The grand narratives of democratic and libertarian transhumanism: A Lyotardian approach to transhumanist politics

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D uring the last two decades, the growing interest in human enhancement technologies has taken on political dimensions. Transhumanism, as "the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason […]" [1] raised – both from right and left-wing bioconservatives – numerous ethical issues, concerning social and political fields. The bioprogressive answers to those questions were neither homogeneous, nor totally compatible with each other. Consequently, since the late nineties, a series of events and theoretical debates lead to the gradual emergence of two distinct political stances inside the transhumanist movement: the techno-progressivism and the techno-libertarianism.

Despite their shared belief in the potential of technology to radically improve human life, transhumanists across various political platforms have differing visions of the future of humanity. Libertarian transhumanists envisage a future society were every individual will have the right to alter, transform and extend its biological form, free from any type of state

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[1] "What is Transhumanism?" www.whatistranshumanism.org. [Retrieved 15 May 2016].

intervention or oppressive, government regulation. As Ben Goertzel notes in *The Path to Posthumanity,* "the fusion of radical technological optimism with libertarian political philosophy [...] one might call it libertarian transhumanism"[2]. In the contrasting vision of techno-progressivists lies a society in which all citizens will have equal access to human enhancement technologies through a specific type of public policy which will reassure social equality based, for the fist time in human history, on biological equality:

> We are no longer content simply striving for social, economic, and political equality. What do these rights mean so long as people are born biologically unequal? So long as some are born strong others weak, some healthy others sickly, some beautiful others ungainly, some tall others short, some brilliant others dumb - in other words so long as we do not have biological equality- all social equalities mean very little. We will settle for nothing less than [the conquest of] this basic biological inequality which is at the very root of all human inequalities.[3]

In a manner similar to feminist politics (which range from individualist feminism to Marxist and anarcho-feminism) and to other branches of identity politics, the term 'transhumanist politics' involves a wide variety of political stances which controversial as they might be, focus on this new, technologically altered type of (post)human identity and its best potential, social environment.

However, both of those major political ideologies inside transhumanist politics are based on traditional notions of the political subject and its core features, which characterize the 'old-fashioned', biological and not fully altered human. Since the posthuman subject still exists only in the sphere of speculative fiction, every attempt to hypothetically place it inside a concrete system of political organization is, at least, pointless. The humanist presuppositions upon which both libertarianism and

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[2] Goertzel and Bugaj, 2000, p. 393.
[3] FM-2030, 1970 in Hughes, 2004, p. 195.

progressivism are based could not remain unaltered while the subject matter of humanism itself undergoes radical transformations. This new type of post-human, or post-citizen, cannot be circumscribed by the narrow limits of the preexisting political systems. This paper will focus on the above mentioned theoretical systems of transhumanist politics, their roots on the, already fallen, Grand Narratives of modernity and the disruptive advent of the posthuman which should eventually lead to the creation of new political and social discourses. Following Lyotard's argument about the fall of the Grand Narratives, the paper poses an important question concerning the ends of transhumanist politics: Is it possible for transhumanism to maintain the ends of the modernist metanarratives and enforce them through technology, in a postmodern world of delegitimization?

Transhumanism and modernity

In his 2003 article *Transhumanist Values*, Nick Bostrom delineates the basic principles of transhumanist thought by defining transhumanism as an interdisciplinary movement which aims to the acceleration of human evolution through technological means. The overcoming of our biological limitations will lead into the widening of the spectrum of our possible modes of Being, where alternative ways of existence will become accessible by posthumans. As he notes:

> Transhumanism promotes the quest to develop further so that we can explore hitherto inaccessible realms of value. […] There are limits to how much can be achieved by low-tech means such as education, philosophical contemplation, moral self-scrutiny and other such methods proposed by classical philosophers with perfectionist leanings, including Plato, Aristotle, and Nietzsche, or by means of creating a fairer and better society, as envisioned by social reformists such as Marx or Martin Luther King. This is not

> to denigrate what we can do with the tools we have today. Yet ultimately, transhumanists hope to go further [4]

