(UN)HUMAN RELATIONS: TRANSHUMANISM IN FRANCESCO VERSO'S *NEXHUMAN*¹

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Abstract: Transhumanism is an international movement which espouses the idea that any human organ, function, sense, ability, can be augmented and ameliorated with the judicious use of technology. The ethical, cultural, social, biological, economic implications for this view are far-reaching and point to a number of complex questions whose solution eludes researchers so far. One of the possible sources for answers to these is found in science fiction. While transhumanism is a relatively recent phenomenon (last 25 years or so), science fiction published in English that mirrors some of its issues and ideas has been flourishing for at least as long. In Italy, science fiction is starting to enjoy popularity and critical depth in no small measure due to the untiring abilities of a number of authors. This article analyzes the intersections between human and machine as they are portrayed in Francesco Verso's *Nexhuman*. Francesco Verso has published 4 award-winning science fiction novels and a number of short stories. *Nexhuman* offers a considerable narrative construct which paints a dystopian future where trash is formed and re-formed, sold and reworked; however, strong emotions are not absent, since love may flourish in this "kipple"-laden setting, as well as violence and obsession. Transhumanist ideas explicitly dealt with in the novel include the end of death, the question of the soul, mind uploading, limb prosthesis, the co-existence of humans with mind-uploaded beings. The amalgam between human and machine does away with the Self and the Other(s) as separate entities and constructs a completely different *Weltanschauung*. *Nexhuman* is not only a transhumanist

¹ Some of the ideas elaborated on here were first presented at the Graduate Students' Conference entitled "(Un)human Relations/Relazioni (dis)umane," organized by the Graduate Students' Association of Italian Studies and held at the University of Toronto, in Toronto, Canada, on May 6, 2015; other ideas were included in my "Afterword" to the English translation of *Livido*, *Nexhuman* (249–252).

trailblazer within the flourishing arena of Italian science fiction, but also a springboard for deeper understanding of what makes us human and the extent to which binary categories need to be overcome in order to create a more accommodating world.

The most remarkable aspects of the so-far-unassailable human/unhuman boundary are contained within the possibility and probability of rescinding that boundary through technology. If this boundary-voiding happens, human identity can be thought of as interwoven with not only a myriad of beyond-human relationships, but also an infinite set of non-human embodiments. This act of willful sabotage of margins (see, for example, David Eagleman's TED Talk) may create a being whose experiences transcend the primordial human attachment to binary categories and initiate posthuman consciousness. One of the possible pathways to achieve this merger is earnestly suggested by the international philosophical and cultural movement named transhumanism. Transhumanism's main tenet is the belief in the positive outcomes of enhancement and augmentation of all human faculties, organs, sentiments using reason, science, and technology. It assumes that humans are imperfect and that they need separate, technological support to keep improving. There is no end, however, to this improvement, according to Max More, since "the implementation of transhumanism [...] [is seen as] being a continual process and *not* about seeking a state of perfection" (5). The core element of transhumanism is identified by More in the possibility and desirability of overcoming "biological limitations on human cognition, emotion, and physical and sensory capabilities using science, technology and experimentation guided by critical and creative thinking" (13). The modifications go beyond simply alleviating pain or bettering one's eyesight. They involve prostheses, implants, nanotechnology, exoskeletons, DNA alteration, and so on to augment human abilities beyond their human limit (for example, adding gills or making night vision possible). Transhumanism's view of human improvement and augmentation is often correlated with the idea of "singularity." Singularity does not have a univocal definition but, in short, it refers to a time when machines will greatly surpass human cognitive abilities (Kurzweil). Those who envisage such a leap in technological progress also often repeat that it is impossible to predict what human life will be like under these unimaginably exponentially amplified computing powers of machines.

The remarkable and increasingly frequent developments revealed by technological breakthroughs that concern all aspects of transhumanism make this

philosophical movement's moral and ethical concerns more and more urgent and palpable. Two specific instances of the mainstreaming of transhumanism will suffice: firstly, there was recently, in 2016, a transhumanist candidate for the Presidency of the United States of America, a man named Zoltan Istvan (see his statements in Istvan); secondly, an Italian surgeon, Dr. Sergio Canavero, has made public his intention to organize and proceed with a head transplant in 2018 (Čartolovni and Spagnolo).

