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Transhümanizm Çağında Ölümsüzlük Arayışı: Batı Sineması Üzerine Bir Analiz

Quest for Immortality in the Age of Transhumanism: An Analysis through Western Cinema

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Öz

Transhümanizm, teknolojik yenilikler yoluyla insanlığın biyolojik ve bilişsel sınırlarını aşmayı amaçlayan entelektüel bir harekettir. Bilim kurgu filmleri, geleceğin teknolojilerine ilişkin toplumsal istek ve korkulara dair kapsamlı bir bakış açısı sunmakta ve transhümanizmin potansiyel etkileri ve yansımaları üzerine pek çok tartışma yaratmaktadır. Bu araştırma, Zardoz (1974), Mr. Nobody (2009), Transcendence (2014) ve Self/Less (2015) filmlerini örnek olay olarak kullanarak, transhümanizm bağlamında insanın ölüm ve ölümsüzlükle olan ilişkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Gerçekten de bireylerin yaşamları boyunca üzerinde düşündükleri ve anlamlandırmaya çalıştıkları daimi kaygılardan biri ölümdür ve bu konudaki belirsizlik ontolojik sorgulamanın temelini oluşturur. İnsan yaşamının bir yansıması olan sinema, varoluşsal kaygıları, korkuları ve arzuları izleyiciye aktarırken anlamayı da kolaylaştırır. Batı sinemasında ölümsüzlük farklı açılardan ele alınmakta ve çeşitli temalar üzerinden işlenmektedir. Bilimkurgu türünde, somut şeylere dayanarak inşa edilen ölümsüzlük diğer türlerden ayrılır. Bu çalışmada, verilerdeki örüntüleri veya temaları tanımlamak, analiz etmek ve raporlamak için nitel bir yöntem olan tematik analiz kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, ölümsüzlüğün bilimsel ve teknolojik ilerlemelerle ilişkili olduğunu, idealize edilmiş bir yaşam tarzının gençliği vurguladığını ve ölümsüzlükle ilişkili ahlaki ve etik ikilemlerin ve varoluşsal kaygıların insan doğasını derinden etkileme potansiyelini önemli ölçüde tehdit edebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ölümsüzlük, Transhümanizm, Posthumanizm, Batı Sineması, Bilim Kurgu Filmleri.

Abstract

Transhumanism is an intellectual movement that aims to transcend the biological and cognitive limits of humanity through technological innovations. Science fiction movies offer a comprehensive insight into social aspirations and fears over future technologies, generating much debate on the potential impacts and repercussions of transhumanism. The research intends to explore the human relationship with death and immortality in the context of transhumanism, utilizing the movie Zardoz (1974), Mr. Nobody (2009), Transcendence (2014), and Self/Less (2015) as case studies. Indeed, one of the perennial concerns that individuals ponder and try to make sense throughout their lives is death and the uncertainty about it serves as the basis for ontological questioning. Cinema, being as a reflection of human life, reveals existential concerns, fears and desires to the audience while facilitating understanding. In Western cinema, immortality is gets examined from multiple angles and treated through diverse themes. In the science fiction genre, immortality constructed by reliance on tangible things differs from other genres. This study employs thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes in the data. The research reveals that immortality correlates with scientific and technological advancements, an idealized lifestyle highlights youth, and the moral and the ethical quandaries and existential concerns associated with immortality may significantly threaten the potential to impact human nature profoundly.

Keywords: Immortality, Transhumanism, Posthumanism, Western Cinema, Science Fiction Movies.

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Introduction

The relationship between immortality and cinema is multifaceted and multidimensional. Cinema, with its capacity to reflect and reconstruct life, encompasses the concepts of both immortality and death. The characters in movies such as *Thor* (2011), *Batman* (1966), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *X-Men* (2000), *Deadpool* (2016), *The Avengers* (2012), *Superman* (1978), *Iron Man* (2008), exemplify immortal beings, often portrayed as fantastic superheroes or mythological gods endowed with extraordinary abilities, powers, and moral values. Another sub-genre that centralizes the theme of immortality, drawing from mythology, is vampire movies. Vampires, dependent on human blood for their immortality, frequently encounter moral dilemmas. Horror movies, on the other hand, typically present immortality as a non-physical entity associated with fear. Rather than depicting bodily immortality, these movies often present the immortality of the soul in relation to damnation, incorporating fear and the notion of paying a price for eternal life. Movies that utilize technological advancements and scientific approaches to achieve or explain immortality demonstrate fictional continuities and ruptures. In Western cinema, the attainment of immortality through genetic cessation of aging reflects a thematic continuity, yet these narratives also introduce moral questioning and ethical dilemmas, highlighting the complexities and potential disruptions inherent in the pursuit of eternal life.