In this passage, a brief description of what Jean-François Lyotard calls the Grand Narratives of modernity is easily detected: the speculative grand narrative and the grand narrative of emancipation. The idealistic conception of truth, which can be grasped through the dialectical expansion of knowledge, is a philosophical ideal which permeates the history of philosophy since Plato and finds its most detailed expression in Hegelian philosophy of Spirit. However, after the French Revolution, knowledge is reevaluated and gains a whole new purpose: to set humanity free either from religious oppression (Enlightenment) or from capitalistic exploitation (Marxism). Knowledge as an end in itself becomes the basic instrument of global emancipation; "knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject"[5]. Those two models of knowledge seem to share a common grounding and a similar structure. First of all, both of them start from the idea of the linear-progressive history of humanity which will lead, eventually, in a future where all the contradictions (either idealistic or materialistic in nature) will be resolved. The realization of universal self-consciousness and the communist utopia function as the final stage of human and social evolution; distant but graspable through specific educational systems, public policy or collective actions.

In order for humanity to reach this higher state of existence or to accelerate toward a fairer society, "all the different areas of knowledge […], all the social institutions such as law, education and technology combine to strive for a common goal […]."[6] And this type of institutional organization is political in nature; political philosophy is almost always related with metanarratives concerning the progress of mankind.

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[4] Bostrom, 2005, p. 9.
[5] Lyotard, 1984, p. 36.
[6] Malpas, 2003, p. 27.

> The thought and action of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are governed by an Idea (I am using Idea in its Kantian sense). That idea is the idea of emancipation. What we call philosophies of history, the great narratives by means of which we attempt to order the multitude of events, certainly argue this idea in very different ways […]. But they all situate the data supplied by the events within the course of a history whose end, even if it is out of reach, is called freedom[7]

Transhumanism, according to Bostrom, constitutes no exception: its main goal is to promote a series of enhancements through which most of our current physical constraints will be reduced, our way to a posthuman mode of Being will be accelerated, greater amount of knowledge will become accessible and fairer social coexistence will become attainable. In an attempt to avoid criticisms about the utopian aspect of transhumanism, Bostrom notes:

> Transhumanism does not entail technological optimism. While future technological capabilities carry immense potential for beneficial deployments, they also could be misused to cause enormous harm, ranging all the way to extreme possibility of intelligent life becoming extinct[8]

Although he refers to the potential dangers that such enhancements may evoke for humanity, Bostrom does not seem to challenge the modernist ideal of a universal metalanguage, which will legitimize all the other 'language games' and organize them in order for humanity to achieve its ultimate purpose. On the contrary, technology, as a more concrete version of scientific knowledge, becomes the basic instrument both for its self-expansion and consequently the design of a better society. However, according to Lyotard, both speculative and emancipatory metanarratives failed to map the complexity of the postmodern world. The speculative hierarchy of knowledge and the prioritization of the scientific discourse was replaced by "an

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[7] Lyotard, 1989, p. 315.
[8] Bostrom, 2005, p. 4.

immanent and […] 'flat' network of areas of inquiry, the respective frontiers of which are in constant flux"[9] and the emancipatory legitimization has already been proved insufficient since "there is nothing to prove that if a statement describing a real situation is true, it follows that a prescriptive statement based upon it (the effect of which will necessarily be a modification of that reality) will be just"[10] . The Lyotardian linkage between the disorienting effects of the contemporary technological evolution and the delegitimization of the Grand Narratives of modernity passes unnoticed in Bostrom' s warnings about the possible misuse of technology, which, still, remains "in large part responsible for the evolution of […] basic parameters of the human condition […][11].

The inherent link between transhumanism and the modernist ideals of progress provides the ground upon which transhumanist politics will be formed. Both libertarian and democratic transhumanism are structured in the context of "the narrative of emancipation (which) gives hope to people that one day they will be free or that their situation will be better"[12]. However, the self-destruction of the grand narratives of modernity has already happened: Auschwitz, Prague 1968, Paris 1968 and the economic crises of 1911, 1929 and 1974-9 are only some of the historical events which signify the collapse of the grand narratives. The reconciliation between radically different language games through a transcendental illusion is possible but has a price - and "the price of this illusion is terror. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us our fill of terror"[13]. All those political movements which presented the world as a well-organized system, ended up in suppressing and wiping out anything that did not fit into these systems. And, according to Lyotard, at this point, the link between meta-narratives and totalitarianism becomes more than evident.