Italy has had a long and important connection to transhumanist thought: not only are there presently two associations (*Associazione Italiana Transumanisti* and *Network transumanisti italiani*) whose members are active in publishing and research, but Italy also boasts the world's first transhumanist politician (now an ex-parliamentarian), Giuseppe Vatinno, as well as a new political party. While Italian transhumanism is very alive in scientific (and political) circles, this philosophical movement has not seen assiduous application in Italian science fiction. If science fiction can be defined as those works of literature whose narration is contingent upon some as-yet-unfulfilled scientific advancement, transhumanist science fiction refers to those works of literature that deal with self-directed evolution (therefore not with cyborgs created by others, but with the fact that the subject's enhancement is directly willed by him- or herself). In this sense, Francesco Verso's *Nexhuman* can be considered a transhumanist trailblazer in the more and more vigorous forest of Italian science fiction (on Italian science fiction, see Saiber).

Verso was born in Bologna in 1973. His full-time vocation as a writer dates back to 2008; before that, after receiving his degree in Environmental Economics from Roma Tre University, he worked at IBM and Lenovo. His novel *Antidoti umani* was a finalist for the 2004 Urania Mondadori award. In 2009, he won the Urania Mondadori award for his book *e-Doll*. The novel *Livido* won the 2013 Odyssey Award from Delos Books as well as the Premio Italia in 2014 and it was his first novel to be translated into English (*Nexhuman*, 2015).² In 2014, he won the Urania award for *Bloodbusters*, sharing the prize with Sandro Battisti's *L'impero restaurato*.

Nexhuman is a complex novel whose themes and concerns intertwine in a rich narrative. The associations between transhumanism and the book touch upon mind-uploading, limb prostheses, and relations between and among humans and *nexumani*—"nexhumans," beings who lost their physical body to

² The American publisher Apex has recently announced a new edition of *Nexhuman* for the near future.

disease or old age but who chose to have their mind uploaded to a computer and from there to an artificial body. *Nexhuman* does not deal with the formation of empires (such as in Asimov's *Foundation* series), space travel (for example, Dario Tonani's *MONDO9*), aliens (H. G. Wells), the complete disintegration of human bodies into some other biological form (such as in Greg Bear's *Blood Music*), time travel, or the possibility of living in a computer simulation; all of these topics are part and parcel of a different type of science fiction stories. The content of the novel is more in line with Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, where humans and nano-biotechnologically-supported beings coexist. Although the novel does not focus specifically on self-directed evolution, the narration involves one of the crucial aspects of transhumanism: mind-uploading. *Nexhuman* paints a dystopian picture of the future, where the complexities of a consumerist, profit-driven, technology-obsessed, and trash-filled world populated by humans and nexhumans seemingly obliterate those aspects of humanity that likely matter most: love, identity, family, friendship, and adolescent dreams and aspirations, to name just a few³.

Nexhuman illustrates elements of a type of Bildungsroman, tracing three stages of the protagonist's life spanning the years 2040–2055. In this first-person narrative, Peter Payne lives with his mother and an older brother in the slum part of a megacity. He is a boy of 15 who lost his arm and leg to a garbage-chopping machine, but he finds the necessary pieces in the trash with which to substitute the lost limbs with prostheses. These give him strength greater than he would have had with his biological limbs. He lives in a world overflowing with trash; he works as a *trashformer* for a company that recycles as much material as can be salvaged from garbage heaps, either manually going through the *palta* ("kipple"⁴) or using machinery to separate it. The filthy, grimy, greasy, oozing, trashy surroundings do not close Peter's heart to beauty: in fact, he falls in love with what he does not know is a nexhuman woman, Alba Vicente, who looks like she is 23 but was uploaded when she was in her sixties. When he witnesses a violent gang (whose leader is his brother) viciously attacking and dismembering her and scattering her body parts, his life gains one purpose: that of putting her together, making her whole again. Thus, he devotes most of his adult life to collecting the once-nexhuman fragments. This quest occupies his mind and becomes his

³ For a very general review, see Porta 35–36.

⁴ The word used to render the Italian *palta* is taken from Philip K. Dick.

obsession. After finding all of her limbs, Peter achieves his goal: being with his loved one forever. In other words, transhumanist technology makes it possible for the protagonist to upload his brain into a freshly-created new body, similar to the one that embodies Alba's self.