Cinema, as a reflection of human life, conveys existential concerns, fears, and desires to its audience, aiding in quest for meaning. Meaning, as a product, is formed and shaped through social interaction and experiences (Wallace & Wolf, 2016). Each society has developed explanations for the uncertainty of death and its aftermath, framing these concepts within its own cultural and social dynamics. Approaches that focus on the causes of death reflect specific attitudes, while explanations for death similarly convey particular perspectives. Despite being a product of historical and cultural conditions, death remains difficult to comprehend at a mental level. Although death can be known objectively, questions persist about how this perception is realized and how the understanding of death is shaped. Addressing the essence of death and whether it represents a mode of existence is a complex process that challenges the positivist-empirical method. Positivism, which seeks knowledge through empirical methods by examining cause-and-effect relationships, struggles to grasp the depth of axiological and ontological concepts. As Miller (1992) points out, , this approach often fails to understand profound concepts such as reason, mind, truth, reality, will, and death, recognizing its own limitations in the face of death, while advocating for the empirical analysis of existence, life, and scientific and philosophical propositions. The central problem addressed in this study is the ethical and social implications of immortality as portrayed in contemporary Western cinema, particularly through the lens of transhumanism. Existing literature highlights the theoretical foundations and potential consequences of transhumanism, yet there remains a gap in understanding how these themes are represented and interpreted in the world of cinema. By employing a qualitative thematic analysis of movies such as *Zardoz* (1974), *Mr. Nobody* (2009), *Transcendence* (2014), and *Self/Less* (2015), this research endeavors to illuminate the multifaceted portrayals of immortality and their implications for human nature and societal values. By analyzing characters' reflections on life and death, the ethical dilemmas they face, and the societal impacts of human-machine integration, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how transhumanism is depicted in movie. The objective is to provide a thorough analysis that not only delineates the moral and existential

concerns inherent in the quest for eternal life but also situates these concerns within the broader discourse of transhumanism and posthumanism.

This study starts by exploring the historical context of immortality, providing a general overview of its intellectual origins during the Enlightenment. Following this, it delves into the theoretical framework surrounding immortality as discussed in the literature related with transhumanism, extending the discussion to encompass posthumanism. Finally, it identifies the gap that this study aims to fill, through the examination of four key case studies in Western cinema.

1. Cinema and Transhumanism

All forms of representation including oral history, written texts, music, art, television and cinema can be considered as endeavors to convey human experiences. These tools illustrate the hopes and fears of humanity as reflected on the screen, while analyzing value system and the lifestyle. Despite the dramatic structure of the movies yielding false outcomes, the emotions and experiences conveyed are frequently more authentic. These movies are created by individuals, reflecting their own beliefs and values. Science fiction movies about transhumanism and technology have a significant role in terms of revealing possible reactions to transhumanist technologies (May, 2014, pp. 15-18). Science fiction movies offer narratives that encourage individuals to question the enduring ramifications of their present behaviors and decisions. Productions regularly examine concepts such as cloning, genetics, social monitoring, sustainability, identity, class, race and mortality are frequently addressed in such productions. These movies urge consumers to examine their aspirations by drawing attention to the potential harms of succumbing to the lure of technological innovations (Villaverde & Carter, 2013, p. 122). In this setting, the desire to transform and develop human beings and the space they inhabit through technological advancements stands out as one of the central concepts of transhumanism (Dağ, 2018, p. 90). The complex relationship between the nature of humanity and the incredible technological progress sets the stage for further exploration of transhumanism's impact.

Science fiction movies centered on transhumanism can explore aspirations and anxieties about future technologies, while simultaneously serving as a critical lens for evaluating contemporary technologies (May, 2014, p. vi). The movies replicate distinct transhumanist elements, depicting human capacity in an enhanced and developed form, while integrating neural functions with machinery. Although these products are engaging due to their scientific themes, they also reveal the lack of ontological continuity between humans and machines. Movies often portray transformed people as a negative aspect of humanity and associate them with stories that lead to negative outcomes, such as robotic evolution and human-machine integration (Harry & Vijaykumar, 2023, p. 158). In cinema, *The Terminator* (1984), *The Matrix* (1999), *Avatar* (2009), *Gattaca* (1997), *Wall-E* (2008), *Metropolis* (1927), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *X-Men* (2016), *Brainstorm* (1983) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) feature transhumanist elements such as artificial intelligence with enhanced intelligence, humanoids with bionic bodies (cyborgs), humans reinforced with metal or steel, and beings with athletic characteristics that can dodge bullets. These productions have the potential to develop highly engaging scenarios by presenting designs of future technologies (Becker, 2000, p. 362). Limitless, a realistic transhumanist movies, illustrates how biotechnological tools can expand human potential. The movie tells the story of a writer who accepts an offer to try NZT-48, a secret substance that promises to solve all life problems. This

drug significantly increases mental capacity, giving the person the ability to write a book in a brief time, make stock forecasts, master foreign languages, and influence those around him. Nonetheless, because of this this overstimulation, the character's experiences remain in a context that we can still understand even as they transcend the boundaries of humanity. In other words, although the main character's increased mental powers transform him into a potential we can imagine, this transformation does not prevent him from remaining fully human. In contrast, the more fantastic transhumanist movies dramatically and overly increase the brain's typical functioning. This enables the brain to process all previously inaccessible information at once. N.Z.T-48 has a lot more power than most nootropics in real life, yet this biotechnological development in the movie fits with many neuroscientists' ideas about how to make the brain work better by increasing its potential and memory. In the real world, people widely use nootropics for therapeutic purposes and academic achievement. Since these kinds of biotechnological advances are likely to happen more often in the future, it means that chemicals could soon be used to make people smarter (Harry & Vijaykumar, 2023, p. 159). Movies offer a unique perspective from which to analyze transhumanist ideas, providing unique insights that written works cannot offer.

More importantly, cinema is a powerful reflection of our emotions, rational thought and beliefs. Movies, akin to other narrative forms, do not confine themselves to a specific period; they can transcend generations and address various eras. In the context of transhumanism, movies both reveal our hopes and fears about future technologies and allow for a critical examination of current technological developments. In this way, movies offer a complementary understanding of our relationship with technological transformation to rational and professional discourses. At the same time, they have the potential to access subconscious emotions and beliefs that are often invisible in written works (May, 2014, p. vi). The cinematic representation of transhumanist themes situates itself on a foundation of both social dynamics and individual experiences.

