity, but it is not enough to capture what today characterizes the new scenarios of otherness. Through the reference to cyborgs and robots, such scenarios respond to a new process of "silicolonization of the world" (Sadin, 2016) that has modified the usual presentation and stigmatization of the savage. In the face of their traditional identification with nature, the cybernetic otherness of cyborgs and robots now proceeded, on the contrary, through an increasing estrangement from natural and organic life.

Cyborgs and posthuman robots

Although cyborgs and robots had different origins, their paths gradually converged. Cyborg, an acronym of words *cybernetics* and *organism*, was a term coined in the 1960s by scientists Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline during a symposium in Texas funded by the Air Force School of Aviation Medicine (Clynes & Kline, 1960). For its part, the *robot*, from the Czech word *robota,* was born forty years earlier, in 1920, from the imaginative mind of writer and journalist Karel Kapek, who had created it for his play *R.U.R (Robots Universales Rossum)*. The Czech word alluded to mechanical and slave labor (Iglesias, 2016, p. 89), a condition for which those new beings had been precisely created, like a modern version of the Jewish and medieval Golem (Subirats, 1991, p. 183).

Both from a historical and cultural point of view, Kapek's era was crucial in many ways, bringing together a large part of the findings, aesthetic expressions, and cultural changes of the

20s and the 30s, and which we still find today in the background of our present and persistent dilemmas. Quantum mechanics, relativity, or psychoanalysis changed our worldview (let us not forget that the constitution of the Vienna Circle in 1931 had been publicly presented in a text entitled *The Scientific Conception of the World*), but this change was joined by the Avant-Garde, which sensitively expressed so many ideas in mutation and conflict.

Shortly afterwards, Norbert Wiener's cybernetics added to these consonances between the symbolism of machine aesthetics and the result of the reduction of life to techno-scientific processes. It was then when the Golem, the automaton or the robot became figures that found "in the experiments and forecasts of Norbert Wiener's machines their technological counterpoint, contemporary to the futuristic images of Fritz Lang" (Subirats, 1991, p. 183). For its part, the cyborg, although it had emerged in a decade of socio-political conflicts, belonged to a time that had already begun to erase from its memory the ravages of the last war and was ready to vibrate before fulfilled futuristic dreams (such as the human moon landing), and to claim hopeful paths for an integral liberation of the body and its desires (Le Breton, 2007).

None of this can be separated from the later existence of cyborgs and robots, and the use that has since been made of them. Although there is nothing novel in the desire to produce humanoid-looking artificial beings (Bodei, 2022), the fact remains that the realizability of such creatures has varied considerably from the ancient automatons of the 18th century to today's robotics industry (Iglesias, 2016). Similarly, the implants of today's cyborgs cannot match the prostheses by means of which humans tried to counteract their limitations in other eras, producing objects that would be suitable for a better life.

None of these advances came even remotely close to the idea (let alone the realization) of a complete organic-machinal fusion. Hence the argument that defends the dream of a hybrid consummation on the grounds that we have always been cyborgs (impure mixtures of biology and artifice) is captious. It would be as much as to say that we have always been armed, by ignoring the substantial differences between a silex knife and the destructive capacity of a thermonuclear bomb. Such an argument incurs in the erroneous "thesis of technological parity" (Vaccari, 2013. p. 51), despite which it continues to function as a typical ideological fallacy of technoscientism.

As a result, technoscience is inclined to blur the distinction between technique and technology, and to disregard the distance that separates praxis from technique in the Western reflexive tradition. Marcuse had already noted the former, observing that technology organizes itself according to the notion of *apparatus*, which technique does not. He wrote:

> Individualistic rationality has been transformed into technological rationality. It is no longer in any way confined to the subjects and objects of big business and characterizes the common way of thinking and even the multiple forms of protest and rebellion. (Marcuse, 2001, p. 58)

For his part, Habermas, at the end of the 60s, emphasized the difference between praxis and technique, observing that politics was no longer oriented "to the realization of practical ends, but to the resolution of technical questions" (Habermas, 2009, p. 84).