The novel makes a disturbing but hopeful statement about a possible society in which technological advances not only create an individual's goals (such as mind-uploaded embodiment into another form), but also fulfill them, in what seems an endless loop. Groups of scientists who work on making this possible belong to institutions that, obviously, support technological processes; still, no one seems to be in charge. This type of society relies on the self-made man and woman who search to find their own goals and look for ways to fulfill them on their own, or with minimal help from friends. Moreover, science has an answer to any query: Peter, in his pursuit of Alba's past, enters the "Temple of Moore," which is clearly a spoof on Moore's laws (and on Max More's role in transhumanism); scientists are the new priests and they solve any human problem that the individual cannot resolve by him- or herself.

Nexhuman elaborations of (un)human relations span all kinds of permutations in the types of participants and associations; they involve at least the following four combinations:

1. Humans and dead bodies (biological as well as non-biological): necrophilia is one example of such (un)human relations;
2. Humans and interactive multimedia hologram avatars: Peter updates the personal data of his mother, Cleo, upon her death so much so that the avatar—in a beautifully Pirandellian fashion—thinks that it is Cleo;
3. Humans and nexhumans: this is clearly the most interesting set of relationships, as well as the most emblematic of the possible manners in which humans can deal with other human consciousnesses uploaded into different, but still humanoid, bodies. And, as expected, most relationships fall within two opposite camps: on the one hand, nexhumans are left alone to live in a separate (aseptic) part of the city; on the other hand, nexhumans are the target of hate, homicide, and, after being disembodied, their parts are used for various purposes or sold. Peter's own attitude of love and affection for a nexhuman is uncommon. Moreover, he is aware of the unequal position that nexhumans hold from legal and political perspectives:

She was nexhuman and destroying her was murder, even though the Government does not recognize that yet, and turns a blind eye. Eventually the murder of an uploaded being will be seen as equivalent to that of a human being. But for now, the Dead Bones [the gang that murdered and dismembered Alba] won't be punished—an indifference that discriminates against nexhumans whose only fault is having chosen to leave their native bodies never to return. [...] As far as the law is concerned, the Dead Bones haven't murdered anyone; they have merely pulled the plug on a cadaver held in suspended animation by technology. But, for me, what they did yesterday was unforgivable. (Verso 15)

Furthermore, Peter is very aware of the biological shortcomings of nexhumans, and he knows that if he will ever be with Alba, she cannot give him the gift of a child. Still, his musings reveal his existential yearning while he contemplates her severed head:

When I look at her, I don't see crude inorganic matter, atoms assembled by who-knows-what rules of model making. On the contrary, I enjoy the purity of her energy trapped in this artificial form. I see a creature designated for a better future. I see the suspension of time, the end of all rules, a union between natural and artificial; the inconceivability of it leaves me troubled and impotent. (Verso 41)

4. Relationships between and among humans mediated by machines: Peter meets his wife Kiko while playing an interactive game in the virtual *gamesphere*, where they share numerous exciting trips and adventures, all in virtual programs. These multiplayer games always contain love—to be defended “against thousands of dangers” (65). Initially, however,

[...] it is worth remembering that Kiko might not even exist outside of the gamesphere. That little round face might be a front for an Artificial Intelligence, or a fat boy with a fixation, or maybe a bored housewife, fed up with cleaning, looking for adventure. (69)

These (un)human relationships complement the associations between and among humans throughout the narrative. Human-to-human relations are also of various types, but they are overwhelmingly negative, violent, and unfeeling: mental patients are treated in a most horrific fashion, employees can have their memories wiped out, and brothers hate each other to the point of exasperation-induced violence. Peter is usually on the receiving end of all of the blows, and the Italian title *Livido* suggests biological as well as psychological traces of violence perpetrated on him: “The world I live in [...] is suspended between the unreality of the gamesphere, the necrosis of the dump, and the sinister air of the wardrobe where Alba lies” (Verso 61).