An analysis of the research on the issue demonstrates a multidimensional investigation of transhumanism in cinema, enhancing social and ethical debates. The study by Yetkinler and Özdemir (2022) seeks to examine the use of artificial intelligence technology in cinema as a product of transhumanist understanding. The study aims to reveal to what extent the impact of artificial intelligence on cinema and analyzed the movie *Mr. Puzzles Wants You To Be Less Alive*, one of the most recent examples, to evaluate the stage at which this technology is present in cinema. The research scrutinized the movies representation of artificial intelligence, the way cinematic narratives handle technology, and the processing of transhumanist ideas within this context. Özdemir and Yetkinler's (2023) other research provides a descriptive analysis of the themes of the movie *Transcendence* from a transhumanist perspective. The study reveals that humans constantly treat the foreign as a phenomenon to fear, approach transhumanist movement with skepticism and portray artificial intelligence as a dangerous entity. Movie analysis develops a critical perspective on the ethical, social, and technological dimensions of transhumanism in this context. May's (2014) master's thesis analyzes transhumanism in movies in terms of personality, moral status, and perfection. The study scrutinizes the representation of transhumanist ideas in cinema, specifically examining its impact on individuals' personalities, moral values, and pursuit of perfection. The thesis provides an analysis of how transhumanist themes and technological developments have led to questions about human nature and ethical status.

Harry and Vijaykumar's (2023) study examines transhumanist movies in the context of social greed and the desire for power and discusses how these themes are portrayed in the movies. The study underscores the disappearance of lustful and intrusive tendencies in scenarios where human transformation into a higher being occurs. The research analyzes the effects of transhumanist transformation on the ethical and moral tendencies of individuals through social power dynamics and human evolutionary desires. Dağ's (2018) study took Blade Runner movie and Neuromancer novel as examples and tries to understand the philosophy of transhumanism through these works. In the study, it is emphasized that works in the genres of dystopian, futurist and science fiction contain space, human and other elements related to transhumanism. In these works, technology is portrayed as an integral part of future humanity and the role of semi-bionic and semi-biological beings, cloning, biotechnology, neurobiology, pharmacology, evolutionary development and artificial intelligence software that surpasses human intelligence are examined. The analysis revealed that such novels and movies often present a critical view of the transhumanist process and draw attention to its threats and dangers. Simultaneously, these works not only provide a stimulating role but also act as models and intellectual laboratories for transhumanist thinkers. In order to track transhumanist and post humanist themes in science fiction cinema, Yılmaz (2023) uses the descriptive analysis method to examine Andrew Niccol's 1997 movie *Gattaca*. The analysis of the movie, which encompasses transhumanist and posthumanist concepts, is conducted under three primary topics. Firstly, under the title 'Eugenic Practices in Gattaca', the effects of genetic engineering and eugenic practices on individuals and society were evaluated. Secondly, under the title 'Rational Human Construction in Gattaca', the reconstruction of the ideal of humanity within a rational and genetically determined framework is discussed. Finally, under the title 'Valid Human - Invalid Human Dichotomy in Gattaca', genetic discrimination and the resulting social inequalities in the movie are analyzed through the conflict between 'valid' and 'invalid' humans. Through these thematic groupings, the study aims to discuss how the concepts of transhumanism and posthumanism are processed through science fiction cinema and the social, ethical and philosophical contexts of these themes.

Kıyıcı's (2021) study examines how transhumanist technologies in Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) paves the way for the unwitting control of individuals. In the study, it is stated that applications such as advanced artificial intelligence technologies and personal letter writing services in the movie increase individual welfare and social peace on the surface, but within the framework of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, it reveals that individuals are unwittingly subjected to a control mechanism. In this context, transhumanism is considered as a means of managing and directing society with the promise of providing freedom and super-welfare. The article discusses how technological developments can turn into control mechanisms instead of freedom and analyses the implicit effects of transhumanist technologies on the individual. This research adds an ontological perspective to the studies analysing cinema in the context of transhumanism, immortality and the impact of scientific/technological developments on human life.

While artificial intelligence, transhumanist thought and the relationship between the individual and society through technology (Yetkinler & Özdemir, 2022; Yılmaz, 2023; Kıyıcı, 2021) and ethical debates (Dağ, 2018; Harry & Vijaykumar, 2023) are prominent in the literature, this research focuses on ontological and existential questions by linking these topics to death and immortality. The literature presents a conceptual framework in this context, addressing how technology and scientific advances reinterpret humanity's relationship with