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[9] Lyotard, 1984, p. 39.
[10] Lyotard, 1984, p. 40.
[11] Bostrom, 2006, p. 2.
[12] Schultz, 1998.
[13] Lyotard, 1992, pp. 15-16.

Although Grand Narratives still exist and affect our society their legitimizing power ceases while the figural energy of the postmodern renders them inadequate to represent and contain us all. The simultaneous coexistence of the metanarratives and the

postmodern "incredulity towards (them)"[14] is not marking a contradiction in Lyotard's thought: "the postmodern does not replace a worn out modernity, but rather recurs throughout modernity as a nascent state […] of modernist transformation"[15]. This transformation of modernism, according to Lyotard, eventually leads to an urgent need for micronarratives which will replace metanarratives in contemporary cultural and political thought - a need which has not yet been fulfilled by transhumanist politics.

The Grand Narrative of Libertarian Transhumanism

Although the term 'transhumanism' was first used in the mid '60s by the futurist F. M. Esfandiary in the context of his lectures on futurism at the New School of Social Research, it was not until the foundation of Extropy Institute in 1992 by Max More and Tom Bell that transhumanism transformed into a fully formed ideology. Starting as a network of transhumanists which would interconnect various ideas about human enhancement all over the world, the Extropy Institute focused also at the formation and the promotion of a small set of transhumanist values which would express clearly the spirit of extropianism [16]. The

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[14] Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv.

[15] Malpas, 2003, p. 43

[16] Extropianism, as an intellectual movement, is based on the principles of Extropy which "outlines an alternative lens through which to view the emerging and unprecedented opportunities, challenges, and dangers. The goal was – and is – to use current scientific understanding along with critical and creative thinking to define a small set of principles or values that could help make sense of the confusing but potentially liberating and existentially enriching capabilities opening up to humanity." More, 2003.

publication of its five basic principles in the first issue of *Extropy* in 1988 signified the transition from an abstract set of ideas on human enhancement through technology to a concrete ideological system with specific social and political purposes. According to the fifth principle of this early version of More' s manifesto, named 'Spontaneous Order', Extropianism supports "decentralized, voluntaristic social coordination processes […] (and fosters) tolerance, diversity, foresight, personal responsibility and individual liberty"[17].

In his 2004 book *Citizen Cyborg,* James Hughes argues that the 'Spontaneous Order' principle "distilled their belief, derived from the work of Friedrich Hayek and Ayn Rand, that an anarchistic market creates free and dynamic order, while the state and its life-stealing authoritarianism is entropic." [18] The anarcho-capitalist rejection of the paternalistic role of the state in favor of individual sovereignty can be detected in several articles of the *Extropy* journal until the end of the 90s. However, through the years, extropianist network started to gain a wide and divergent group of followers; the internal and external criticisms of its extreme, anarcho-capitalist tendency was unavoidable and gradually lead to a more moderate version of libertarian transhumanism. In 2000, Max More abandoned the 'Spontaneous Order' principle and replaced it by the following:

> Open Society: Supporting social orders that foster freedom of speech, freedom of action, and experimentation. Opposing authoritarian social control and favoring the rule of law and decentralization of power. Preferring bargaining over battling, and exchange over compulsion. Openness to improvement rather than a static utopia[19]

Other technolibertarians, however, choose to express their political beliefs in more direct ways. For example, Ron Bailey, in his review of Hughes' work *Citizen Cyborg*, argues:

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[17] More, 1993.
[18] Hughes, 2004, p. 166.
[19] More, 2003.