Despite these nuances, the idea of a cyborg condition as something consubstantial to the *anthropos* is still very common today, as much as the techno-cosification it implies. "We are cyborgs, hybrid people fused with technology. Although in many cases we do not have it permanently integrated into our bodies, it has already become an extension," says Eurídice Cabañes, a specialist in philosophy of technology (Zafra, 2021b, p. 60). Meanwhile, Roger Bartra states that "we humans are essentially artificial beings" (Zafra, 2021a, p.29), something from which our character as cyborgs is not directly deduced, but rather serves as support for Bartra's thesis on *exocerebral* prostheses, which, according to him, would define us and could be considered as the key to understanding the complex cultural phenomenon (Bartra, 2006, 2019).

For the Mexican anthropologist, natural language is the first and most important of these prostheses. But I think that this raises two questions that should be taken into account: the first is about the possibility of really considering linguistic activity as an artificial element and not as the fruit of a long evolutionary and organic process, not exempt of course from artificial capacities, but not originated by them, and the second refers to the simplistic identification that some authors make of language and technology, taking the former as a mere instrument of communication. This is what happened at the presentation of the new issue of *Telos* magazine at the Fundación Telefónica in Madrid, to which Roger Bartra and Eurídice Cabañes had been invited.

While Bartra once again recalled the importance of speech, Cabañes added that we could not "fall into the primitivism" of renouncing all technology, because then "we would even have to dispense with language, because everything is technology" (Espacio Fundación Telefónica Madrid, 2021). In a single sentence, she had confused natural language, even in the dimension of artifice highlighted by the anthropologist, with the concept of technology, demonstrating to what extent the confusion of practical life with technological notions had penetrated. The metaphor of primitivism used by Cabañes was revealing of the persistent cliché that defined the primitive (heir of the savage) by a total absence of technical mediations and illustrated the prevailing confusion between techniques and technologies. Perhaps she meant that the primitive lacked technology, not technique. But then, given his identification between natural language and technology, how could such an identity be reconciled with the fact that these human beings also had language? The absurdity was to continue speaking of primitivism in such a derogatory and false way.

But returning to Bartra's cinematographic savages, what we saw appearing with them was a different creature, no longer content with being halfway between man and animal, but now also taking the form of a composite of aluminum, carbon steel, and silicon. Had nothing changed in such a savage? Perhaps little with respect to the concerns he stirred up, but the change was enormous with respect to his link to the old ideas of civilization and progress. Both the *homines agrestes* of Antiquity and the *homines silvestres* of the Middle Ages allowed at the same time to reject animality and to keep it close. To this end, his fantasy of savagery was useful, indirectly evoking

nature while disguisedly freeing us from it through an idea of enlightenment as misleading as unfair (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007, pp. 57-93). In opposition, the hybridity of the cyborg no longer responded to that *memento naturalis*, but now his gaze was oriented towards the front, envisioning a horizon of endless technological advances.

This was not so strange, since industrial civilization had been built in part by seducing human beings with its chants of technological progressivism. The paradox was that, at the same time, it opened a widening socio-cultural gap between people. Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), made these dualities very palpable, showing us the contrast between the hedonistic life of a well-to-do class, enraptured by the atmosphere of modernity and technological comfort that surrounds it, and the hidden existence of another social class, submerged in the subsoil of the megalopolis and enslaved to the machine apparatus. But we can also find them comparing the visibility that people exposed in the human zoos of the nineteenth century suffered (Lopez, 2017), with that enjoyed by cyborg artists today (Lee, 2019). Presentations by cyborg artists such as Neil Harbisson (TEDx, 2016), for exemple, show a prevailing hyperindividualism that has nothing to do with the amputated self of the zoo savage, and rather pushes him to strange attempts, such as that of assuming the isolation of his own body to connect with the Nasa International Station and thus "hear the alien colors".