death. In addition, by associating the concept of immortality presented in the movies with moral, ethical and existential concerns, the implications of technological immortality for the individual and society are opened up for discussion.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to examine perspectives on cultural values, belief systems, and the human relationship with death by analyzing the representation of immortality in Western cinema. This inquiry stems from the question of how human endeavors to defy death, pursuits of immortality, and how these reflections are portrayed in the Western cinema. Therefore, a transhumanist approach is deemed necessary to comprehend how cinema serves as a mirror reflecting humanity's deepest fears, beliefs, and strategies concerning death and immortality. Movies featuring mythological heroes or supernatural elements were deliberately excluded, as they did not establish a tangible connection with real-world scenarios, thereby deviating from the intended focus beyond the realms of horror or fantasy genres. Attention has been given to selecting films that emphasize the attainment of immortality through scientific revolutions and technological advancements. The movies that we examine are chosen by purposeful sampling within qualitative research methods. Four movies that exemplified this thematic exploration are: *Zardoz* (1974), *Mr. Nobody* (2009), *Transcendence* (2014), and *Self/Less* (2015). In *Zardoz* (1974), scientific and technological advancements have reshaped social structures in a society cut off from the outside world. The movie juxtaposes a group of scientists and intellectuals, protected by class distinctions, who have achieved immortality with a savage world outside their community. This society has attained immortality via scientific interventions and genetic engineering, altering the social structure, individual identities, and moral ideals. The movie examines the inequalities that technology will engender in society and the humanity's confrontation with death. *Mr. Nobody* (2009) narrates the story of 117-year-old N mo, the last mortal human being in a future where immortality is attainable by telomerisation. The movie has a structure that questions the meaning of an individual's life and the inevitability of death in a world where human life span has become unlimited. The movie presents a narrative in which technology causes existential crises by extending the life span of the individual and asks deep philosophical questions about identity and choices. *Transcendence* (2014) tells the story of scientist Dr Will Caster, whose brain is transferred to a digital supercomputer after his death because of an important discovery he made in the field of artificial intelligence. While the movie deals with the idea that technology can achieve immortality through the digitization of human consciousness, it discusses the potential threats of artificial intelligence on humanity and its ethical limits. Dr Caster's continuation of life as a digital being after death raises in-depth questions about the relationship between humanity and technology beyond the transcendence of human biological limits. *Self/Less* (2015) tells the story of Damian, a wealthy businessman who, after nearing death, decides to transfer himself into a young and healthy body. Damian's endeavor to escape death by using his wealth and technology raises ethical issues, while discussing the human desire to sustain life and the effects of this desire at the social and individual level.

The movies *Zardoz* (1974), *Mr. Nobody* (2009), *Transcendence* (2014), and *Self/Less* (2015), which were produced in different time periods allow for an understanding of how the technological and scientific concept of immortality has evolved over time. While some study in the literature focus more on technological, social and ethical dimensions, this research offers a perspective in analysing how existential concerns interact with the concept of

immortality, how scientific realities are used in technological representations of immortality, and how these realities are reconstructed in cinema.

In this study, a qualitative thematic analysis was meticulously employed to dissect the movies. As delineated by Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data. This method not only organizes and describes a data set in rich detail but also extends to interpreting various aspects pertinent to the research topic. Thematic analysis is particularly suited for studies aimed at exploration through interpretation. To illustrate the adoption and use of this methodology, the studies discussed in the literature review constitute a certain degree of prevalence and validity (Yetkiner & Özdemir, 2022-2023; May, 2014; Harry & Vijaykumar, 2023; Dağ, 2018). Initially adopting the role of an engaged reader, it is commenced by the process of reinterpreting the elements, episodes, and narratives of the movies through a social science lens. The multifaceted meanings and contexts depicted in the movies were intricately intertwined with the theoretical underpinnings of transhumanism. Scenes and dialogues addressing the theme of immortality were accurately analyzed. Themes were identified through the characters, events, and dialogues within the movies, and each theme was subjected to detailed analysis. The movies were scrutinized for their portrayal of the theme of immortality, including the characters' reflections on life and death, the ethical dilemmas posed by immortality, and the social implications of this concept. The representation of transhumanism within the movies, along with its interplay with technology, was explored. This examination delved into how human nature is altered through technological advancements, the ramifications of human-machine integration, and the consequent impacts on both individuals and society.

Furthermore, the social and cultural contexts of the movies were critically assessed to understand how these themes resonate within a broader perspective. This analysis also aimed to elucidate how these contexts are depicted in the movies, offering a comprehensive interpretation of the underlying messages and their relevance to contemporary societal and cultural discourses. In line with the above, the research is centered around three questions which explore the relationship between transhumanism and cinema through the lenses of immortality and technological advancements and its repercussions on human existence. What scientific and technological advancements are related with the concept of immortality are addressed in the selected movies? How does the immortality in cinema reflect the ethical issues and existential dilemmas of individuals? In what manner do the selected movies relate the theme of immortality to youth, the ideal existence and moral responsibility? The thematic analysis of the study is structured around three main themes: "Technological Eternity: Immortality in the Pursuit of Science," "Youth as a Portrait of Idealized Modern Life," and "Beyond Immortality: Human Nature and Moral Concerns." The first theme demonstrates how scientific advancements shape the aspiration for immortality, positioning technology as a means to transcend biological limitations. The second theme portrays youth as a symbol of modernity and perfection, reflecting societal ideals in the context of technological progress. Finally, the third theme addresses the ethical and philosophical dimensions of immortality, questioning the fundamental nature of humanity and the moral dilemmas that arise in the pursuit of eternal life.

3. Findings

3.1. Technological Eternity: Immortality in the Pursuit of Science

In movies such as *Zardoz*, *Mr. Nobody*, *Transcendence*, and *Self/Less*, the concept of immortality and its associated explanations are rationalized through scientific reasoning. These movies depict human existence as transcending existing limitations. For instance, in *Zardoz*, the narrative delves into the question of how the mortal community, referred to as the Brutals, managed to overcome death. The protagonist, Zed, becomes a focal point in this exploration. When Zed seeks answers regarding how the Eternals, who are immune to aging, achieved immortality, he receives the following response:

They did (pointing to a group of individuals punished with aging). They were the world's best scientists, but they were middle-aged and heavily conditioned towards mortality. We are their successors. We tightly sealed ourselves within this place of learning. Thus, even though we yearn for the experience of dying, we will never dismantle it. Here, people and this sum of knowledge will never die; they will only progress towards perfection. We have dedicated ourselves to the unsolved mysteries of the universe.

