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Creative Posthumanism and Bogdan Rață

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Abstract:
Creative Posthumanism is one of the most crucial discussion areas of the 21st Century contemporary art. There are many posthuman works in many branches of art from literature to cinema, from photography to sculpture. Biotechnological developments, digital technologies as art devices, futuristic vision, and several variations of humanism are some components of creative posthumanism. On the other hand, creative posthumanism has classical mythological origins. In this context, the subject will be evaluated through several artistic examples focusing particularly on Bogdan Rața's art and sculptures.
Keywords: *Creative Posthumanism, Bogdan Rața, Promethean dialectic, Ihab Hassan, Travis Scott*

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"More than science fiction, now we need the fictions of science"
(Ihab Hassan, 1978:783)

Introduction

Postmodernism, post-truth situations, transhumanism, posthumanism, and cyber life through virtual reality and artificial intelligence technologies are principal components of the 21st century's Zeitgeist.

We live in an age where postmodernism has more or less completed its mission of criticizing universal modernism, post-truth subjectivism idealizes free will on the one hand and feeds collective schizophrenia on the other, transhumanist superman utopia is embodied medically and technologically, human existence is defined as being predominantly a net instrument and sometimes paradoxically liberal democratic principles are manipulated or exploited by repressive strategies of social engineering.

"Eventually we are all cyber-sophists who live between futuristic enthusiasm and post-apocalyptic phantasies" (Atay, 2021: 15).

Romanian artist BOGDAN RAȚĂ is a distinguished representative of posthuman culture and creativity (https://bogdanRața.com/sculptures/). In his art, neo-classical austerity and avant-garde formalism are intertwined. In general, his subject is the human body and its parts, and some of these body parts are in colossal dimensions. These elements are autonomous forms through rhizomatic articulations and connections.

Rața's interior exhibition spaces are environments loaded with kinetic energy, where gravity is challenged from time to time, and the exhibition choreography forces the walls. It is not a fixed situation that his sculptures are two-dimensional or three-dimensional, this is an interdimensional mode of becoming. His sculptures that transform the exhibition wall into a permeable surface are also conceptual representations of a titanic rebellion that knows no obstacles. This energetic expression of Bogdan Rața intersects with the kinetic formalism of Matteo Pugliese's Extra Moenia series (2009-2013).

Some of Rața's works have a kitsch aesthetic due to the monumental dimension, expressionist use of color, and chimera combinations. But the kitsch in these works has nothing to do with the banal or repressive origins of kitsch, it is an inverted critical ostranenie technique.

In this article, Posthumanism, Creative Posthumanism, and two cultural components as Vitruvian Man and Body without Organs will be defined, relevant examples from literature, plastic arts, photography, and cinema will be mentioned, and Bogdan Rața's selected sample works in this context will be examined with descriptive method.

Promethean dialectic

In our age, there is a need for a new critical criterion beyond postmodernism. At this point, let's recall a visionary discourse from the last century; Ihab Hassan's essay entitled "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" In this essay, Pretext, one of the figures speaks in this way: "This masque attempts to place the subject of postmodern performance in a wide and speculative context... If posthumanist culture is the matrix of contemporary performance, there is a matrix larger still: the universe itself, everything that was, is, and will become"(Hassan, 1977:831).

Postmodernism, like everything else in the mobilistic sense, is developing and changing, so postmodern culture is also predominantly evolving towards a very

comprehensive posthumanist culture. Therefore the 21st century's definition of Dasein is equated with the definition of Posthumanism.

The term posthumanism was first coined in 1977 by Ihab Hassan in his essay entitled "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" mentioned above. In this original theatrical essay, eight characters, Pretext, Mythotext, Text, Heterotext, Context, Metatext, Postext, and Paratext, describe and discuss what posthumanism is in five scenes.

Ihab Hassan is one of the pioneering philosophers of posthumanism, just like postmodernism. He defines Prometheus as the anthropomorphic representation of posthumanism. Thus, Ihab Hassan lists the character features that apply to Prometheus himself at the beginning and all subsequent Promethean initiatives, through Postext: "Prometheus, prophet, Titan transgressor and trickster, giver of fire, maker of culture-Prometheus is our performer. He performs Space and Time; he performs Desire. He suffers" (Ihab Hassan, 1977:850).

