



Navigating the Afterlife: Transhumanism and Televised Visions of Eternity

Aureliana Natale

University of Naples Federico II

aureliana.natale@unina.it

This article examines contemporary representations of the afterlife in television series such as *Upload*, *The Good Place*, and *Black Mirror*. It highlights a shift from traditional spiritual depictions to technologically mediated and merit-based afterlives, reflecting broader trends towards secular, technology-driven paradigms of post-mortem existence. These series, embedded in cultural pop imagery, address significant technological and social transformations, including the digital revolution and corporate economies. The article explores how these depictions raise ethical questions about the impact of technology on human values and societal structures, intersecting with Christian theological perspectives on the body and spiritual fulfilment. By analysing these narratives, the article underscores the evolving relationship between humanity and technology, prompting a re-evaluation of life and death in the digital age and highlighting the critical role of media in reflecting on ethical and existential implications of technologically mediated afterlives.

Aureliana Natale is a researcher in English Language and Translation at the University of Naples Federico II. She earned her Ph.D. in 2017 at the University of Bologna and the University of L'Aquila. Her research interests encompass topics such as: studies on melancholy and trauma from the modern to the contemporary era, studies on performativity and storytelling, studies on the relationship between media and collective imagination and Shakespearean studies. Her recent publications include the article "Climate Trauma and Activism: the Social Media Coverage of Climate Crisis and its effects, an Overview" (*Anglistica*, 2022) and the essay "Uscire dal bosco incantato: il linguaggio della fiaba nel racconto del trauma" (*Editoriale scientifica*, 2023). She also published the books *Per-formare il trauma. Evoluzioni narrative dai conflitti mondiali al terrorismo* (*ESI*, 2019) and *Lo scrigno del bardo. Storie ritrovate prima e dopo Shakespeare* (Pacini, 2023) co-edited with A. Leonardi.



*Far other dreams my erring soul employ,
Far other raptures, of unholy joy [...].
Alexander Pope, Eloisa to Abelard*

Introduction

The concept of an afterlife has been a staple of human storytelling since time immemorial. From the ethereal heavens of religious belief to the ghostly realms of folklore, the question of what lies beyond death holds enduring fascination. In contemporary television series, a new paradigm emerges in the representation of the afterlife; one deeply intertwined with technological advancement, capitalistic structures, and a transhumanist philosophy that seeks to transcend the limitations of human existence. This article examines the depiction of the afterlife in popular television series such as *Upload*¹ (2020–present), *The Good Place*² (2016–2020) and, to a lesser extent, *Black Mirror*³ (2011–present). We will argue that these shows have ventured into the previously uncharted territories in TV series of the afterlife, presenting visions that diverge sharply from traditional portrayals infused with spirituality and the supernatural in favour of a distinctly transhumanist perspective on life, death, and the potential for technologically mediated immortality. The focus on technologically mediated or merit-based afterlives reflects a broader trend in contemporary popular culture, exemplified in works like *The Matrix* (1999) and *Ready Player One* (2018). These narratives reveal a shift away from traditional religious and spiritual frameworks towards a secular vision of the afterlife shaped by technological advancement and the pursuit of individual enhancement.

Transhumanism, a movement advocating for the use of technology to transcend human biological limitations, provides a fertile ground for reimagining life after death. As noted by Ronald Green (2013) it emerges as a multifaceted intellectual movement that has evolved over the past two decades, deeply rooted in the Enlightenment’s quest not primarily for societal improvement but for the transformation of the human organism itself. It envisions a future where technological advancements significantly extend human health and lifespan, as well as enhancing our physical and cognitive abilities. This movement looks to biotechnology, stem cell research, genetic manipulation, nanotechnology, bionics, and computer science as avenues to forestall ageing and enhance human capabilities, promising more fulfilling and productive lives.

¹ *Upload* is a science fiction comedy series created by Emmy Award-winning writer Greg Daniels. The production is ongoing, with the fourth and final season awaiting release. Set in a near-future world brimming with technological advancements, the show depicts companies offering luxurious afterlife experiences. Its backdrop, futuristic and bordering on dystopian, serves as the background for a comedic series infused with sharp satire regarding technological progress and its societal repercussions, delving into the realm of the afterlife.