> Where Hughes goes wrong is in fetishizing democratic decision-making. He fails to recognize that the Enlightenment project that spawned modern liberal democracies began by trying to keep certain questions about the transcendent out of the public sphere. Questions about the ultimate meaning and destiny of humanity are private concerns. Worries about biotechnological progress must not be used as excuses to breach the Enlightenment understanding of what belongs in the private sphere and what belongs in the public. […] Hughes understands that democratic authoritarianism is possible, but discounts the possibility that the majority may well vote to ban the technologies that promise a better world.[20]

What Bailey suggests in the above mentioned passage is that, according to the Enlightenment project, the metaphysical statements concerning the destiny of humanity should be abolished (or, at least kept in the private sphere) in order for humanity to be emancipated. The mythical aspect of all those statements is highlighted by science and their "[…] narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal."[21] The death of religion, or other authoritarian systems of thought, as the absolute regulators of meaning in a society, is accompanied by the enforcement of various discourses as the independent guarantees of pragmatism.

However, Lyotard argues that the radical heterogeneity between all those 'language games' in the contemporary, capitalist world, is, once again, regulated according to one single principle:

> The decision makers […] attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. […] In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system' s performance - efficiency. The application

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[20] "Trans-Human Expressway: Why libertarians will win the future" http://reason.com/archives/2005/05/11/trans-human-expressway [Retrieved 15 May 2015].
[21] Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv.

of this criterion to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, consumerable) or disappear[22]

In late capitalism, the role of state and its capacity to intervene in social and economical issues is already limited: multi-national corporations have become the key-players of the decision making processes all over the Western world and their power is based on the commodification of scientific knowledge. The fall of previous, metaphysical grand narratives was followed by the rise of a new one, whose basic goal is to provide the necessary legitimacy in contemporary, scientific knowledge. In the context of capitalism, everything is evaluated according to its financial value and the legitimacy of all 'language games' derives from the main, capitalist principle of efficiency.

In libertarian transhumanism, the authoritative role of capitalism is more than evident: due to a radical shift from ends to means, technological progress functions as the absolute meta-language: "[...] (the) language that takes for itself the right to legislate meaning across incommensurable regimes of phrases, never realizing it is utterly trapped within its own"[23]. The demands for social and economic equality are treated as parts of a fictitious, utopian project which disorientates humanity's way towards to its final destination: the creation of the New Man, a being capable of transcending every biological limitation. This highly technological romanticism and its tendency to reduce everything to its own agenda bears many similarities with the majority of the totalitarian political regimes of the past.

The only way to avoid the totalizing effects of any type of metanarrative, according to Lyotard, comes through the acceptance of the fact that "there is no knowledge in matters of ethics. And therefore there will be no knowledge in matters of politics" [24] . In contrast with libertarian transhumanism,

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[22] Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv.
[23] Mann, 2006, p. 73.
[24] Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, p. 73.

Lyotardian *pagan politics* reject the modernist hierarchy of knowledge and celebrate the diversity between the various discourses and genres of utterance. Where libertarian transhumanism attempts to update the previous political thought in order to fit it into our hyper-technological future, Lyotard proposes the constant destabilization of previous (political) systems and the creation of new rules of judgment. In pagan politics, "political progress consists either in inventing new moves within old games, in refining and modifying established rules, or in inventing new rules"[25]. And those moves are not based on 'universal' criteria of ethics and justice or on *sensus communis* but on our affective responses: "I mean that, in each instance, I have a feeling, that is all. It is a matter of feelings, however, in the sense that one can judge without concepts"[26].

In his article *Cyber-Communism: How the Americans are Superseding Capitalism in Cyberspace,* Richard Barbrook describes a similar 'feeling' experienced by Internet users, who, although live in capitalist systems, choose to exchange information as gifts. As Barbrook notes, "quite spontaneously, people are adopting more democratic methods of working together in cyberspace"[27]. This spontaneous tendency to share freely information through the Net is supported by the technological evolution which renders the reproduction and the distribution of information easier and cheaper. In Lyotardian terms, the gift economy of the Net is a 'pagan' respond to the new communicative practices, which is not regulated by the rules of capitalism; a new move within an old game, a sensus communis which appears as a result of a spontaneous feeling and not as regulatory, ethical principle. However, in this point, an important question raises: Is democratic coexistence possible only through the spontaneous feeling of its citizens or can it be regulated in a more strategic way?