In any case, and even if expressed in different ways, there is no doubt that the unease aroused by the concept of nature is at the origin of almost all contemporary controversies about humanity and its future. This is demonstrated by David Cronenberg's latest film, *Crimes of the Future* (2022), in which he makes a powerful reflection on the relationship between nature, the body, art, technology, and the human evolutionary process. We also find it in anthropologist Philippe Descola's notion of naturalism (Descola, 2012), and it is also clearly perceived in the posthumanist critiques against the legacy of humanism, a heritage that, together with that of modernity, some consider pernicious, while others simply value as insufficient, in the face of the future of incredible anthropological transformations that technology supposedly holds in store.

In fact, humanism and modernity had gone hand in hand on a path of expansion and conquest that exported to the world the image of humanity that the West had interwoven with Greek, Roman, and Christian elements. To this was then added the verve of the Renaissance, which proclaimed the centrality of man (with the biased oblivion of woman), and inaugurated a new world centered on male individual power. This expansion, as Lévi-Strauss said, gave a historical context to the development of anthropology, but it was also an incentive for anthropology to become aware of the existence of societies and beings very different from those in Europe, to acquire new knowledge, and to broaden its idea of the human condition. Humanism was thus decentered, but not humanization, which gained by becoming aware of its breadth and embarking on the search for a humanity that could no longer be limited to the poor rationalist stereotypes of life and world imposed by modern European thinking.

However, this loss of the centrality of humanism, although crucial, was not enough to remake an image of the world that would be convenient and convincing. In addition to ending the

Western humanist interpretation, it was necessary to do the same with humanization as the main topic of anthropological discussion. The problem was not only in humanism, but above all in anthropocentrism, which was ultimately as self-referential as the former (Duque, 2009). Broadly speaking, this is the main argument put forward by posthumanist currents.

Nevertheless, it should be clarified that there is no single posthumanist current, but rather a certain epochal air in which different authors coincide, although they provide very different answers to each other. This is what happens between the transhumanist current and non-transhumanist posthumanism. Although both are challenged by the crisis of humanism and anthropocentrism, each of them takes a different path. While the posthumanists consider that it is enough to think of the human being as the universal measure of all things, contravening the famous sophist maxim, the transhumanists claim that this measure is not enough to account for all the possibilities that await the human being when merging with technology.

From its origin as a term, proposed by the biologist Julien Huxley in 1957, transhumanism revealed its particularities, both in its link with biology and with humanism. Its affinity with an evolutionary and progressive idea of the human future was well represented by Huxley's position, for whom the human species could transcend itself and thus fulfill the "new possibilities of and for its human nature" (Huxley, n.d., p. 17). This continuity of human nature would not fail to pose a problem for later transhumanism, conceived rather as a radical transformation of humanity from "a period of explosive expansion of knowledge, freedom, intelligence, life expectancy, and control over experience" (More, 1990, p. 6).

Likewise, the debt to humanism is something that transhumanism itself recognizes. It is, of course, a very particular version of humanism: that of the rationalism that made its way in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which had glimpsed the possibility that humans could "develop through the application of science" (Bostrom, 2005, p. 3). However, once the recognition was made, transhumanism distanced itself from this humanism, considering it as excessively limited and prey to "too many outdated ideas and values" (More, 1990, p. 6). Instead, early contemporary transhumanism, known as *extropianism*, championed an idea of extropy that was the antithesis of the entropic pessimism of thermodynamics, and advocated principles of "limitless expansion, dynamic optimism, self-transformation, and intelligent technology" (More, 1990, p. 5). In turn, it took note of the changes in novel sciences and technologies that, thirty-four years later, continue to ground the transhumanist project and technoscience itself in its merged interest in nanotechnology, biotechnology, informatics, and cognitivism (Ferry, 2016, p. 11).