Prometheus' divine punishment or his existential struggle is a transhumanist act - his liver is constantly eaten by an eagle and constantly regenerating–. On the other hand, according to the Text of Ihab Hassan: "His mind is where Imagination and Science, Myth and Technology, Language and Number sometimes meet" (Hassan, 1977:835).

In the same context, this time, Hassan's Metatext states: "The cosmos is performance, posthumanist culture is a performance in progress, and their symbolic nexus is Prometheus" (Hassan, 1977:838).

The dialectic between science and imagination as a modern experience for mass culture also played a fundamental role in the aesthetic development of 19th-century Media. Especially in terms of photography and cinema, there is an intense interaction between industrial production and artistic functionality in these areas. Scientific research and artistic needs mutually developed and multiplied each other. This modern experience has also become an important factor in the emergence of 20th century Avant-garde Art and continues energetically in the postmodern period and of course in the field of new media. In parallel, the logic of technological evolution defines artistic creativity, and whether an artist uses technological tools or conventional methods in the creative process, his/her work ultimately reflects the characteristics of the Zeitgeist of the century in which he/she lived.

In this context, an extraordinary encounter takes place between Lev Manovich and Ihab Hassan. According to Ihab Hassan: "Indeed, the history of the avant-gardes in our century is a history of technological symbiosis, of tools becoming statements, concepts becoming styles, processes becoming environments" (Hassan, 1978: 788, and Manovich constructed New Media as a new cultural avant-garde (Manovich, 1999:1).

As an actual example of Ihab Hassan's Promethean dialectic, there are also important clues in Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer (2023); Quantum physics is not only a science but also an interdisciplinary vision that also is the impetus of artistic creativity. Therefore, for the imagination of J. Robert Oppenheimer -American Prometheus- art and literary experience is an extremely important factor as much as his scientific formation. For this reason, Oppenheimer's interest in Picasso, Stravinsky, and T.S. Eliot is indicated in the film.

Žižek poses a question in his book Organs without Bodies: "How do art and science relate to sublimation?" (Žižek,2012:133). Because the methods of science and art are different from each other regarding the reality of the body. Science makes "The Thing" transparent by mathematizing by its peculiar "sublimating abstraction" while

Art, in its immersive reality environment " (It) cuts out from it a fragment, an object, elevating it to the "level of the Thing" (Žižek,2012:133). Thus, the work of art as a "Thing" provides the emergence of reality. Of course, in this context, which reality is interpreted or displayed is a separate discussion topic. The scientific sublimation mentioned here has also been pointed out by Ihab Hassan: "Science promotes abstraction, and in so doing denies the flesh, thwarts the very instincts of life" (Hassan, 1978:781). In addition to the fact that science and art have different methods and strategies, it is still not an obstacle to making dualistic digital-analog comparisons today. Ihab Hassan explained this nearly fifty years ago: "Metaphor" and "objectivity," imagination and science, are no longer at the antipodes of the contemporary culture of philosophy"(Hassan, 1978:782). This determination is the basic logic of Posthumanism.

Therefore, the contemporary posthumanist artist subtracts the real of the contemporary Zeitgeist originally and individually despite our continuing captivity in "Plato's cave", alienation and uncertainty caused by the daily experience of reality, and the popular power of nihilist pragmatism and mediocrity.

Vitruvian Man

Leonardo's drawing Vitruvian Man (1490, after Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's De Architectura, 1st century BC) is the ideal human model of the Renaissance and Humanism and the universal symbol of perfection. Ihab Hassan defines the importance of the Vitruvian Man as follows: "The figure of Vitruvian Man, arms and legs defining the measure of things, so marvelously drawn by Leonardo, has broken through its enclosing circle and square, and spread across the cosmos" (Hassan, 1977: 843). However, the anthropocentrism of Renaissance and Humanism is one of the focal points of postmodern criticism. Especially since the Second World War, various definitions of the human, humanity, and human condition developed by different groups, cultures, and doctrines have led to a humanism multiplication-as you wish, inflation-. According to Braidotti: "The crisis of humanism is the vengeful re-emergence of the structural others of the modern humanist subject in the postmodern era (2002)… (The Others) "mark the crisis of the previous humanist "center" or dominant subject position and are not only anti-humanist. …they move towards another posthuman project" (Braidotti, 2014: 54). By the way, Vitruvian Man is no longer considered the absolute center of humanistic universal harmony. In other words, the Vitruvian Man has begun to represent misogynist, imperialist, conservative, and even racist paradigms. However, the Vitruvian Man is still the principal model for the golden ratio in the basic elements of design and composition courses in Fine Arts Programs. Overall, this crisis of postmodern humanism is inspiring for deconstructivist art.