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[25] Fairfield, 1994, p. 60.
[26] Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, p. 15.
[27] Barbrook, 2000.

The grand narrative of democratic transhumanism

In contrast with Barbrook, Hughes express his doubt about the adaptive capacity of people in radical changes, which affect their everyday lives. He refers to Alvin Toffler' s notion of 'future shock', "the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time"[28] and adopts his main theoretical point that people, most of the times, experience severe uncertainty and discomfort when they are exposed in entirely new living conditions. Opposed to Lyotard' s *paralogy,* as the spontaneous creation of new rules that will fit to the new social circumstances, Hughes and Toffler describe the human tendency to avoid change or being confused by it. However, Hughes is not a pessimist: people eventually adapt. He is using as an example the process of the legalization of gay marriage across Europe and the USA and he concludes "the logic of democracy will make laws against gay marriage seem as curious and wrong-headed as laws against interracial marriage are seen today"[29].

In transhumanist politics, democratic tendencies make their appearance in late 90s, when Nick Bostrom and David Pearce organized the World Transhumanist Association (WTA) as an international organization focusing on promoting transhumanism as an academic field of scientific inquiry. In his "Transhumanist Declaration", Bostrom takes distance from Extropians' extreme techno-optimism and refers to the possible catastrophic consequences which accompany the technological evolution as well as the existential risk posed to humanity by those advanced technologies. The extropian belief in the autoregulation of the market is replaced by the need of a social order where responsible decisions can be implemented; a certain type of anticipatory democracy, which will take into account the possible threats of technological evolution and prepare the public for the upcoming changes. According to Hughes:

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[28] Toffler, 1965, p. 110.
[29] Hughes, 2004, p. 59.

> With the Declaration transhumanists were reembracing their
> continuity with the Enlightenment, with democracy and
> humanism, and setting aside the antisocial, free-market anarchism
> that had briefly held sway in transhumanist circles in the unique
> circumstances of mid-1990s bubble economy, South California-
> based, net culture [30]

And while libertarian transhumanists focus mostly on Enlightenment' s ideal of liberty, democratic transhumanists struggle also for equality and solidarity. A democratically regulated technology could become the best way of achieving equality and justice by rejecting the biological bases of social inequality. Most of the biological traits which predict a balanced and successful life (like physical and mental health, intelligence, longevity, etc.) could become accessible by most of the future citizens through genetic enhancement while gender inequality could be faced by technologies that will free women from specific anatomic traits which, at our patriarchal society, render them socially vulnerable (more evolved reproductive technologies, artificial wombs, etc.). Finally, according to Peter Singer, technology could contribute to the creation of citizens which will be freed from their selfish nature and will therefore become more suitable for a democratic society:

> In a more distant future we can still barely glimpse, it may turn out
> to be a prerequisite for a new kind of freedom: the freedom to
> shape our genes so that instead of living in societies constrained by
> our evolutionary origins, we can build the kind of society we judge
> best [31]

Could this kind of freedom be the object of a universal desire though? Could it be a utopia for mankind on the whole? "For Lyotard, as a post-Marxist, the pattern of thought which founds a communal subjectivity and self-determination has become problematic"[32]. According to his own words:

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[30] Hughes, 2004, p. 178.
[31] Singer, 1999, p. 366.
[32] Pulkkinen,1988, p. 133.

> There is no libidinal dignity, nor libidinal fraternity, there are libidinal contacts without communication (for want of a 'message'). This is why, amongst individuals participating in the same struggle, there may exist the most profound miscomprehension, even if they are situated in the same social and economic bracket[33]

Every action, every struggle, every "movement in the game" is the result of a desire, or, in Lyotardian terms, *jouissance*. This desire, which has a strong sexual, possessive aspect, is unstable, fluid and cannot, in any case, be directed by abstract ideas. Any society and any political economy "is prey to an open set of heterogeneous desires"[34] and there is no transcendent, privileged realm of ethics or political ideals that can regulate and manage those libidinal energies. There is not, and there cannot be, a sensus communis, a commonly shared belief, universal and permanent, which will define the most beneficial route of humanity's progress.