These relations and various others, however, find their common thread in the question of the Self: not just the basic question “Who am I?”, but all the other probing queries, such as “Who is the Other?”, “What is my rapport with the Other?”, “Where do I fit in?”, and “What do I do with my life?” In view of transhumanist thought, additional questions arise, particularly the following:

- *Who will the Other(s) be* in a world where any one individual can take on any shape?
- *Who will the Self be* in a world where any one individual will have the chance to both shape and experience any desire being embodied in any shape?
- *Will there be a need to classify the world in binary categories?*

Nexhuman suggests a most noteworthy possibility regarding the relationship between the Self and the Other, as the Self and the Other may become and often are the same individual. This does not mean that the Self is the Other, nor that the Self is divided or doubled, but that the Self has a chance to live within the Other, thanks to technology.

Transhumanism values progress, reason, and optimism through self-determined, self-directed evolution. According to this movement, death is not inevitable: negligible senescence is conceivable and likely through life extension, cryonics, or mind-uploading. Furthermore, “Humanism tends to rely exclusively on education and cultural refinement to improve human nature whereas transhumanists want to apply technology to overcome limits imposed by our biological and genetic heritage” (More 4). This morphological freedom may also come about on account of the possibility of mind-uploading, the procedure whereby the brain

of an individual would be transferred first into a computer and then placed in a body-form of the individual's choice. As More (7) explains,

Any discussion of transhumanist concerns quickly raises multiple issues in the area of metaphysics. Several of these revolve around the nature and identity of the self. With few exceptions, transhumanists describe themselves as materialists, physicalists, or functionalists. As such, they believe that our thinking, feeling selves are essentially physical processes. While a few transhumanists believe that the self is tied to the current, human physical form, most accept some form of functionalism, meaning that the self has to be instantiated in some physical medium but not necessarily one that is biologically human—or biological at all. If one's biological neurons were gradually replaced, for example, with synthetic parts that supported the same level of cognitive function, the same mind and personality might persist despite being "in" a non-biological substrate.

The nature and identity of the self, therefore, is seen as persisting, notwithstanding the different morphological embodiments. However, the self's persistence is highly modifiable and its characteristics alter the perception of the evolutionary bases of duality (this/that; human/unhuman, self/ others, etc.).

For millennia, humans have acknowledged the fact that there exists a chasm between the Self and the Other. This binary, exclusionary relationship pits the Self against the Other and separates the two fragments into clearly delineated compartments. The transformation or metamorphosis of the Self into some Other is a recurrent topos in literature, but as the following examples and many others show, duality is at the heart of traditional transformations—a duality which is never surpassed.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* begin with the purpose of the collection: "to tell of the *bodies* [emphasis mine] which have been transformed into shapes of a different kind" (29). Therefore, the author generally is not concerned with the consequences of the transformations on the Self. Apuleius' protagonist in the *Golden Ass* also readily comes to mind, even though within the new animal form, the man is still a man, with all-too-human characteristics. It is unclear whether the protagonist's experiences while transformed into another shape make a dent on his self-realization and Weltanschauung; the binary categorization continues.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* deals with creature construction, not the willful decision to transform oneself; Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is based on the dual vision of the self; Kafka's Gregor Samsa is transformed into a "monstrous insect," but not by his desire, and that makes a difference in the way the protagonist lives this metamorphosis. In these novels, duality rules the protagonists' experiences, never to be questioned or overcome. As an aside, it must be mentioned that on account of attempting to overcome a binary cognitive mindset, *Nexhuman* cannot be read profitably from a Marxist perspective. More specifically, the notions that refer to the middle class in Franco Moretti's reading of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* do not find parallels in this science fiction: the middle class is non-existent, and the proletariat as a class does not exist. Above all, the human relations that a Marxist reading assumes to be in place are not relevant for a technologically-based, transhumanist world. In any case, a Marxist reading also stems from a dualist perspective, and that must be overcome in order to account for novel experiences that are likely to accompany mind-uploading into another form. Clearly, the conceptual reworking that accounts for the inclusion of transhumanist technology in literature has to transcend the normal critical categories.

It is true that anthropological triangulation, or double-consciousness, offers a tripartite view, but still of the same three items: Self, Other, and Other-Self. The binary cognitive and emotional pathways, supported by evolution, can be altered and modified, as Jack Denfeld Wood and Gianpiero Petriglieri write (32):

[...] when emotions do not jump-start an instinctual chain of reactions bypassing the cortex, they can provide the "drive" to focus our efforts toward ever-finer understanding and better adaptation to a fluid environment.