Indeed, in the movie *Zardoz*, the desire to surpass the biological constraints of humanity and attain immortality is depicted as residing at the radical fringe of transhumanist ideology. For the Eternals, science and technology serve as indispensable tools in their quest for eternal life. Confronting their mortality, the Eternals harness the power of science and technology to unlock the secrets of immortality, transmitting this knowledge across generations. Consequently, immortality is upheld as an ongoing pursuit, aimed at advancing towards a state of perfection. Within this framework, the movie portrays immortality as an accomplishment made possible through the aid of scientific inquiry and technological innovation.

In the movie *Mr. Nobody*, the rationale behind immortality is intricately linked to the telomerization process, which symbolizes the perpetual renewal of cells. This process not only defies mortality but also arrests the aging process, ensuring eternal youthfulness. During an interview with *Mr. Nobody*, a journalist poses the initial question, inquiring about the state of the world before humans attained immortality, before the continuous rejuvenation of cells. The telomerization process depicted in the movie involves the action of the telomerase enzyme, which facilitates the renewal of telomeres. Telomeres, situated at the ends of each DNA spiral, serve to safeguard chromosome pairs. Clinical research has elucidated a correlation between the shortening of telomeres and various diseases, underscoring that preserving telomere length not only signifies a healthy existence but also correlates with an extended lifespan (Axelrad et al., 2013). However, the movie envisions a future where genetic engineering has successfully achieved telomerization in a realm of science and technology far advanced from our present reality.

The concept of immortality through a disembodied mind is evident in the movie *Transcendence*. Dr. Will conducts successful research on the development of artificial intelligence. However, this development triggers opposition from anti-artificial intelligence groups.

(Speaker) - The efforts to develop a strong artificial intelligence have led to significant advancements in the field of neural engineering as well as our understanding of the human brain. But while some focus on the still-distant dream of a thinking computer. I believe in the journey to be more important than the destination. My priority is to use my colleagues' accidental insights to develop new methods for the early detection of cancer and in the hopes of finding a cure for Alzheimer's.

(Dr. Will) - ...For 130,000 years our capacity for reason has remained unchanged. The combined intellect of the neuroscientists, engineers, mathematicians and hackers in this auditorium pales in comparison to even the most basic AI. Once online, a sentient machine will quickly overcome the limits of biology. And

in a short time, its analytical power will be greater than the collective intelligence of every person born in the history of the world... So now imagine such an entity with a full range of human emotion. Even self-awareness. Some scientists refer to this as the Singularity. I call it "Transcendence". The path to building such a süper-intelligence requires us to unlock the most fundamental secrets of the universe. What is the nature of consciousness? Is there a soul? And if so, where does it reside?

So you want to create a god? (someone asks)

(Dr. Will) – Isn't that what man has always done?

and eventually Will Caster is murdered by opponents of artificial intelligence. Before his death, the transfer of the mind to the artificial intelligence Will built is discussed between his wife and his friend:

(Wife)-Will's body is dying, but his mind is a pattern of electrical signals that we can upload into PINN.

He's not a monkey Assuming that implanting an electrode into his brain doesn't actually kill him and that this works, at the very best you'll be making a digital approximation of him. But we should be focusing our efforts on nanotechnology. Synthetic blood cells.

The movie suggests that more advanced technologies - among them nanotechnology and synthetic blood cells - are needed for true immortality, but they are not currently available. Current technological and scientific development is presented as a mental replication or continuation of digital existence. In this context, it is emphasised that more advanced technologies should be developed in order to achieve immortality in the physical sense and that further development of science and technology is important in this context. In addition, the question *So you want to create a god?* posed by opponents of artificial intelligence is an important emphasis in terms of the subject. Dr Will's answer to this question emphasises the tendency of humanity to subconsciously seek a divine being or a divine explanation when faced with complex or unknown situations throughout history. In a period when scientific thinking and rational reason gain priority, the effort to reach the truth in the light of science, questioning the place of mythology, religion and metaphysics and explaining the universe from a rational point of view are at the forefront. The technologies mentioned in the movie *Transcendence* have scientific foundations that exist in real life and are constantly developing and researched. At this point, the world of science is constantly making progress in fields such as nanotechnology, neuroscience and biotechnology. Therefore, although these technologies with scientific foundations have not reached a certain level of maturity at the moment, they show possible potentials in the future.