For this early transhumanism and its evolutionary ideology, posthumanism was merely the futuristic goal of its inner development. On the contrary, for posthumanists such as Rosi Braidotti, that dissociates herself from such transhumanist beliefs, the critique should rather be directed at the representation and implications that stem from the Vitruvian man and his biased vision of the human. Instead, we should look for a nomadic thought proposing the image of an erratic, fluid human being, stripped of any center, and dissolved in a series of technological connections and environmental links that include and at the same time overflowing him everywhere (Braidotti,

2015, 2020). Unlike transhumanism, which is influenced by analytical theory, we can perceive in this other type of posthumanism several debts with poststructuralist and postmodern theories, although with clamorous absences also akin to continental thought, such as hermeneutics or Critical Theory.

But in any case, there are also coincidences between both tendencies, one of which has to do precisely with the use of the cyborg as a present reality and as a futuristic figure that promises human liberation. A well-known case is that of Donna Haraway, for whom the cyborg is "an effort to construct an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism" (Haraway, 1995, p. 251). In Haraway's opinion, the cyborg has a metaphorical character, but its existence is equally related to the real possibility of establishing kinship relations with machines (Haraway, 1995, p. 263). A postmodern experimentalism that was undoubtedly provocative in the mid-1980s, but which seems somewhat imprudent forty years later in the face of the advances in technoscience celebrated by the transhumanists, the reactivation of risks that we thought had expired (among which the nuclear risk stands out), and the activation of new ones.

As a result of new technologies, the dilemma posed by their possible or impossible containment has gained renewed prominence. Containment, which we can define as "the overall ability to control, limit and, if necessary, stop technology at any stage of its development or distribution" (Suleyman& Bhaskar, 2024, p. 45), is in fact the most controversial aspect of the new technologies of the present. Suleyman and Bhaskar stress the crucial relevance of the issue in the face of the new technological wave, but at the same time recognize that in the end technologies have always prevailed over any will to stop, except in part those related to nuclear weapons.

Indeed, today we perceive how a triumphalist technological discourse is gradually taking hold everywhere, producing a mixture of a messianic and fatalistic atmosphere in the media, and disdaining those who have been sacrificed in this accelerated race to replace human energy with new technologies. Let me give an illustrative example. In the summer of 2023, the former secretary of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence of the Spanish government, Carme Artigas, referred to the upcoming loss of jobs caused by AI in the following terms:

> There is no need to be anxious about what is going to happen, because just when we are looking at this, the other day I saw a study [incomprehensible audio] by Boston Consulting Group according to which 36 new categories of jobs are going to emerge. (elDiarioes, 2023)

When I checked the report dated 2021, all I found was a forecast for the U.S. case, which predicted 63 new occupations, "most of them in the fields of data science and software development" (Strack et al., 2021, p. 20). The jobs destroyed were more than Artigas remembered, but they were centered in a single country and in very specific occupational sectors. Nevertheless, there was an absolute silence about the jobs that could not be recycled.

But I would like to point out something else in relation to posthumanism. It is a biographical aspect that concerns its authors, generally born in the Baby Boomer generation, and which Rossi

Braidotti also comments on when she reflects about his own history and times. Having grown up politically and intellectually in the years following the end of World War II, Braidotti declares his generation's debt to the politics and social movements of the 1960s, as well as to the cultural rebelliousness that served to challenge "the stereotypes of Cold War rhetoric, with its emphasis on Western democracy and liberal individualism" (Braidotti, 2015, p. 29). This is a historical key that serves me to think about how the next generation, consecutive to Braidotti's, ended up years later discovering and amplifying the inherited failures and unfulfilled yearnings of the preceding one.

Between Jim Morrison's imperative voice singing "we want the world, and we want it now" in the late sixties, and Kurt Cobain's scream of grunge in the nineties, two decades of neoliberal devastation and cultural nihilism had passed, with military coups encouraged by US governments throughout Latin America, authoritarian repression, military conflicts, and an alternation between economic crisis and waves of growth, modernization, and consumerism. At that time, the so-called Generation X had to painfully learn that it was not enough to desire the world to get it, not even to take for granted the continuity of the earth and nature. The hopes still housed in symbols such as Berkeley, Paris, Prague, Woodstock or Lisbon had been annihilated in the interval of each of these generations, and in their place were erected new scenarios of violence that now represented places such as Tlatelolco, Santiago de Chile, or Tiananmen.