² *The Good Place*, created by Michael Schur, is a US fantasy tv series. The show follows the story of the protagonist, Eleanor Shellstrop, who awakens in the afterlife only to realize she has been mistakenly placed in “The Good Place,” a utopian afterlife crafted as a reward for leading a virtuous life.

³ *Black Mirror* is a British anthology television series. Each episode delves into various genres, predominantly set in near-future dystopias featuring advanced sci-fi technology. In particular, this article will discuss the first episode in the second season, “Be Right Back”, and the fourth episode in the third season, “San Junipero”, both written by the series creator and showrunner Charlie Brooker.

Nick Bostrom (2014), a prominent voice in transhumanism, encapsulates this vision by advocating for the improvement of current human conditions through rational methods and applied science, aiming to augment health-span, cognitive and physical capacities, and control over mental states. Transhumanism's most ambitious aspirations include eliminating human suffering and achieving personal immortality. Ray Kurzweil (1998), for instance, speculates about a future where humans could transcend death by digitising consciousness and living indefinitely in a disembodied state. However, this perspective raises profound ethical and philosophical questions about the essence of human life, the balance between technological enhancements and basic human needs, and the voluntary versus obligatory nature of such enhancements.

The discourse of transhumanism intersects intriguingly with Christian theological reflections on human life, sin, and eschatological salvation. Contributions within Christian theology, as explored in discussions of figures like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and historical concepts like "theosis" and *imago Dei*, reveal a nuanced dialogue between Christian visions of human transformation and transhumanist futures. While there are points of convergence – such as the role of humans as co-creators and the potential for technological manipulation to extend human capabilities – significant divergences remain, particularly regarding the redemption and glorification of the body, contrasting with transhumanist desires to transcend physical limitations. This discussion underscores a fundamental value inquiry into the nature of bodily existence and its inherent value. It probes whether life's significance is rooted in our finitude and the natural arc of life from birth through death, challenging the transhumanist pursuit of physical immortality to enduring value. Christian perspectives, drawing on the Incarnation and resurrection, affirm the inherent goodness of creation and the physical body, offering a counter-narrative to transhumanist aspirations, which often devalue or seek to escape bodily existence. In summary, the intersection of transhumanist and Christian thought on the transformation of human life illuminates deep philosophical, ethical, and theological questions about the nature of human existence, the pursuit of improvement, and the essence of human fulfilment and salvation. These discussions invite a broader contemplation of what it means to be human in an age of unprecedented technological capabilities, challenging both transhumanist and traditional religious understandings of human destiny.

Upload and *The Good Place* exemplify this reimagining, portraying afterlives that are not only devoid of traditional spiritual or divine governance but are also extensions of earthly existence, enhanced through technological or ethical advancements. Their transhumanist afterlife embodies this ambition by envisioning a continuation of existence made possible through technology or merit-based systems. *Upload* presents a future where death can be circumvented through economic means, offering the wealthy elite the chance to continue their existence in a digital utopia. This afterlife, characterised by limitless fulfilment of material desires, serves as a critique of contemporary materialism and consumer culture, casting death as a luxury item within reach of those with sufficient financial resources. In this series, the afterlife is a digitally constructed paradise reserved for those wealthy enough to afford the process of uploading their consciousness. This exclusive digital heaven mirrors the inequalities of our capitalistic world while perpetuating a materialistic vision of immortality.⁴ Likewise,

⁴ Indeed, *Upload* addresses the socio-economic issue by emphasizing how access to digital paradises is a privilege of the wealthy few. At the same time, as is now customary in this type of production, the series appears to be attentive to applying an inclusive policy regarding ethnic and gender representations.