On the other hand, people become transhuman through biotechnological initiatives and digital technologies meanwhile posthuman creatures have started to be included in the collective life practice due to AI Technologies and robotics. In this case, the real "other" is now a cyborg, and also under the influence of posthuman culture, the meanings of life and death expand. According to Rosi Braidotti, the Freudian Eros/Thanatos dialectic acquires a more vitalistic character, and hence the time of death is not only Kronos but also Aion (Braidotti,2021:170-172). Thus, the eternal present represented by Aion strengthens the transgressive art in general. Therefore, expressions and narratives beyond conventional ethical values and taboos take place in almost every branch of art.

Body without Organs:

Another key component of the posthumanist vision is the concept of Body without Organs, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987:163), quoting Antonin Artaud's play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God/ Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu; November 28, 1947):*

"When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom"

"Lorsque vous lui aurez fait un corps sans organes, alors vous l'aurez délivré de tous ses automatismes et rendu à sa véritable liberté" (Artaud, 1948: 37/42)

In this context, the body is a metaphor for an "organic organization of the organs" and an organized system (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987:158). In contrast, a Body without Organs represents independent existence, free design of self or free self-destruction, and free transgressive challenge. "The organs distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; forms become contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients" (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987: 164). Accordingly, the body and organs could be constantly renewed, regenerated, and differentiated throughout rhizomatic, nomadic, decentralized, deterritorialized, and unlimited articulations and connections. Because: "BwO is a becoming" (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987: 164).

Posthumanist art emerges through cyber-art examples based on Prometheus, Golem, and Frankenstein archetypes as form and content, performance art examples based on bodily transformation performed with surgery or digital prostheses, sculpture art examples that express the crisis of humanism as a corporeality - by separating the body, by treating the organs independently or by combining body parts into hybrid combinations-, art photography examples that use corpses and corpse parts as plastic material or use anti-mainstream photography technics, science-fiction movies, modern literary examples describing physical/spiritual transformations and science-fiction literature with endless variations. Besides, the romantic and avant-garde features of posthumanist art can be observed due to postmodern anachronism.

Let's give examples in this context.

Nazım Hikmet's poem Makinalaşmak istiyorum! / I want to become a machine!

Some Avangard works of communist literature form the basis of posthuman culture.For example, Nazım Hikmet's poem Makinalaşmak istiyorum! / I want to become a machine! (1923, Moscow) is a cult example in this context. In this poem, which has futurist and dadaist qualities, the poet desires to become a machine.

I WANT TO BECOME A MACHINE!

trrrrum,

trrrrum,

trrrrum!

trak tiki tak!

I want to become a machine!

It comes from my brain, my flesh, my skeleton

This!

I'm crazy to get every dynamo under me!

my salivary tongue licks the copper wires,

auto-resistors chasing locomotives in my veins!

trrrrum,
trrrrum,
trak tiki tak
I want to become a machine!
I will definitely find a solution for this.
and i will only be happy
installing a turbine on my stomach
the day i put a double screw on my tail!
trrrrum
trrrrum
trak tiki tak!
I want to become a machine!

Posthumanist photographers

According to Daniel Rubinstein: "Posthuman photography is concerned with the photographic image that is based not on the patriarchal politics of identity and subject-object dualisms but on establishing the multiversal: a rhizomatic assemblage of interconnected fragments" (Rubinstein,2018:4).

Joel-Peter Witkin creates magnificent baroque/grotesque images by articulating corpses and corpse parts in morgues (Coke, 1985:2). Besides he transforms physically different or disabled others into mythological heroes by establishing glorious intertextual connections with art history.

Aïm Deüelle Lüski designs and produces his cameras himself (De Laat, 2015:2). This is an extremely subjective attempt at mainstream photography and technology. He records abstract images with these homemade photo apparatuses. The conventional human photographer figure was deleted and the apparatus became an autonomous operator-machine.

