# Hyperhumanism in the Age of Generative AI: The impact on human creativity and identity

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**Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence have made it once again important to investigate our relationship to emerging and disruptive technologies. A core question being asked is what it now means to be a human being, when we are no longer the sole creators. What is the role of the human when the creative act is being outsourced and externalised to our machines? Hyperhumanism offers an alternative path when conceiving our relationships with these powerful tools, by defining concepts that help us to rethink human-technology interaction. This is a follow-up paper to Techno-Hyperhumanism (Smith and Castaneda 2020) addressing the future work suggested, namely hyperhumanism's impact on human identity, comparing transhumanist and hyperhuman approaches and relationships to modern and future technologies, as well as developing the ethics of human improvement through a hyperhuman lens. Our main conclusion is that new technologies can give us new creative roles instead of eliminating them. Hyperhumanism is enabled through ontological design where we focus on context rather than content creation. We believe it is important to continue this work and develop hyperhumanism further due to the nature of our technological moment.**

*Hyperhumanism. Ontological design. Ethics. Imagination.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the "Techno-hyperhumanism" paper (Smith & Castaneda 2020) huge advances have been made in machine learning which is widely referred to as AI, especially generative AI with tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney and Dall-E. This has already affected the creative industries, with 70% of jobs lost in some instances (Zhang 2023) and this trajectory will most likely continue. This is not only affecting economies, but we argue it is affecting human identity as well.

Human beings have seen themselves as sole creators with the capacity of both depicting and shaping the world according to their will, but what happens when machines themselves begin to take on this creator role? A transhuman response would be to encourage the outsourcing of this capacity to the machines, sit back and enjoy the endless stream of AI generated content, especially if the machines can eventually become better creators than humans. The question is what will happen to us as human beings if we adopt and encourage this perspective? Here, we believe hyperhumanism can offer a cognitive reframing of the relationship

between man and machine and the creative act in the meeting with generative AI.

We regard the transhumanist narrative of human augmentation as a negation of the human condition and will demonstrate how this affects our thinking and, in turn, our (well)being with machines. We will then offer a hyperhuman approach and framework that is an affirmation of the human condition by outlining the central concepts of hyperhumanism that can help us to cultivate creative and ethical human-technology relationships.

## 2. GENERATIVE AI

The Artificial Intelligence field is a vast and branching field of research that has undergone a lot of development in recent years with several breakthroughs, the latest (and the one which is of main interest for this paper) is generative AI. Generative AI is a subfield within the field of deep learning and refers to systems that can generate content based on training data and not only classify data (Feuerriegel et al. 2024). Tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney and Dall-E had their breakthrough in the last two years and generative AI

was chosen as one of the top ten emerging technologies likely to transform society by the world economic forum (Fink and Weissenberg 2023).
fixed. Therefore, we endeavour capturing the large structure digitally with its charm of slow decay and transferring it through an artistic interpretation into an immersive experience.



*Figure 1: The Hyperhuman according to GenAI*

## 3. TECHNOLOGY: DREAMS AND REALITIES

We need to understand that our stories have a tendency to become our realities. The transhuman versus hyperhuman dialectic is therefore designed to fuel design thinking regarding the development and implementation of future technology. The importance of the discourse lies precisely in how we dream about human-technology interaction, consciously and unconsciously, for it is how we dream that will determine how we face our realities. The hyperhuman narrative is therefore a cognitive reframing of the human being and, more importantly, it's becoming in relation to future technology.

A transhumanist vision of the future of dreaming can be encapsulated by a device called HALO (Prophetic AI 2024). HALO is built by 'Prophetic AI' which is a non-invasive (tFUS) neurotech company. HALO is a device designed to induce and stabilise lucid dreams. It is rare to have a lucid dream. There is a technique, which is hard to learn, but you can learn it. This is the hyperhuman approach to do the work, to learn the technique. The transhuman approach, once you use this device and maybe it is successful, maybe it will allow you to lucid dream, but then there is a chance that you will never have a lucid dream without the device, dependency becomes the problem. And what happens if

everyone's lucid dreaming? What happens if this is the last place of agency we have, where we are now forced to work in our dreams, precisely because dreams now a stable place to interact in? A new economy will arise, especially, as the technology that will enable us to record our dreams is also being developed in parallel.

## 4. HOW TRANSHUMAN IDEAS AFFECT THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT TECHNOLOGIES

We understand transhumanism to be a negation of the human condition, a perspective in which limitations of human nature (body and mind) are viewed as bugs rather than features, such as death, ageing, and disease, and that therefore the process of transcendence to transhumanism is a debugging of the human condition (Bostrom 2003).