The depiction of immortality in movies such as *Mr. Nobody* and *Transcendence* evokes the discourse of transhumanism, a topic that, while not widely influential for an extended period, has recently garnered considerable attention from scientists. Considering the advancements in nanotechnology and artificial intelligence, the notion of mind transference portrayed in these movies no longer appears to be a distant aspiration. The utilization of various chemicals for mind control, cloning, synthetic production of essential bodily compounds, nanotechnological devices capable of implantation in the human body, establishment of networks between human minds or between the human mind and mechanical systems, use of mood-altering drugs or substances with temporary memory-altering effects, as well as the development of methods such as prenatal genetic screening and gene therapy, are all realities of contemporary society (Tirosh-Samuelson & Mossman, 2005, p. 31-33). As in the movie *Transcendence*, the transfer of the mind is also depicted in the movie *Self/Less*. However, in this narrative, immortality is achieved through the transfer of one's consciousness into another body. Within the movie, this transfer is facilitated by a device resembling an MRI

machine. A dying affluent businessman enters the device alongside the body of a less privileged individual whom he intends to replace. After undergoing the process within the MRI, the businessman's old body succumbs to death, while his consciousness is copied into the young body. Consequently, the concept of immortality portrayed in the movie does not entail a longer or healthier life. On the contrary, it is depicted as a life purchased by the wealthy from the less privileged—a perpetual form of immortality exclusive to the affluent rather than complete transcendence from mortality.

Indeed, the movies under examination depict scenarios where human intelligence has led to the creation of superior intelligence, ultimately addressing the existential dilemma of mortality faced by humanity. In *Zardoz* and *Mr. Nobody*, death, disease and other biological vulnerabilities are acknowledged and surpassed as limitations of conventional human existence. The movie *Transcendence* promotes the aspirations of transhumanist advocates. While the utilization of such advanced technology results in the creation of an intelligent and immortal being, there arises a profound uncertainty regarding its classification within the *Homo sapiens* species. The extent to which this hybrid entity, partly human and partly machine, retains its humanity versus embodying machinic qualities is a contentious debate. It prompts the question of whether the capacity to solely utilize the mind is sufficient to confer humanity upon an individual. Ultimately, the movie raises ontological inquiries about the essence of existence, suggesting that an existence devoid of a soul is ontologically hollow, reducing existence to a mere mental process. Consequently, the incongruity between existence and its manifestation gives rise to entities with asynchronous bodies (Dyens, 2001, p. 75). Therefore, *Transcendence* serves as a catalyst for discussions on the radical frontier of transhumanism, intimating the possibility of existence transcending into a posthuman realm.

3.2. Youth as a Portrait of Idealised Modern Life

The idealized depiction of modern life portrayed in the movies reflects a longing for a life wherein immortality is synonymous with youth, vitality, and robust health, framed within the context of the signifier/signified relationship. According to Bauman (Bauman, 1992), during the modern era, individuals were often held accountable for deaths resulting from diseases, leading to the equation of old age/illness with youth/health. Consequently, aging came to be perceived as a pathological or abnormal process (Estes & Binney, 1989). The elderly individual was often depicted as the closest embodiment of death, with death's visibility being more pronounced within this demographic. Through the lens of the movies, immortality is portrayed as a force capable of halting the natural aging process and mitigating the physical ravages of time. Within these cinematic narratives, where history is often depicted as irrational and somber, the advancement of the modern mind is depicted as the progression of humanity embodied in youthful forms. The advancement of humanity as a perfectible entity is epitomized through scientific and technological progress, profoundly influencing the mindset of individuals.

Hence, within the trajectory of the movies, it becomes evident that there is no room for the elderly body within the paradigm of modernism's conception of progress. It is the youthful body that is idealized and exalted. Old age becomes synonymous with death and the finite nature of existence. It is the young body that infuse vitality into life and symbolize the pursuit of immortality. In *Zardoz*, the immortal characters, referred to as the Infinites, are depicted as having attained mastery in various sciences, ranging from geometry to arithmetic, and from art to literature. Ultimately, they have preserved their youth and vitality by unraveling the

secrets of the universe through the utilization of computer technology. The portrayal of aging as a form of punishment is encapsulated in the following statements:

-What will happen to him (if he commits an offence..)

-at least six months.

-Prison?

-Aging?

-And if you get punished often enough, you'll die?

-They make you old, but they don't let you die. You can't die.

In the world devoid of death, immortality doesn't confine individuals; rather, those who deviate from societal norms are penalized with aging. Through this form of punishment, individuals are condemned to experience the ravages of time, yet they remain unable to escape their immortal state. Furthermore, the society depicted in the movie *Zardoz* comprises primarily of youthful individuals, devoid of children, while the elderly are relegated to the periphery as aged beings, often viewed with apprehension from the outside world. These aged individuals are depicted as potential threats, constructed with an image that suggests they may pose danger.

In the movie *Mr. Nobody*, a utopian vision of the year 2092 is portrayed, where human lifespans have been extended indefinitely, and youth and vitality reign supreme. Individuals are depicted as perpetually young, dynamic, and flawless. While the narrative spans across various life cycles, encompassing individuals at different stages from childhood to old age, notably absent are the elderly within the world of immortals. Youthfulness is attained through the eradication of factors contributing to aging. In the movies portrayal, one of the primary causes of aging is attributed to the loss of telomeres within the body, a process independent of chronological aging. Through the narrative, the cessation of telomere loss is depicted as the key to arresting the aging process and overcoming death. Consequently, within the conceptual framework established by the movies signifier and signified relationship, old age becomes synonymous with mortality, while death is exclusively associated with the elderly population.

The movie *Self/Less*, on the other hand, focuses on the effects of the desire for immortality on human life, and although it focuses on the main character Damian's desire for immortality and the difficulties this desire brings with it, it presents the existence of immortality manifested within a young body and its impact on the aging process facilitated through science and technology.

-I wont last 6 months. Its metastasized, liver and lungs. This morning the oncologist were talking about hospice care.

-Sorry.

-Don't be. What you and Judith went through losing a child. That's tragedy. And old man dying, I'm supposed to say, that's life.