This is one of the main reasons for the deceitful air that posthumanism possesses as a historical and cultural current. Although it presents itself as a novel and affirmative movement, its proposals are not so recent, as they sink their roots in old authors, works, and reflections, nor can its approaches be so liberating, since they drag the shadow of the lost illusions of poststructuralism and the recent advance of neoliberal authoritarianism (Stiegler, 2019; Ayala, 2021). In this sense, the expected social transformations remain narrow today and are hardly limited to the existence of an environment replete with commodities and consumerist desires. At the same time, the improvement of the situation of minority groups and causes, important as it is, seems to be far from concentrating enough energy to achieve a transformative response to the poetic challenge launched by the poet Arthur Rimbaud in the 19th century, at the height of industrialization and positivism, when he wrote: "True life is absent" (Rimbaud, 1873, p. 22).

The problem with this relative impotence of posthuman poststructuralism is that it ends up legitimizing, even unwillingly, the technoscientific delusions of our time while trying to escape from all the evils allegedly caused by humanism and anthropocentrism. It may do so by platitudes, such as that "we are structurally related to each other, and to the human and non-human world in which we live" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 65), or by infinite definitions of the human. Although Braidotti claims that what is at stake with such definitions "is the question of how contemporary power is being constructed" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 57), or that of "increasing the capacity to understand the intensity of the world and to accept the challenge of confronting its unpleasant aspects" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 108), the rightness of his diagnosis does not guarantee the adequacy of his treatment. To think power and horrors, as Braidoti does, we might well raise the possibility of a self-critical

humanism that can provide answers while still confronting the most atrocious aspects of human existence, avoiding accommodation to them.

Thus, while some yearn for cyborg interbreeding, others prefer to promote the evangel of robots, which offers a much more appropriate metaphor for heralding the arrival of that radical otherness that transhumanists call the *singularity* (Vinge, 2013). The singularity is defined by the belief in a "future period in which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, and its impact so profound, that human life will be irreversibly transformed" (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 24). It is an idea that predicts that we humans will be overtaken by the advent of one or more artificial superintelligences (Diéguez, 2017, p. 54), a prediction in which it is indeed difficult to deny the charge of religiosity involved, despite the explicit hostility towards religion displayed by transhumanists (More, 1990, pp. 6 ff.). It is not surprising that one of their main transhuman creeds appeals to the struggle against aging and death (Vita-More, 2013; de Grey&Rae, 2007; de Grey, 2017). To understand this paradoxical faith, another text by More, who not for nothing runs the cryopreservation company Life Extension (O'Connell, 2019), clarifies that the first principle of extropianism lies in the defense of continuous progress.

This invocation of progress by transhumanism brings the savage back into the picture. At the same time, comparing the promise of technoscientific singularity with the breath of religion reminds us that Western progress historically rested on the secularization of ancient beliefs (Nisbet, 1991). If extropianism was a transhumanism, as More declared in 1990 (More, 1990:18), we could now add that transhumanism was just a late sprout of progressivism and a hypertechnological variation of individualism. Only then does its simultaneous intention to scrutinize human capacities, away from any divine source of external inspiration, and to "continue a process of improving and transforming ourselves into ever higher forms" make sense. But to what extent does non-transhuman posthumanism also respond to these traits, and what consequences does this bring for thinking about our time by means of a new and suitable concept?

From posthumanism to extramodernity

When posthumanists use the prefix *post*, they are trying to ensure that the overcoming of humanism they propose is sufficiently convincing to be universalized. It is indeed a universality very different from that imposed by the scientific humanism that they rightly criticize, but this does not prevent posthumanism from wishing that some of its approaches could be shared by others. This desire allows them to argue in favor of surpassing anthropocentric humanism, which they see as indispensable. On this point, their harmony with transhumanism and their own idea of an outdated humanism is ironic, even if their reasons and motives remain different. This leads to propose, in the face of Lyotard's famous concept of postmodernity, a different notion that is more in line with the features of our time. It is a notion that wants to rethink the question of humanism, defending a different position from the one that predicts its inescapable overcoming.