> There are only encounters, each tracing at full speed around itself a multitude of transparent walls, secret thresholds, open grounds, empty skies in which each encounter flees from itself, overflows itself, is forgotten - or is repeated, ceasing then to be an encounter. This latter does not return, does not reproduce itself [...][35]

In Singer's vision of a future society, where citizens would be genetically suitable for his (ours?) notion of freedom, we could easily detect the same tendency of assimilating and neutralizing heterogeneity, which Lyotard describes as the basic characteristic of the capitalist "vanguard machine" that drags "humanity after it, dehumanizing it in order to rehumanize it at a different level of normative capacity"[36]. If libertarian transhumanism's goal is to maximize the efficiency of human nature in order to achieve higher (according to a specific, modernist hierarchy) states of

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[33] Lyotard, 2004, p. 111.

[34] Williams, 2000, p. 29.

[35] Lyotard, 2004, pp. 34- 35.

[36] Lyotard, 1984, p. 63.

existence, in democratic transhumanism, "the human ceases to have the capacity to be surprising or strange and is reduced to just another cog [...]" [37] in the utopian system of absolute freedom, equality and solidarity. In both cases, the posthuman is treated as a medium in order for humanity (as an homogenous set of individuals) to achieve ethical or existential goals, which are rooted in specific types of philosophical and political systems of thought. Due to his deep "incredulity towards metanarratives", which characterizes the postmodern thought, Lyotard criticizes this type of technological "inhuman" as the result of their homogenizing, intellectual totalitarianism. However, he suggests another type of inhuman which bears "the potential of being taken hold of by surprising and uncanny transformative possibilities that cannot be predicted, explained or mastered by technologically-based systems of reason" [38]

The posthuman, the inhuman, and the transhumanist politics

In the introduction of his essay *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1988), Lyotard detects the above mentioned capitalist principle of efficiency in the anti- avant-garde tendency of the contemporary culture: "Be communicable, that is the prescription. Avant-garde is old hat, talk about humans in a human way, address yourself to human beings, if they enjoy receiving you then they will receive you" [39]. The capitalist art market needs art which has the capacity to appeal to a mass audience in an easy, quick and pleasant way. Consequently, art looses its inherent incommensurability; it is transformed into another saleable commodity and paradoxically, by talking to 'humans in a human way', becomes part of the dehumanizing vanguard machine of capitalism. However, Lyotard argues that art can also talk in an *inhuman* way- it always retains its capacity of producing "surprising and uncanny transformative

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[37] Malpas, 2003, p. 90.
[38] Malpas, 2003, p. 91.
[39] Lyotard, 1991, p. 2.

possibilities that cannot be predicted, explained or mastered by technologically-based systems of reason"[40]. As he notes:

> (There are) two sorts of inhuman. It is dispensable to keep them dissociated. The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage. […] The system […] has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it. But the anguish is that of a mind haunted by a familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think - if one claims to exclude it, if one doesn' t give it an outlet, one aggravates it.[41]

This type of inhuman possesses most of the characteristics that Lyotard attributes to postmodern thought, throughout his whole work: it is figural, (*Discourse, Figure*), libidinal (*Libidinal Economy*), incommensurable (*The Differend*) and sublime (*An Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?*). It carries an entirely new energy which cannot fit in the old theoretical schemes and seeks for a 'pagan' respond – a judgment without preestablished criteria. It is vulnerable, because of systems' tendency to obliterate all those elements that do not fit in it, and, at the same time, powerful, because of its capacity to disrupt, subvert and transform the established metanarratives of any society. In contrast to Habermas' need for completing the 'unfinished project of modernity', Lyotard' s postmodern thought focuses on this 'inhuman' discontinuity with the past and the paralogical, "ongoing creation of meaning […] (which) can awaken our minds to an unending expansion of new ideas"[42].