The Good Place offers a vision of the afterlife where ethical behaviour in life dictates one's eligibility for a paradisiacal existence that mirrors the earthly realm, albeit without its tribulations. While not directly technology-driven, this system still offers a materialistic reward of endless desire fulfilment, reflecting a meritocratic transhumanist ideal. Both series portray the afterlife as a continuation of earthly existence rather than a spiritual realm. Death becomes a hurdle to be overcome, a transition toward an enhanced form of life. This view aligns with the transhumanist ambition to use technology to extend and improve upon the human experience. *Black Mirror*, with its anthology format, often explores the darker implications of a technologically mediated afterlife. Episodes like "San Junipero" and "Be Right Back" address the potential pitfalls of digital immortality, exploring themes of grief, loss, and the blurring of lines between the real and the simulated.

Through a comparative analysis of these series, this article identifies key trends and motivations underlying contemporary depictions of the afterlife. All of them challenge conventional paradigms of death and eternity, suggesting that technological and ethical advancements could redefine our post-mortem existence. However, their approaches to this redefinition vary significantly, reflecting differing views on the role of technology and morality in shaping the afterlife. They prompt us to consider the ethical implications of technologies that might enable such visions of the afterlife, questioning the fairness of access to these technologies and the value of human life in a world where the boundaries between the human and the technological blur. By engaging with themes of transhumanism, technological advancement, and ethical conduct, these series do more than entertain; they encourage reflection on the potential direction of our society and the ethical considerations that should guide our approach to the future. As we navigate the complexities of the digital age, these series offer invaluable insights into the evolving relationship between humanity and technology, challenging us to envision a future where death may no longer signify the end but rather the beginning of a new form of existence.

In Pursuit of Perfection: Memory, and the Appeal of "Eternal Sunshine"

Steve Fuller's (2023) commentary on the enduring appeal of "the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind," a concept originating from Alexander Pope's poem *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717) and reimagined in the eponymous 2004 film by Michael Gondry, offers a rich framework for understanding the dynamics of human memory, romance, and the philosophical underpinnings of transhumanism. The phrase itself, embodying the desire to escape the pain of undesirable memories while celebrating an untarnished mental state, provides a compelling metaphor for exploring the human condition through the lenses of history, literature, and future-oriented ideologies like transhumanism. Fuller's analysis suggests that our fascination with revisiting and reinterpreting past romances reveals a pattern of human behaviour that is cyclically regenerative and reflective. This cycle suggests that humanity is perpetually drawn to the allure of idealised pasts and the promise of rectifying or reimagining them in the present and future. This phenomenon is not merely about the persistence of certain themes across generations but speaks to a deeper, intrinsic human tendency to find meaning, redemption, and progress in the reinterpretation of past ideals and errors. Furthermore, Fuller cleverly extends this discussion to the realm of transhumanism, a movement that embodies the quintessence of human aspiration towards overcoming biological limitations and

achieving a form of perfection or divinity. By invoking nostalgia as a mechanism through which transhumanism operates, Fuller highlights the movement's roots in humanity's long-standing quest for transcendence and improvement. This perspective is intriguing because it frames transhumanism not as a break from human history but as its continuation and evolution, motivated by the same desires that have propelled humanity forward through ages. Fuller's critique also touches on an essential aspect of intellectual discourse and progress: the dialogue between past and present ideas, and how this dialogue shapes future directions. His mention of key figures in the transhumanist movement, such as Max More and James Hughes, and the evolution of their ideas over time, underscores the importance of philosophical and ethical considerations in shaping the trajectory of transhumanism. It is a reminder that while technological advancements are at the forefront of transhumanist objectives, the movement is deeply rooted in philosophical questions about the nature of human existence, freedom, and progress.