Despite the years that have passed since the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's work (Lyotard, 2006), the shock wave generated by it and his idea of postmodernity has not yet ended.

The arrival of an era supposedly marked by the end of the great narratives, rather than preventing it, stimulated the proliferation of diverse options of reading and interpreting this thesis of a time after modernity. Thus, different approaches to the subject emerged, as well as different nomenclatures. Hence, there was talk of overmodernity (Augé, 2000), hypermodernity (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2008), transmodernity (Rodríguez Magda, 2004, 2011; Dussell, 2004, 2005, 2007), but there was also advocacy for a critical revision of modernity (Touraine, 1993; Subirats, 1991; Taylor, 2006; Kozlarek, 2014, 2015), or for alternative forms of assessing the meaning of postmodernity (Vattimo, 1987, 2020; Jamieson, 2006).

Yet, to capture the conflicts of our time, including these paradoxes of *post* and *trans*, in my opinion it is more appropriate to refer to the notion of *extramodernity, whose advantage comes from the* two semantic nuances of the prefix *extra,* i.e., intensified quality and exteriority. Thus, *extramodernity refers to an epoch that* responds to ambivalence, rather than to an epoch of succession and overcoming, such as that underlying the concepts of postmodernity and transmodernity, or to an idea of intensification of the modern, such as that retained by the notions of overmodernity and hypermodernity.

This ambivalence of extramodernity can be interpreted as a hidden condition of the very historicity of the modern. It was already present in the original indefinition of the human being conceived by the Renaissance discourse of Pico della Mirandola (Agamben, 2006), but it also appears later in the contradictory movement of the Hegelian dialectic and its idea of *Aufhebung,* that is, of an overcoming that preserves part of what has been overcome in the act of surpassing itself (Ferrer, 2015). Giorgio Agamben's allusion to this anthropological undefinition, as well as to the Renaissance author's *Discorso*, is particularly significant to think on a paradoxical and open humanism that opposes the univocal mention of a closed and rationalist one, which is the only admitted by post and transhumanists when they propose its urgent disappearance. Agamben writes:

> The anthropological machine of humanism is an ironic device that verifies the absence for Homo of a nature of his own, keeping him suspended between a celestial and an earthly nature, between the animal and the human, and therefore always being less and more than himself. (Agamben, 2006, p. 63)

The paradox of such humanism consists in its simultaneous movement, which transits between dichotomies (nature/culture, human/animal and so on), and presents the liminal as an inherent feature of our vital condition. It is a mobility that opens over and over the question of the human condition while preserving its historically multiple answers. It is precisely this simultaneous character of closure and openness that reminds us of the *Aufhebung* and shows the original ambivalence of extramodernity. It is also this condition that let us to posit the existence of many other and varied modernities (Taylor, 2006; Kozlarek, 2014, 2015), which neither conform to the model of a single one, nor resign themselves to a postmodernity governed by a set of scattered fragments. At the same time, this simultaneity impels us to understand our time as a multiple

and ambiguous epoch, whose breath animates the two techno-scientific narratives of the new era, which, taken as gospel, see in cyborgs and robots the *endo-transcendent* future for our species The latter is also what posthumans defend when they refer to the communion of the living with a technology released from humanism and anthropocentrism.

This extramodern condition is also present in the alternative vision of transhumanism held by González (2014), for whom transhumanism implies the convergence of global control and the selective power of a few individuals. Hence, he refers to a "planetary transhumanism" that is defined "by the incorporation of the human being as part of the great technological-military system that will make it possible to overcome conventional limits, from biology to the social". It is a project that, due to its characteristics, is not linked to a desire "for collective welfare but for the supremacy of those who direct, own and administer it" (González, 2014, p. 197). The extramodernity of the project is detected in its inevitable ambiguity when marrying the confessable desires to experience new sensations and possibilities (similarly to what happens with cyborg art) with the unconfessable interests attached to a reality of technological and military integration that intensifies the features of control. This is typical of Western technoscientific modernity, i.e., of its real extramodern condition, which poses an updated and expanded vision of colonialism, now understood also as data colonialism (Mejías&Couldry, 2019), and splits life between visible and invisible forces, in the usual betwixt-and-between of digital-liminal societies.