Transhumanists are right, however, that "human nature" is not a fixed condition but is, like most complex systems in nature, adaptive. What makes human beings special in this case is the degree to which the human condition is shaped by our use of technology. However, humans are not the most resilient and adaptive beings on earth. The tardigrade has survived five mass extinctions whilst humans are currently causing the sixth (Banerji 2020).

Transhumanism operates under a technocentric or "technology first" principle and is correct that our technology shapes our thinking and being. An insight which Marshall McLuhan built into his philosophy and explored in his ground-breaking work "Media the extensions of man" (McLuhan 1964) describes human augmentation as auto-amputation, "every augmentation is an auto-amputation" (McLuhan 1964). Technology shapes our thinking and our thinking about technology shapes the development and implementation of technology, making this a potentially vicious feedback loop for human beings if the dominating narratives about future technology are about human replacement, where human features become bugs to be removed.

There are several popular narratives that stem from Transhumanist discourse; they are examples of "technology first" narratives as they use existing or emerging technology as a metaphor or sometimes direct explanation of how the nature of the universe actually is. These narratives often have a pseudoscientific character, they seem to be the result of hard science but are widely speculative and lack grounding in existing or sometimes even probable emerging realities. The clearest example is "The simulation hypothesis" (Bostrom 2003) meaning that the entire universe is a computer simulation we are living in. Although the argument is a probability argument and not a mechanistic one it

is a narrative that has had major influence in contemporary philosophy and tech-culture. Another narrative that also utilises the computer as a metaphor is consciousness uploading, the idea that consciousness is a form of code that could be copied and stored on a hard drive or uploaded into the cloud so we could live forever. The hard problem of consciousness is that we still don't know what it is, and therefore the idea that it can be stored in a computer is (from all available neuroscience sources) far-fetched. This post biological narrative has led some thinkers down dangerous paths such as Cerullo (2015) who reaches the conclusion that if consciousness can be uploaded that would be the superior mode of being and it is therefore an ethical act to upload your consciousness and dispose of the physical body.

David Pearce's (Pearce 2019) philosophical project paradise engineering, sometimes known as 'The Hedonistic Imperative', argues that suffering could be eliminated in all sentient life, using biotechnology. This is based on the principles that it is now possible (using technology) to engineer gradients of bliss and that it is desirable to eliminate all pain, suffering and malaise. Pearce says genetic engineering, nanotechnology and neuropharmacology will open the door to redesigning the biological substrates of consciousness. With such enhancements, we could do away with the physical and emotional forms of suffering, replacing them with genetically pre-programmed hedonia, or states of well-being more intense than most people experience today. What are the implications of this hypothesis for personal autonomy? Happiness and wellbeing can have many meanings, as clearly attested by the diversity in human life.

Along these lines transhumanist principles are now being applied to drug development. DMTx or DMT extended is a new technology being developed at Imperial College London and around the world that aims to prolong the peak of the DMT state, from hours to months and potentially indefinitely. Andrew Gallimore states that…

> "You will learn how your brain constructs your subjective world and how psychedelic drugs alter the structure of this world; how DMT switches the reality channel by allowing the brain to access information from normally hidden orthogonal dimensions of reality. And, finally, you will learn how DMT provides the secret to exiting our Universe permanently — to complete the cosmic game to become interdimensional citizens of hyperspace." (Gallimore 2019).

The key question with this proposed technologising of DMT is that are we not here to have a human experience? This intervention presents another form of the transhuman 'ready player one' scenario where we sidetrack the 'jackpot win' of being human for the short period of time that we have the privilege to be here.

## 5. HYPERHUMANISM

Hyperhumanism (HH) represents an affirmation of the human condition and of our central importance in the current technological moment. The human being is not something that we want to move beyond and be "on the other side of" (transhumanism) or something that we no longer are (post), but as stated earlier, the first tenet of HH is that we are not human yet, making the human being "pre-human." HH requires a shift from thinking about human beings as an essence to a process; a human being is therefore defined as a being participating in the process of becoming human. Hyperhumanism is the insight that a human birth is a jackpot win, "the best of all possible worlds" and that one who is lucky enough to be born a human should not miss the opportunity to be human; one should seek to thrive in their human body for the short time it is still here. We will now explore the definition of Hyperhumanism through some key concepts:

### 5.1 The "hyper" prefix in hyperhumanism

Before outlining the characteristics of hyperhumanism as a response to transhumanism in the GenAI question, an explanation of the choice of the "hyper" prefix is required. There are several prefixes indicating a state of being "beyond", "over", or "after" a certain concept, such as "post", "meta", "trans" and "hyper ". While these prefixes have distinct meanings, the way they are used to delineate a certain realm of discourse is often arbitrary and can lead to more confusion than clarity. Humanism has been combined with all the said prefixes; "posthumanism" and "transhumanism" are established and well-known terms in the field; and "meta-humanism" is also of some significance as well (del Val 2010).