Contemporary discussions and advancements in transhumanism lack depth in historical and philosophical engagement. Transhumanism does not discuss the negative externalities of indefinite human longevity, which points to the need to integrate ethical, social, and philosophical considerations into the transhumanist discourse. This integration is crucial for ensuring that the pursuit of technological advancements remains aligned with broader societal values and ethical standards and raises important questions about the direction and sustainability of the movement. It suggests that for transhumanism to achieve its lofty goals, it must not only innovate technologically but also engage deeply with the philosophical, ethical, and social implications of its endeavours. This includes a conscientious reflection on the lessons of the past and how they inform our visions of the future. *Entertaining Judgment: The Afterlife in Popular Imagination* by Greg Garrett (2015) explores the various ways the afterlife is represented and imagined in popular culture. Garrett highlights the richness and diversity in portrayals of heaven, hell, and other afterlife scenarios in media and literature, reflecting broader cultural and social trends, emphasising the significant impact of popular culture on our understanding and envisioning of afterlife concepts. Garrett argues that discussions of the afterlife have moved away from the domain of serious theological reflections and into popular culture. Cartoons, movies, music, and TV shows now more frequently express our thoughts and anxieties about what lies beyond death. Despite the shift in focus, these popular culture portrayals of the afterlife are not frivolous. They offer comfort, a way to shape our understanding of death, and reflect our underlying beliefs even when presented with humour or light-heartedness. Garrett spends considerable time examining the imagery and concepts of heaven, hell, purgatory, and encounters with the undead as they appear in contemporary media. His focus is on how these depictions contrast with traditional religious portrayals. He argues that popular culture afterlives, whether in heaven, hell, or elsewhere, tend to emphasise the themes of divine assistance, judgement/punishment, and the possibility of rewards after death. Garrett's work suggests that popular culture is a crucial terrain for the exploration of afterlife beliefs, offering a space to question, affirm, and negotiate ideas about what may lie beyond this life. This engagement with the afterlife in popular imagination not only entertains but also serves deeper functions, potentially influencing individual and collective attitudes towards death, morality, and the meaning of life.

Eternal Pleasures, Earthly Divides: Exploring the Secular Afterlife in *Upload*

Garrett's reflections appear highly relevant in the context of contemporary media's portrayal of the afterlife, which is depicted as increasingly secular rather than spiritual. In this regard, series such as *Upload* and *The Good Place* serve as quintessential examples, embodying this shift towards a more secular interpretation of post-mortem existence. *Upload* presents a futuristic vision of the afterlife that is both a technological marvel and a societal critique, wrapped in a narrative that is as much about human connection as it is about the implications of digital eternity. Set in a near future where humans can cheat death and choose a form of tech-driven immortality by uploading their consciousness to a luxurious virtual environment, called Lakeview, allowing them to continue living a seemingly idyllic existence, the series explores themes of love, inequality, and the moral dilemmas posed by technological advancement. In the series the afterlife is not determined by spiritual beliefs or moral actions but by economic status and personal choice. Lakeview caters to every whim and desire. It is a materialistic playground for the wealthy, with unlimited food, entertainment, and even simulated physical interactions. This reflects a secular vision of the afterlife, where happiness is equated with endless consumption and fulfilment of desires. Indeed, this digital heaven, filled with luxurious amenities and customizable experiences, mirrors earthly desires and consumer culture, suggesting that even in death, the pursuit of comfort and pleasure prevails. This commodification of the afterlife raises questions about the essence of the human experience and the value placed on material versus spiritual fulfilment, and sharply critiques current societal trends, projecting them into the future.

Uploading is a privilege reserved for those who can afford it. This creates a stark contrast between the wealthy who get to live eternally in luxury and the rest who face an unknown fate. The availability of a digital afterlife based on one's ability to afford it highlights the stark inequalities that pervade society persisting even beyond death. The series thus does not shy away from showing the problems inherent in this system. Lakeview is riddled with microtransactions and limitations placed on those with lower tiers of service. After computer programmer Nathan Brown dies prematurely, he finds himself uploaded to the luxurious Lakeview digital afterlife. However, his newfound digital existence comes with a twist: he is still under the control of his possessive, living girlfriend, Ingrid. As Nathan adjusts to the highs and lows of this digital heaven, he forms a bond with Nora, his living customer service representative. Meanwhile, Nora grapples with the challenges of her job and her growing feelings for Nathan, all while beginning to suspect foul play in Nathan's death. Nora and Nathan's relationships with the living and other uploads are central to the narrative, emphasising that human connection and love transcend the boundaries of life and death, physical and digital. In reflecting the inequalities and consumerism of the real world, the series suggests that death does not erase societal problems and aligns with Elise Bohan's (2022) critique of the practical aspects of transhumanist aspirations, particularly the current limitations of technologies like cryonics. This critique not only addresses the legal and ethical quandaries posed by such technologies but also reflects on the broader implications of seeking to transcend human mortality. The selective adoption of cryonics among wealthier transhumanists underscores issues of access and equity that are often overshadowed by the movement's more abstract philosophical debates. Moreover, while the characters seem happy, there is a sense of isolation and artificiality. They are