Both in libertarian and democratic transhumanism, the posthuman is treated as an updated version of the human: although more developed and improved, the posthuman still pertains to the well-known intellectual being which created this civilization through his reasonable thinking and the power of its

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[40] Malpas, 2003, p. 91.
[41] Lyotard, 1991, p. 2.
[42] Shawver, 1996.

will. From this perspective, the transhumanist attempts of predicting its social behavior and political activity are justifiable and necessary. If the posthuman is the unavoidable next step of our (linear) evolutionary progress, then the philosophers' task could not be anything else than previsioning the best social and political environment inside which this huge ontological transformation will be realized.

However, leaning on Lyotard, this type of previsioning is exactly what postmodern thought should avoid: instead of creating criteria which will guide our response to future events (and which will, unavoidably, be expressed in terms of a metalanguage), we should prepare ourselves to judge without criteria: to confront the sublimity of the post- or inhuman and invent new 'language games' which will be compatible with its unique characteristics. The advent of the posthuman will have the form of an Event:

> (A)n instant in which something happens to which we are called to respond without knowing in advance the genre in which to respond. […] the event is what calls for a response, a judgment, which respects its specificity and refuses simply to fit it into a pre-given scheme[43]

Instead of pre-schematizing the posthuman identity and adapting it in already existent political and social systems, transhumanists should start considering its inhuman (in the Lyotardian sense) aspect and re-evaluate their modernist visions about humanity' s destiny. In a postmodern era, when every political and philosophical theory is being relativized, the already established systems of thought could not function as a legitimate base upon which we can stand and stare at the future. The advent of the posthuman or the singularity or the A.I., with their updated physical and mental capacities, could mark both the end of postmodernism, by providing us with answers to questions which might currently seem metaphysical, and with the practical realization of the postmodern deconstruction of everything that seemed to be solid and unquestionable. In front of this radically

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[43] Malpas, 2003, p. 101.

new phase in the history of mankind, every attempt of adapting the post- or in-human in our political visions is, at least, useless (if not dangerous): our only choice is to adapt the latter in the new, posthuman condition.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to present trends in contemporary transhumanist politics, examine them through Lyotard's postmodern ideas and expose their problematic reliance on modernist ideals. In the introduction, the transhumanist belief in a higher state of Being which is achievable through technology was presented as an updated version of the speculative and the emancipatory metanarratives of modernity. In the case of libertarian transhumanism, the rejection of the state as an absolute regulator of social order marks the rise of a new, capitalist metanarrative which is based on a principle of efficiency. In democratic transhumanism, the prioritization of social equality and the need to design citizens who will be genetically suitable for a fair society ends up in a systematic neutralization of heterogeneity. Both libertarian and democratic transhumanism have their theoretical roots in the (fallen) modernist grand narratives, which still affect expectations regarding the future of humanity. The liberal ideal of autonomy and freedom and the democratic struggle for equality have been proven to contain the seeds of the totalitarian tendencies which have afflicted civilization over the last centuries. According to Lyotard, to escape from them one needs to embrace our limited capacities of theorizing the Event as well as to create new 'language games' which can replace old, insufficient ones. However, it is crucial to note that the discourse on transhumanist politics has two main tasks: to provide a vision of our posthuman future and to regulate the transition from human to posthuman in political and social terms; two tasks distinct from each other, but not unrelated. Still, according to Lyotard, both libertarian and democratic posthuman utopias seem to be metanarrative and problematic, the regulation of the production and the distribution of new technologies of human enhancement remains

a practical problem that should be examined in the context of the already existing 'language games'. From this perspective, transhumanist politics should emphasize a case-by-case type of judgment, in petit récits, which, while still affected by our current moral values, will mark:

> (T)he acceptance of the fact that one can play several games, and that each of these games is interesting in itself insofar as the interesting thing is to play moves. And to play moves means precisely to develop rules, to set the imagination to work[44]

Transhumanist politics can function as either metalanguages or as language games. In the former, manifestos will present us with totalities that can only be sustained by eliminating difference. In the latter, the lack of universal criteria will lead us to embrace the sublimity and incommensurability of the posthuman and respond to it in a paganist way.

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[44] Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, p. 61.

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