When the brain reacts in a binary way, it leads to quick, irrational decisions and action; when a dialogue is engaged between the emotional and rational parts of the brain, the "tension of the opposites" stimulates a more sophisticated exploration of the environment and furthers subsequent individual development.

The novel describes, in stark and nasty details, the results of the primordial, dual, antagonistic stance: quasi-fratricide, possible matricide, nexhuman-cide, exclusion, separation (humans vs. nexhumans, male vs. female). Nevertheless, Peter Payne endeavours to avoid falling into the trap of hate or unfeeling toleration, even when

he thinks of vendetta. He falls in love with a being whom he does not know is a nexhuman, and he keeps loving her even after finding out that she is the result of the mind-uploading of an infirm 60-year-old woman's consciousness. His search for Alba's brutally severed pieces symbolizes his pursuit to find himself but not at the cost of exclusion of others. And here is the point at which transhumanism's mind-uploading and technology show yet another possibility, clearly illustrated in the novel: to live as Self within the Other(s). The Self can be uploaded into any form (human or not), of any age, gender, and physical and psychological make-up, and this can be done many times over—just as Alba's example shows. The Self can live within other people's memories: Peter uploads his memories into his mother's hologram program and therefore he will live within those. However, the most inclusive sense of the Self within the Other is Peter's feeling that Alba lives within him. Furthermore, these serious aspects of the "Payneful" experience receive good doses of irony (specifically, love growing in trash-filled environment; trash-forming, the recycling of garbage but also of mind; Peter's willingness to upload his mind not because of his mutilated, bruised body, but on account of love; questioning whether Alba's severed pieces are trash).

Therefore, the Self on its own and within the Other(s) are categories that do not exclude each other, but are subsumed within each other: the new consciousnesses of Peter and Alba are not simply imagined but concretely embodied, not dreamt about or dreamt up but uploaded. There is no need to be antagonistic, nor are there blurred, indistinct outlines between Self and Other(s), but the Self is enclosed within, experienced, practised, familiar, deeply felt within the Other(s). The newly-formed identities are not fluid; they are firmly rooted in their previous life's memories, which are embraced and heartily received. It is possible that the new individuals, rather than relying on the "old" definition of Self, create a new Self that also includes the experiences of Other(s). It is crucial to note that even when self-concept is thought of as changing "typically in response to new environments" (Gore and Cross 741), it is not clear whether a new form into which the mind-uploaded Self has entered will signify "a new environment," or to what extent this environment will have an effect on the unchanging part of the Self. This has interesting repercussions on (un)human relations: they will no longer be a part of binary thinking, dual categories, polarization, but will embody differences and inclusive mediation and transcend the polarity that is caught in the interstices between alternatives.

Verso's protagonist is not at all like those literary figures imagined by writers who define the new Italian epic's characters on the basis of Calvino's suggestions⁵ as "extra-human, inhuman or unidentifiable"; he is exactly the opposite: he is very human and very identifiable, both in his biological form (which, however, is made up of titanium parts) and in his uploaded form.

Two other subjects related to (un)human relations require mention here: one concerns the environment, specifically rubbish; the other has to do with the notion of love in a time of uploaded consciousnesses. The environment as envisaged in the novel is made up of various areas of the megacity that are full of shells of computers, piles of monitors, blackened circuit boards, and other hazardous materials; all of these are burned and therefore create acrid and dangerous fumes and ultimately, when it rains, reek of sludge. After a period of "out of sight, out of mind," which made it possible to sell rubbish elsewhere, Urban Cleaning Units were created to "promote the idea of reconsumerism" (Verso 3). These units are in competition with gangs of children or outcasts who live off selling anything that can possibly be salvaged and reused. The obvious consequence of this messy situation leads to unpredictable climatic disasters, unexpected gales, acid deluges, etc. The characters in the novel deal with the situation as well as they can: those who live in the garbage heaps dig holes and make strong covers for them, while others simply barricade themselves at home. Consequences on health include frequent diarrhea; nausea; altered DNA of plants, animals, and humans; and mental illness. *Nexhuman* paints a truly dismal picture of a world bursting at its seams with trash. The solution to the kipple crisis cannot be trashformers, reconsumerism, or the Urban Cleaning Units, since consumerism remains rampant. Characters illustrate different attitudes toward garbage:

Ion has a fixation with kipple—everybody does, because kipple affects us all. But Ion is not like me; he analyzes kipple as if it were a mathematical problem that might actually have an answer, as though he were trying to reverse the laws of chaos.