disconnected from the real world and their loved ones who cannot afford to upload. That is why, as the series progresses, the characters start to grapple with the limitations of this materialistic afterlife. They begin to question if true happiness lies solely in fulfilling desires or if there is something more profound missing from this digital existence. *Upload* uses its premise to discuss issues like the digital divide, privacy concerns, and the potential for exploitation by corporations that control these digital realms. It forces viewers to consider the ethical implications of such technology: Who has access to this afterlife? Who controls it? And what does it mean for concepts of mortality and eternity? At its core, the series delves into the human capacity for growth and connection beyond physical existence.

While the show does not delve deeply into the implications of uploading consciousness, it does ask viewers to consider deep philosophical questions about the connection between earthly existence and digital afterlife: What makes us human? Is consciousness preserved in digital form still “us”? Is it truly the same person or just a copy? And how should we live, knowing an afterlife can be guaranteed, albeit a digital one? This ambiguity adds another layer to the exploration of what it means to live and die in this digital age. By exploring these themes, the series touches on debates in philosophy of mind, ethics, and the nature of existence, making it a thought-provoking exploration of future possibilities. It serves as a speculative mirror, reflecting our hopes, fears, and ethical dilemmas regarding the role of technology in human life and its potential to redefine death itself, suggesting that while technology may offer new realms of existence, the quintessential human concerns – love, inequality, moral growth, – remain unchanged.

Eternal Questions, Digital Answers: Between Heaven and Code in *The Good Place*

The comparison of transhumanism to millenarian religions, albeit with qualifications, points to the deep existential and ethical questions that emerge as the movement edges closer to realising its goals. Bohan’s discussion of the potential societal impacts of indefinite human longevity – such as the philosophical reconsideration of the meaning of life and the moral implications of human mortality (or the lack thereof) – underscores the profound implications of these scientific pursuits. The notion that achieving the option to live indefinitely may lead to ethical debates about the value and purpose of extending life indefinitely highlights the need for a more comprehensive discussion on the consequences of transhumanist ambitions. From this perspective, *The Good Place*, created by Michael Schur, is a refreshing and innovative take on the afterlife that combines humour, philosophical inquiry, and ethical dilemmas. Unlike traditional depictions of heaven and hell, this series introduces viewers to a complex afterlife system where the moral value of one’s actions on Earth determines their eternal destination: the Good Place or the Bad Place. Unlike the tech-based system of *Upload*, entry into the Good Place is based on your actions during life. Points are awarded for good deeds and subtracted for bad ones. This creates a meritocratic afterlife where your behaviour determines your eternal reward. The Good Place itself is a beautifully designed paradise where residents can pursue their passions and indulge in their interests. However, it is still structured with a point system and challenges, creating a somewhat gamified afterlife experience. The point system raises questions about the definition of good and bad. Is it truly objective, or are there cultural biases? The show explores these

complexities and the challenges of defining morality in a diverse world. In fact, the series quickly reveals that this binary system is fraught with complications and inaccuracies, leading to unexpected twists and profound questions about what it means to be good. At its core, *The Good Place* challenges conventional notions of the afterlife by portraying it as an administrative system overseen by immortal beings and subject to bureaucratic errors. The series cleverly subverts traditional heaven imagery. It is not a place filled with angels and harps, but rather a constantly evolving world shaped by the residents' desires. This reflects a more modern and personalised vision of the afterlife. This setting allows the series to explore the afterlife not as a static realm of eternal reward or punishment, but as a dynamic space where characters continue to grow, learn, and confront their flaws. One of its most striking aspects is its engagement with moral philosophy. The series introduces viewers to ethical concepts and dilemmas through the experiences of its characters, particularly Eleanor Shellstrop, a morally flawed individual mistakenly sent to the Good Place. Through Eleanor's journey, the series explores questions of what it means to lead a good life, the importance of intention versus outcome in ethical actions, and the possibility of moral improvement. Relationships with others are central to ethical development and personal growth. The connections formed between Eleanor and other main characters – Chidi, Tahani, Jason, Michael, and Janet – demonstrate how interpersonal relationships can lead to profound ethical insights and personal transformation. The series suggests that heaven is not so much a place as it is the bonds we form with others, highlighting the importance of empathy, understanding, and cooperation in achieving a good life.