Conclusion

Up to now we have seen how transhumanism and posthumanism have considered modernity and humanism as serious obstacles to human enhancement. For some, because of their inability to detach themselves from organic forms and transcend to much more powerful artificial ones. For others, because of their stubbornness in a species arrogance that prevents man from forgetting himself and dissolving into the plural forms of the living, expanding furthermore into technological prostheses that intensify his experience of total communion with the world without endangering it. Curiously, both currents, which only interpret humanism from the corset of instrumental rationality and technoscience, are the ones that most emphasize the importance of technoscientific products when speaking of cyborgs or future humanoid robots.

This is an updated vision of the world, but one that is nonetheless linked to Western history and its relationship with otherness. Channeled for centuries by the figure of the savage, part of this relationship is today altered by the new metaphors of otherness represented by cyborgs and robots. Unlike the traditional savage, who was sought outside civilization, even when it was civilization that had invented him, the new savages are now to be found inside, giving name and form to those who do not participate docilely in the technological achievements that serve to produce these other figures of otherness. Thus, technological delay is penalized without paying attention to the necessary separation between praxis and technique. All this without forgetting that the progressivism that had accused and subdued the modern savage, depriving him of the preeminence

conferred to technoscientific artifacts, continues today with the ideological simplification implied by the transhuman mantra of exponential growth.

But even if the savage has changed, the accusation hanging over him remains the same, and so does the sentence. The savage had to be observed, analyzed, investigated and, above all, he had to accept the decision that condemned him to assimilation, exclusion or, if necessary, death. Thus ends the hapless savage in Aldous Huxley's famous novel *Brave New World.* But the plot also shows that this outcome can reach even those who allow themselves to be seduced by the dangerous gaze of the savage and his implicit criticism. It is a warning to the disbelievers of techno-scientific progressivism defended today by transhumanist discourses, that states for the inexorable exponential enhancement of humanity. Something that non-transhumanist posthumanism does not share.

What they agree on is the death sentence they apply to humanism, although for reasons that also differ. Transhumans criticize the inherent limitations of humanism, including the most akin to technoscience, while posthumanists reproach it for its violent and false universality, the cradle of imperialism, and notions as harmful and false as that of the savage. In the face of both reproaches, I cannot but consider another possible path, which takes up again the way of a transformed humanism, with very different bases from those of its rationalist version of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and thanks to the potential that still radiates from different philosophical and anthropological proposals. Hermeneutics, Critical Theory, and a good part of interpretative sociocultural anthropology can be placed in these coordinates. The case of anthropology seems to me particularly relevant, since its colonial past gave it the opportunity to criticize itself and to establish renewed commitments with people, societies, and different cultures, so expanding the features of intensity and exteriority that mark it as an extramodern discipline.

In fact, to close, I would like to take up the last words with which Lévi-Strauss ended his 1960 lecture: "Only then could anthropology affirm itself for what it is: an enterprise that renews and expiates the Renaissance, to extend humanism to the measure of humanity." Faced with the magnitude of the dangers of our time, from the nuclear threat to the devastation of the planet, passing through all the intermediate modalities of violence and destruction that plague so many places, I do not see what harm these words and the humanism they defend, open to all the nuances of the world and to all the humanisms that may come to question us from any of its corners, can do us. Neither do I see what salvation awaits us if we decide to renounce all this in order to climb on the dream of a cold and immortal civilization of cyborgs and robots, instead of on the shoulders of real and mortal giants. Perhaps the best thing would be, in that case, to claim our particularity as human animals (absolutely detached from a superiority we never possessed), and to present ourselves as new savages, ready once again to unmask the contradictions of civilization, as much as to explore a new condition of liminality that identifies our ambiguous extramodern condition with our most human limits.

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