Even Charlie's life revolves around kipple. After he left his Dead Bones rebel period behind, what he had once hunted with the aim of cleansing his neighbourhood became his daily bread. Still, as team leader, my brother is not interested in the ontology of the phenomenon but rather in how to make as much out of it as he can. [...]

⁵ For a discussion, see Rushing 2011.

Then there's me. Compared to Ion's and Charlie's, my attitude is more hostile. Since the attack five years ago, my personal relationship with kipple has changed. Perhaps, though, it is being surrounded by garbage, working in its midst for twelve hours a day, that has changed my perception of reality. [...] As a trashformer, I *hunt* kipple. (Verso 53–54)

Later on, Peter explains his role as follows: "I am a salvager of matter. I give back hope to things that have none left. I blow a breath of life into organic degeneration" (98). This is precisely what he did with Alba's pieces: he made it possible for her pieces to be revived. It is significant to note that Peter's search for Alba's pieces starts in the trash heaps, continues in the morgue, leads to a mental asylum, follows in a shoe store, and ends up in the basement of his flat, and all the trashed pieces are put together in a Temple.

The other subject, love, deals with the question of the sources of the feeling of love. In the novel, Peter notices Alba (a propitious name) on account of her kind disposition, her perfumed fingers, her ownership of a travel agency (where she helps clients realize their dream voyages), and her beautiful body, but, most of all, she is the only character who acts kindly toward Peter, if only to say hello every morning. Peter is smitten with her in a teenage first-love manner, but this love continues throughout his youth. At the outset, he does not know that she is really the result of the mind-uploading of a much older mature woman—a situation that overturns the generally accepted age relationship between a man and a woman (and poignantly highlights the differences between transhumanist possibilities and prevailing mores, not to mention classic fictional or real love pairs. For instance, Beatrice is nine when the teenage Dante falls in love with her). Thus, mind-uploading obliterates the borders that so far have created the unwritten societal relationships underpinned by the usual sociological categories of age, gender, class, race, religion, occupation, and income.

In this view, love requires a much more forceful leap into the unknown than among humans only since the object of one's love is truly unknown: the amount of cultural, psychological, physical, and experiential baggage that the uploaded individuals carry is, in theory, unlimited. Even though Alba is the central point of existence for Peter, she as a character does not appear as often as the unaugmented/un-uploaded humans; it is surely impossible to predict and imagine a being whose world is exponentially bigger than that normally experienced by humans. The

being whose mind has been uploaded surely relies on different sets of coordinates than those used so far by human actors. Classifications of social groups in that world become invalid or at least insignificant. In the novel, it is in fact unclear what sentimental or psychological reasons Alba would need to have to be able to accept and conceivably reciprocate Peter's love and take on his aspirations for a truly happy existence.

Frederick Pohl, an American science fiction writer, claimed that "A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam."⁶ *Nexhuman* traffic jams include not only the usual problems encountered in science fiction (extreme environmental degradation, unscrupulous employers, the failure to stop aggressive and violent behaviour), but also those created by new transhumanist technologies (perpetual self-constructed trashed bodies, mind-uploading that requires stepping into the "Temple of Moore," the misuse of mind-transforming technologies, the inability to educate the young, wide gaps between humans and nexhumans). The novel does much more than this, however, since it redefines the relationships between the Self and the Other(s), offering a new way of being human: that of embracing one's Self within the Other(s).

Katherine N. Hayles expresses her virtual dream as follows:

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (6)

Finitude, as imagined here for posthumans, is certainly not a concept shared by transhumanism and by Verso's protagonists, and it does not have to limit human experiences and relations in a world where mind-uploading into another form is possible. Above all, even in a dystopian vision, hope (in the form of love) lurks in the most unusual and unexpected of places. The possibility of breaking

⁶ Cf. <https://www.asme.org/engineering-topics/articles/technology-and-society/fiction-put-science-in-engineering>

down barriers between the Self and the Other(s) is a most fascinating aspect of transhumanist vision depicted in Verso's *Nexhuman* world.

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