As the series progresses, it becomes increasingly critical of the afterlife's rigid and oversimplified system of judgement, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced understanding of morality, one that acknowledges the complexity of human actions and the influence of external circumstances on ethical decision-making. The focus shifts from simply accumulating points to personal growth and selflessness. Characters learn that true happiness comes from genuine connection and striving to be better people, not just racking up points. Even those who haven't lived perfectly can potentially earn their way into the Good Place through self-improvement. This challenges traditional concepts of eternal damnation and suggests the possibility of redemption, culminating in a radical overhaul of the afterlife system which emphasises continuous ethical development over static judgement. It also encourages further reflection on the nature of progress and the human desire to transcend, which aligns well with Bohan's exploration of psychological mechanisms in the context of transhuman historical and existential inquiry into human beliefs and their consequences. Leon Festinger's (1956) theory of cognitive dissonance, as applied to failed prophecies within millenarian movements, provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological dynamics inherent in transhumanism, particularly in relation to its anticipation of the "Singularity"—a theoretical future point when technological growth becomes uncontrollable and irreversible, resulting in unforeseeable changes to human civilization.⁵ The varied responses within the transhumanist community to the potential

⁵ The concept of Singularity in transhumanism is often associated with the development of artificial intelligence that surpasses human intelligence, leading to a point where AI can improve itself autonomously, potentially leading to rapid advancements beyond human comprehension or control. The term, in this context, was popularised by Vernor Vinge, a science fiction writer and retired San Diego State University professor of mathematics, and later by futurist Ray Kurzweil (1998), who predicts that Singularity will occur around the middle of the 21st century. Kurzweil and others speculate that post-

outcomes of such an event – ranging from enthusiastic promotion to cautious deterrence – reflect a complex negotiation of hope, fear, and expectation reminiscent of the adaptive mechanisms Festinger describes. Bohan’s reference to the “Dark Enlightenment” and its pessimistic view of the Singularity introduces a critical counterpoint to more optimistic transhumanist visions. This perspective, foreseeing a kind of anti-utopia where humanity is reduced in the face of overwhelming challenges, highlights the inherent tension between technological advancement and human vulnerability. It underscores the necessity of engaging with the ethical, societal, and existential implications of transhumanist goals, rather than simply advancing them unconditionally. Also, it suggests that transhumanism, with its futuristic scenarios and radical aspirations, is as much a reflection of human desire for meaning and improvement as it is a genuine pursuit of technological advancement. The psychological underpinnings of this movement, illuminated by the concept of adaptive preference formation, highlight the complex interplay between belief, expectation, and reality that characterises human engagement with the future. *The Good Place* has been praised for its unique blend of comedy and philosophical exploration, making such complex ethical preoccupations accessible and engaging to a broad audience. By using the afterlife as a backdrop, the series invites viewers to reflect on their values, the nature of goodness, and the possibility of change, proving that philosophical inquiry can be both enlightening and entertaining.

As a matter of fact, both *Upload* and *The Good Place* prompt reflection on the social and ethical responsibilities of transhumanist advocates. The emphasis on “technological fixes” for human limitations echoes historical and contemporary examples of utopian thinking, where the promise of a future salvation can sometimes overshadow the complexities and uncertainties of such pursuits. This comparison to millenarianism invites a critical examination of the ways in which transhumanism engages with questions of risk, morality, and the value of human life in the context of unprecedented technological change. It becomes clear that transhumanism occupies a unique position in contemporary discourse, straddling the boundaries between science, ideology, and spirituality. As the movement continues to evolve, it will be essential for its proponents to navigate these dimensions thoughtfully, balancing the pursuit of technological advancement with a deep engagement with the ethical, societal, and existential questions that such advancements inevitably raise.