This leads to the question of why we have chosen the prefix "hyper" and what we aim to say with it. Hyper can mean two distinct but different things, the first being beyond or above, meaning hyperhumanism is beyond a "human-centric" view of life and acknowledges multiple kingdoms and intelligences that are not human but remain valuable, such as the fungi kingdom but also potentially the emerging machine intelligences. The first premise of hyperhumanism is that 'human beings may not be fully human yet', meaning we are still very much in our infancy as humans, in a constant state of becoming. Hyperhumanism is also "hyper" as the hyperhuman strives to be fully human and live a life where the intensity of living a transitory human life is celebrated, sought after and thoroughly explored. In contrast to transhumanism, the hyperhuman does not seek to get rid of the

limitations of the physical body but enjoys them and thrives within those constraints.

## 5.2 Dividual identity

A foundational assumption of hyperhumanism is that humans are not coherent individual beings with solid identities but dividuals in a process of becoming, participating in several networks and flows simultaneously, and having no clear-cut boundaries but using membranes to filter the flows and utilising multiple identities. This is true of both the physical body and consciousness itself (Saey 2016).

## 5.3 Double consciousness

Double consciousness (DC) (Smith 2020) is another key concept for hyperhumanism. Double consciousness is the state of being that gives access, at one and the same time, to two distinctly different fields of experience. The basis of DC is that perception is something that we are actively involved in, reality itself is under construction and we are (to a certain extent) agents in constructing our own reality. The key question therefore is, if we know our reality primarily through our first-hand experience then how should we understand the production of that experience?

The objective is that through understanding the mechanisms of DC we may be able to explore the production of exactly that, our own experience. As a result, DC also relates to the field of Ontological Design, which is a method of context engineering the human experience itself. Double Consciousness (DC) is a framework that is being stress tested through a number of emerging application areas. Can adopting these forms of DC help us to see ourselves from other perspectives and how can a literacy of pluralism help us to become more hyperhuman?

## 5.4 Interbeing

The interbeing (Hanh 2020) is a crucial bridge towards hyperhumanism. Interbeing enriches interconnectedness, compassion, and mindfulness. It encourages us to extend our awareness beyond ourselves in order to foster a greater sense of responsibility and engagement with the world and all living beings. Interbeing also refers to the ability of thriving in the liminal state, the 'liminality of being human' but also utilises the liminal states such as the hypnagogic and hypnopompic for creative insight (Dumpert 2019). Exploring the notion of 'sleeping on it' to ensure the dreaming state can do its work.

## 5.5 Umwelt hacking

Umwelt Hacking is the active questioning of whether we can sense like a forest, a mycelium network, or an octopus (Smith and Wakely 2022). Each of these is their own 'kingdom', so how do we build sensory bridges between these kingdoms? This emphasises and affirms the liminality of the human condition, the ability humans have to shift states of mind. The hyperhuman seeks to master this ability and use it as a source of knowledge and wisdom.

## 5.6 Learning and the creative act

Another central tenent of hyperhumanism is to learn and be devoted to lifelong learning and realise that this learning is dependent on the long-term mediation of knowledge and integrating experience, which means working through information thoroughly and avoiding shortcuts (outsourcing) and copy-and-paste reasoning. This has implications for the creative act as well, where "long-term mediation" is translated to the more poetic concept "the creative struggle," meaning that the creative act cannot be replaced with quick prompts but is dependent on the careful consideration and attentiveness of the artist. This is closely linked to the hyperhuman approach to aim for altered traits rather than altered states. This means that instead of trying to attain a new mental state through shortcuts and bypassing, the way to go is to work through an experience and grow from it. As stated by songwriter Nick Cave in 2023 in response to the popularity of ChatGPT:

> "Songs arise out of suffering, by which I mean they are predicated upon the complex, internal human struggle of creation, and, well, as far as I know, algorithms don't feel. Data doesn't suffer. ChatGPT has no inner being; it has been nowhere; it has endured nothing; it has not had the audacity to reach beyond its limitations; and hence, it doesn't have the capacity for a shared transcendent experience, as it has no limitations from which to transcend. ChatGPT's melancholy role is that it is destined to imitate and can never have an authentic human experience, no matter how devalued and inconsequential the human experience may in time become. ChatGPT is fast-tracking the commodification of the human spirit by mechanising the imagination. It renders our participation in the act of creation as valueless and unnecessary." (Cave 2023)

## 5.7 context over content

Participation rather than Consumption: Contextology (Smith 2016) is the study of context, or the science of 'Context Engineering' (CE). CE focuses less on engineering content and instead attempts to manipulate and create context directly. This is achieved when we are enabled (via CE tools) to reconfigure our own perception and cognitive abilities directly. We can now adopt radically different visual or auditory systems or spend time out of body (through body swapping or gender swapping) to achieve novel cognitive and creative insights. CE gives us new abilities, control over our

senses, and the corresponding ability to develop new forms of perception, providing us with a new type of self and societal exploration.

## 6. CONTENT SATURATION AND MODEL COLLAPSE

Content saturation is one of the dangers of generative AI and relates to the speed that these systems generate content, not necessarily the quality. As these systems have lowered the bar of entry for creating poetry or digital paintings more people can create and upload content using the same models giving similar results. The result of this process is an internet saturated with mediocre content without a personal human touch. This could lead to a drying up of content platforms and loss of engagement, in other words a more boring internet for us humans. It has been suggested this could be harmful for the machines as well since these systems are trained on data scraped from the internet and the model is only as good as the data it has been trained on. This could lead to "model collapse", when a model starts to perform worse with every iteration as it is trained on lower quality data (Shumailov 2023). This is a positive news story for the central importance of human interaction and creativity since it seems to be needed to keep the machines sane.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Hyperhumanism enables the resistance that we need to hold on to our humanity and become detectives in our own life worlds. Hyperhumanism is about discovering what it means to be human. We believe the creative act is a central characteristic of becoming human; a characteristic that we cannot afford to fully outsource to generative AI systems, even if it proves itself a worthy artist. We should not replace our human imagination with computer animation. However these technologies have a place when they instead act as a scaffold, assisting us to go further into our zone of proximal development where the 'zone' focuses on the relation between content (instruction) and the context (personal development) (Chaiklin 2003).

We need to rethink our relationship to these emerging technologies and know that we as humans possess something the machine does not, a will to transcendence with its inherent struggles that gives us a unique perspective, presence and participation. We can become context engineers and space holders for machine generated content and in that way we become participating co-creators with the machines. Or as said beautifully by songwriter Nick Cave:

"This is what we humble humans can offer, that AI can only mimic the transcendent journey of the artist that forever grapples with his or her own shortcomings. This is where human genius resides, deeply embedded within, yet reaching beyond, those limitations." (Cave 2023)

## 8 FUTURE WORK

### 8.1 Developing literacies

A major part of the hyperhuman project in the coming years that will influence our relationships with technology is the mapping of the human experience with the development of several novel literacies. Literacy in the hyperhuman sense is a domain of knowledge that is not confined to propositional knowledge (facts, concepts, and arguments) but also involves developing skills (altered traits) and integrating lived experience to grapple with a certain human domain such as embodiment, sex, mimetics, and death. One of the most important literacies to develop today for our society is a "digital literacy", meaning knowledge about the digital sphere, how it affects us, how we should use it and how it affects our experience. This paper has laid the philosophical groundwork for such a work. What is missing now is a clear mapping of practices that can successfully deal with these issues.

### 8.2 Mapping technologies - transhuman or hyperhuman

Connected to the task of developing digital literacy is the task of mapping and analysing existing and emerging technologies and evaluating their hyperhuman potential. We believe that the hyperhuman potential of a technology lies firmly in the use and application of a certain technology, not in the technology as such. For example, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) could be seen both as hyperhuman or transhumanist technologies depending on how they are used. VR can be used in exposure therapy to treat phobias and anxiety disorders; it can also be used to immerse a user in pleasurable fictional worlds that connect the user to their body and their surroundings. A clear case of using the same technology for altered traits (hyperhumanism) or altered states (transhumanism).

### 8.3 The Hyperhuman Institute

The Hyperhuman Institute was formed in 2024 by Carl Hayden Smith as a container for Hyperhuman research and experimentation to develop Hyperhumanism further and facilitate physical and hybrid events in the future. The Institute's guiding mantra is: *we cannot predict the future, but we can invent it*.

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