Damian, driven by his quest for immortality, undergoes a transformative journey to exchange his aging body for an immortal one. Upon arriving at the company responsible for this groundbreaking process, he is greeted by a lineup of youthful and vibrant bodies, poised to offer him a new body:

-Your homes, your yacht, your jet. All custom built by the worlds finest craftsmen, and so will your new body be as well. Genetically engineered for perfection, harvested to maturity so looks, athleticism, every detail of your new anatomy. Do you feel immortal?

Disease, biological imperfections, suffering, and death are all intrinsically linked with the aging body, while the youthful body stands in stark contrast as the embodiment of vitality and vigor. Therefore, the act of transferring one's consciousness into a young body holds the promise of liberation from the shackles of mortality, aging, pain, and suffering. However, as depicted in the movies, the endeavor to delay or even eradicate aging, while concurrently enhancing intellectual and physical capacities, represents an idealized aspiration. Nevertheless, it does not preclude the emergence of existential queries and psychological introspection regarding the nature of existence.

3.3. Beyond Immortality: Human Nature and Moral Concerns

Opponents of transhumanism harbor serious concerns regarding the current and potential advancements in the biomedical realm. Developments in neurotechnology, information technology, and nanotechnology entail numerous risks, ranging from the creation of nanoweapons to the engineering of genetic viruses. However, while transhumanists exhibit the audacity to embrace such risks in anticipation of a brighter future, they view opponents as culpable for perpetuating the status quo, which they regard as a crime against humanity (Bostrom, 2005). As a matter of fact, the idealized depiction of life presented in the movies under scrutiny in this research encapsulates a paradox. While the promise of immortality in these movies offers youth and vitality, it also precipitates a transformation in human nature, giving rise to a myriad of ethical quandaries, social dilemmas, and psychological complexities.

In the movie *Zardoz*, inner emptiness of the immortality of the infinite and the psychological confusion it brings are depicted. In a scene in the movie, a cellar full of statues is entered and Zardoz asks the question *Is this the house of your god?*. The answer he receives is *yes, gods, goddesses, kings and queens... they all died... they died of boredom*. The fact that the character here refers to boredom and displays a mood of boredom in the atmosphere of the movie is a reference to the other character's lack of joy in life. Zardoz wants to have sexual intercourse with a young and beautiful woman in a place where no one moves, but he cannot tolerate her lack of reaction. The following dialogue passes between them and an immortal character who sees this situation: *Zardoz, didn't I tell you about the insensitive? It is a disease and it is slowly spreading to all the vortices* (at that moment he raises the arm of another woman on the stage and when he pulls his hand away, her arm is still hanging in the air). *Yes, it's a bit scary, isn't it?*. The emotionless do not react in any way, and this is "horrible" for the immortals. The nature of the horror is boredom. In another scene, Zardoz serves food to all the immortals. An immortal sitting at the dinner table said, *Even though we are immortal, we find ourselves running to these difficult jobs. I tell you, I am sick and tired of washing dishes for 200 years*. This discontent underscores the underlying unhappiness and sense of meaninglessness that pervades the lives of the immortal beings despite their eternal youth and vitality.

The portrayal of a monotonous, repetitive existence as a curse is a central theme throughout the movie, illustrating the negative psychological effects of immortality on the immortal beings. Mundane tasks such as sleeping, waking up, and eating are depicted as tiresome and burdensome, highlighting the relentless monotony that plagues the lives of the immortals. Despite their eternal youth and vitality, they are trapped in a cycle of perpetual boredom and ennui, highlighting the existential toll of immortality. This portrayal prompts a profound

questioning of the value and meaning of life, reminiscent of the philosophical inquiries of Socrates. Socrates famously regarded life itself as a malady from which the soul seeks liberation through death, which he viewed as the ultimate gift bestowed by the gods (Plato, 2019). In contrast, the immortal beings in the movie are depicted as trapped souls, imprisoned within their immortal bodies. Far from bringing happiness, this eternal confinement engenders perpetual suffering and spiritual discontent. The desire for immortality, therefore, is portrayed not merely as a quest for eternal physical life, but as a search for spiritual fulfillment and liberation from the constraints of mortal existence. In this context, death is portrayed as an essential element that completes human nature, offering the potential for transcendence and fulfillment. Immortality achieved through death is depicted as a pathway to liberation, freeing human nature from the shackles of eternal imprisonment and realizing its existential purpose.

In movies depicting immortality, the impact on human nature is not limited to an eternal life span. This concept also has a thought-provoking effect on the basic needs and pleasures of human beings. Especially in the movie *Mr. Nobody*, physiological needs are no longer important, but there is an element of longing for the elements that shape the meaning of life and the sense of satisfaction. A journalist who has achieved immortality asks Mr Nobody, the last mortal man, *and sexually? Before sex became obsolete?*, reflecting the effect of immortality on this basic element of life, which is described as obsolete. Because sexuality is within physiological needs such as hunger and thirst, and physiological needs are no longer important in a life where immortality is achieved.

-There were cars that polluted. We smoked cigarettes. We ate meat. We did everything we can do in this dump and it was wonderful. Most of the time, nothing happened... (2009 Mr. Nobody)

In a world where immortality is achieved through science and technology, human lifestyles and habits undergo a dramatic transformation. With the eradication of physiological needs due to unlimited lifespan, societies evolve in ways unimaginable in mortal existence. However, the movies “Zardoz” and “Mr. Nobody” depict a troubling aspect of this immortality: a profound psychological emptiness underlying the outwardly youthful and physically enhanced existence of the characters. Despite their extended lifespans and enhanced capabilities, they grapple with a sense of hollowness and existential malaise. These movies serve as cautionary tales, revealing the limitations of technological progress to address deeper aspects of human experience and highlighting the importance of embracing the transient nature of existence.