Technological Transcendence: The Role of Virtual Paradises in Shaping Future Human Aspirations

Both *Upload* and *The Good Place* can thus be linked to Bohan’s idea of transhumanism as both a political ideology and a secular religion. They capture the dual nature of the movement: on one hand, a set of ideas aimed at improving the human condition through technology; on the other, a belief system with its own rituals, practices, and visions of a transformed future. This characterization highlights the deep emotional and existential investments that many transhumanists make in the pursuit of their goals, akin to the commitments seen in lifestyle politics and religious faith. The divergence of transhumanism from mainstream politics towards a more millenarian

singularity, humans and AI might merge, leading to profound and fundamental transformations in society, economy, and human identity itself. (See also Fuller 2023)

outlook is a critical point of analysis. As Bohan notes, the movement's focus on radical, future-oriented technologies – such as cryonics, digital afterlives, and life extension treatments – positions it at the fringe of conventional scientific and ethical debates. This shift reflects a deeper tension within transhumanism between its aspirations for widespread societal transformation and the practical, ethical, and existential dilemmas posed by its proposed technologies. In expanding upon Bohan's insights, it becomes evident that the study of transhumanism offers valuable lessons about the limits of human knowledge, the ethics of technological intervention, and the enduring quest for enhancement and transcendence. It calls for a sensible understanding of how technological aspirations intersect with psychological needs and societal values, urging a careful consideration of what it means to advance human capabilities in a manner that is ethically responsible, socially equitable, and deeply reflective of the diverse dimensions of the human condition. The two series' reliance on anthropological freedom and its implications for evolutionary biology and societal norms represents a thoughtful engagement with one of transhumanism's most radical and controversial tenets.

In this regard, “San Junipero,” a standout episode from the anthology series *Black Mirror*, presents a more nuanced and emotionally resonant vision of the afterlife. The episode centres on San Junipero, a digital afterlife simulation where people can choose to upload their consciousnesses after death and exist within this 80s-themed virtual world to experience potentially endless youth and joy. This virtual afterlife allows its inhabitants to choose an idealised version of themselves, frozen in a specific time period to relive their best years (thus raising questions about the value of facing reality, with all its imperfections, versus clinging to a perfect memory), or explore periods they never experienced, embodying a form of transcendence made possible through technology. As is apparent, unlike other afterlife depictions, San Junipero offers complete control. People can choose their age, appearance, and even decide when to “pass over” into the simulation. This freedom reflects a move away from traditional concepts of heaven and hell, where one's own eternal fate is predetermined, exploring the complexities of choosing to enter San Junipero and the emotional weight of letting go of earthly life. However, the core message centres on the power of love and connection that can transcend death itself. More specifically, by focusing on the love story between Yorkie and Kelly, two women who find solace and connection in San Junipero, the episode offers a significant portrayal of the afterlife as a possible haven for LGBTQ+ relationships, highlighting a theme often absent from traditional afterlife narratives: the possibility of same-sex relationships continuing after death.

In another vein, the episode “Be Right Back” presents a bleak and unsettling vision of the afterlife, or rather the lack thereof. It does not depict a traditional afterlife realm like heaven or hell, but instead focuses on the desperate attempt to cling to a semblance of a loved one after their death. The episode revolves around Martha, who, after losing her boyfriend Ash, utilises a service that creates a digital replica based on his digital footprint. This “Ash” can interact with Martha through messages and even a robotic body. However, this digital Ash is a hollow imitation. It lacks the true essence of the person, his memories, and the emotional connection Martha shared with him. The episode highlights the limitations of technology in capturing the complexities of human life and love and is more consonant with Rosi Braidotti's (2019) emphasis on the importance of embodied subjectivity, acknowledging the role of the body and lived

experiences in shaping knowledge.⁶ Martha's dependence on the digital Ash prevents her from processing her grief and moving on. This vision suggests a future where mourning and loss can be mitigated by technology, offering a simulacrum of the deceased that can interact with the living. The episode critically examines the human desire to hold on to loved ones and the lengths to which people might go to avoid the finality of death.

These episodes of *Black Mirror* illuminate the tension between traditional evolutionary frameworks and the avant-garde visions of humanity proposed by contemporary transhumanists. By identifying the intrinsic challenges posed by human nature itself—specifically, the cognitive and psychological biases hardwired into our species—on the other hand, *Upload* and *The Good Place* posit a more introspective obstacle to the transhumanist agenda. The concept of internalising barriers goes beyond the usual external factors blamed for hindering progress, such as financial constraints, regulatory issues, and societal views. It instead highlights a critical challenge within transhumanism itself: the movement's ability to overcome the psychological and emotional limitations that are deeply ingrained in human nature. This shift in focus emphasises that the obstacles to achieving transhumanism's goals are not just external, but also lie within the very psychological fabric of humans, questioning whether transhumanism can truly surpass these innate human conditions. The exploration of moral enhancement through digital or other electronic means as a solution to these biases reflects the transhumanist inclination towards technological interventions.

Above all, the caution that all of the series referred to here oppose against fuelling unrealistic expectations speaks to a critical aspect of transhumanist advocacy: the need for a balanced approach that acknowledges both the potential benefits and the limitations of current scientific understanding and technological capabilities. This caution serves as a reminder that while the pursuit of indefinite longevity may hold tremendous promise for humanity, it must be approached with a clear-eyed recognition of the challenges, uncertainties, and ethical dilemmas that accompany such profound transformations in human life. It becomes evident that the discussion around transhumanism and longevity research is not just about the technical feasibility of extending human life but also about the broader implications of such advancements for society, ethics, and the human condition. As transhumanist endeavours continue to push the boundaries of what is scientifically possible, they also invite us to reflect deeply on what it means to be human in an age of unprecedented technological potential.

⁶ In her 2019 work, *Posthuman Knowledge*, Rosi Braidotti lays out a comprehensive framework to grasp the nuances of the posthuman condition, a state of being that emerges from the complex interplay between technological advancements, the forces of globalisation, and evolving bioethical considerations. This condition is characterised by increasingly blurred distinctions between humans and machines, as well as between nature and culture, challenging our conventional understanding of these categories. Braidotti critically addresses the limitations of traditional knowledge systems that prioritise human experiences and perspectives (anthropocentrism) and depend on clear-cut, binary distinctions to define the world. She argues that such approaches are inadequate for capturing the complexities of the posthuman era, where the lines demarcating different forms of existence are continually shifting and evolving. *Posthuman Knowledge* advocates for a departure from rigid binary classifications, such as human versus non-human, proposing instead a more integrated and fluid perspective on life. According to Braidotti, this perspective encompasses not only humans and technology but also animals and the broader environment, all of which coalesce to form the tapestry of the posthuman condition.

Works Cited

- Bohan, Elise. 2022. *Future Superhuman: Our Transhuman Lives in a Make-Or-Break Century*. Sidney: New South Wales University Press.
- Bostrom, Nick. 2014. *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Caneva, Alessandra, Claudia Caneva and Cecilia Costa. 2018. *L'immaginario contemporaneo. La grande pro-vocazione delle serie tv*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Cole-Turner, Ronald, ed. 2011. *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Festinger, Leon, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. 1956. *When Prophecy Fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fuller, Steve. 2023. "Review of *Future Superhuman: Our Transhuman Lives in a Make-or-Break Century* by Elise Bohan." *Prometheus* 39 (3): 195-202.
- Garrett, Greg. 2015. *Entertaining Judgment: The Afterlife in Popular Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Green, M. Ronald. 2013. "Review of *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* by Ronald Cole-Turner." *The Hastings Center Report* 43 (4): 45-7.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Huberman, Jenny. 2020. *Transhumanism: From Ancestors to Avatars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kurzweil, Ray. 1998. *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin.

TV Series

- Brooker, Charlie, *Black Mirror*. Season 2, Episode 1, "Be Right Back", 11 February 2013.
- Brooker, Charlie, *Black Mirror*, Season 3, Episode 4, "San Junipero", 21 October 2016.
- Daniels, Greg, *Upload*, 2020 – present.
- Schur, Michael, *The Good Place*, 2016-2020.