In *Transcendence*, the depiction of Will Caster's mind existing within a computer environment prompts a profound exploration of the interface between human nature and technology, inviting contemplation on its potential implications for the future of humanity. The movie portrays a conflict between opposing viewpoints on artificial intelligence: those who advocate for its advancement and those who oppose it. This ideological divide is encapsulated in a dialogue between two characters with contrasting perspectives (Opposing character): *...Like he just cured cancer. And you know, when he uploaded that rhesus monkey (the application of the monkey mind to artificial intelligence)... And then I realised we had crossed a line. The machine that thought it was a monkey never took a breath. It never ate, never slept. It just screamed. It was begging for us to stop. To shut it down...* This situation brings up the radical representatives of transhumanism and criticisms against them. As a matter of fact, it is known that Will Caster is an intelligent and immortal being, but it is doubtful whether he is a human or a machine.

The movie *Zardoz* and *Self/Less* also prompts us to think about issues such as injustice and inequality of opportunity in society, the impact of power and wealth on people's lives, identity, conscience and ethical values. *Zardoz* asks the immortal character, with whom he is in a discussion, *How could you do all this to us?* and the immortal character replies: *The world was dying, we took everything good and created an oasis here. We, a handful of rich, powerful and intelligent people, retreated to preserve the knowledge and treasures of civilisation as the world sank into a dark age. In order to do this, we had to close our hearts to the suffering outside world.* It is conveyed that immortality for the viewer is not as attractive as it is thought to be and that it involves deep mental, emotional and ethical complexities as well as the responsibilities it brings. In *Self/less*, the following conversation takes place between Damian, who will buy a new body for himself, and the character who will perform the procedure;

-How many before me?

-Less than a dozen. Shedding is an exclusive endeavor.

-You mean expensive, Dr. Albright.

-Well our clients are wealthy but that's not how they're chosen. We keep it to the great, the visionaries whose loss would be a blow to all of us. Simply put, we offer humanity's greatest minds. More time to fulfill their potential.

The accessibility of the body exchange process in *Self/Less* is not limited to those with economic power but also serves the needs of a select elite group, highlighting class distinctions in the utilization of technological advancements. This portrayal prompts viewers to contemplate ethical dilemmas and issues of social justice. Such depictions raise concerns about the potential exacerbation of inequalities by transhumanism, where the privileged elite may benefit disproportionately while the less fortunate are left to contend with the natural order of things (Buchanan et al., 2000).

Conclusion

This study makes a notable contribution to the existing literature on the intersection of transhumanism and cinema studies, particularly through the lens of science fiction movies. The study examines the ways in which these films engage with transhumanist concepts, including immortality, technological enhancement, and the ethical issues surrounding human existence. By focusing on *Zardoz*, *Mr. Nobody*, *Transcendence*, and *Self/Less*, the research elucidates how cinema functions as a medium for examining the societal and cultural implications of technological progress. This study emphasizes the narrative employed by films to convey complex ideas and stimulate public engagement with and within these themes. Furthermore, it contributes to the field of media studies by illustrating how science fiction films not only mirror social concerns but also influence the discourse on the potential consequences of emerging technologies. This makes them invaluable tools for comprehending and critiquing the evolving relationship between humanity and technology. By integrating abstract theoretical discussions with their cinematic representations, this approach enhances both transhumanism and media studies, offering insights into the future of human existence.

Movies depicting immortality present a human and universe design beyond the limits of scientific reason by addressing human existence and the universe from a different perspective. As a matter of fact, these narratives, representing the radical end of transhumanist thought, foreground the desire to transcend human biological limitations in pursuit of immortality. However, they also raise ethical and ontological questions about the

implications of such pursuits: whether humanity risks losing its essence, and the potential loss of spiritual dimensions. Thus, the quest for immortality, driven by advancements in science and technology, demands a deeper inquiry into human nature and existence. In the movies *Zardoz*, *Mr. Nobody*, *Transcendence* and *Self/Less*, immortality is associated with scientific and technological developments and human existence is constructed with a superiority beyond limits. In these movies, immortality is presented as a success achieved through science and technology, and it is observed that the desire to achieve immortality by overcoming human biological limits is emphasised.

In the movies, the profound shift in the human-nature dynamic raises poignant psychological and sociological questions, exposing myriad paradoxes and inner conflicts. As transhumanism ushers in an era of eternal life, it prompts a reevaluation of human lifestyle and habits, intertwining essential elements and aspirations. This portrayal challenges the future landscape, where physiological needs dwindle in significance. Moreover, by probing ethical dilemmas and societal constructs, it offers viewers a thought-provoking lens through which to contemplate existential and moral questions.

As a result, this research offers a multifaceted analysis of the theme of immortality by integrating insights from various disciplines, including cinema, ethics, and technology. By considering the effects of transhumanist technologies on human nature, the analysis enriches the existing debates on transhumanism. Ultimately, by addressing the ethical and ontological dimensions of the quest for immortality, this research encourages further discussion of these issues, potentially raising new questions and perspectives for studies on the ethics of technology and biotechnology.

Açıklamalar

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