Performance artist Stelarc

Performance artist **Stelarc** modifies his body with surgical, digital, and electronic interventions, and extends his bodily possibilities. He hangs himself with hooks, gets an ear implant on his arm, or becomes a semi-robot.

Ceramic artist Yusuf Can Kulak

Kulak gives life to grotesque beings by creating new genetic codes and chimeric creatures (2018). In addition, he sometimes cultivates the abstracted body parts using ecological initiative and fetishizes these parts in a transgressive way such that when we look at these works, we hear the Lacanian BwO formula, as pointed out by Žižek: "c'est moi, la verité, qui parle" (Žižek, 2012:152).

Posthumanist movies

Cinematographic posthumanism is the scene of very diverse and impressive performances.

Robocop 4 (2014, directed by José Padilha) is the latest example of a sci-fi saga that has been going on since 1987—for now. This perfect machine-human prototype fights criminals like a titan, but on the other hand, memory records of his past human existence come into play, albeit in the form of glitch impressions.

Lucy (2014, directed by Luc Besson). This movie is a feminist and cyber-pantheist discourse. Lucy, the protagonist of the movie, undergoes an atomic transformation at the end of the movie and becomes Net itself.

Transcendence (2014, directed by Wally Pfister). In the movie, an artificial intelligence expert uploads himself to the system when he was dying and continues to

exist in a digital afterlife. Thus, two phenomena of posthumanism take place: digital transformation and cyber-immortality.

Titane (2021, directed by Julia Ducournau). The female protagonist survives a car accident as a child with a titanium prosthesis implanted in her brain and later becomes pregnant from a car. A radical and transgressive posthumanism is exhibited in the film. Because the protagonist is still a savage in the transhumanist phase, having no ethical, moral, or conscientious code.

Crimes of the Future (2022, directed by David Cronenberg). In the film, a performance artist exhibits the surgical mutilation of his body before the audience shares the process. The film also evokes the performances of another performance artist, ORLAN. Cronenberg's film is, on the one hand, a critique of the destruction of the human body caused by the conditions of the Anthropocene, on the other hand, it is a body-horror performance

BOGDAN RAȚĂ

Bogdan Rață was born in 1984 in Baia Mare, Romania.

He is a posthumanist sculptor (Evans, 2016: 1). He is at the same time, an academician (PhD) at the Faculty of Arts and Design, West University of Timișoara. He is the initiator of several artistic and educational activities like Kunsthalle Bega, Pavilion Library, and the ARTISTHETEACHER Project. He had many personal exhibitions at Slag Gallery, New York; Farideh Cadot, Paris; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; Liverpool Biennial, Nasui Collection & Gallery, Bucharest; Calina Foundation, Timișoara, at several galleries in Moscow, Tel Aviv, Porto, Venice, and Budapest…

"The surreal sculptures of Romanian artist Bogdan Rața explore the transformation of the body on a hyper-modern social scale. Drawing upon posthumanism—that is, the philosophies that delve into what it means to be "human" in the age of nanotechnology and bio-engineering—" (Evans, 2016:1).

The peculiar corporeality of Bogdan Rață's poetics is an original determination initiative about contemporary art zones where digital technology, biotechnology, genetics, and rhizome philosophy have become art devices. He exhibits his sculptures in galleries, indoor and outdoor art environments, as well as public art installations. He uses polyester, synthetic resin, and industrial paint as materials. He has white sculptures and saturated monochrome works. Irony is one of the important sources of his creativity. This irony is sometimes political irony as in The Middle Way series, and sometimes Socratic irony as in The Pressure (2015).

He creates a sophisticated posthuman discourse by using the body in parts, deforming it, creating irreal combinations from body parts, and creating magnificent corpora from organs alone. He also creates phantasmagoria as a video installation titled Abandoning the Shadow/Catching LightMNAC Bucharest, 2020) with the projections of his dramatic friezes (Untitled series 2016), which are almost like a hommage to the concept of Zoe. Besides his works such as Wormhole (2022) and Decahedron (2022) are science fiction abstractions.

Bogdan Rața creates independent human fragments, and each of these fragments has perfect integrity within itself anatomically—including grotesque/hybrid/chimeric designs. The sublime whiteness of some of his works creates an anachronistic neo-classic aura. In this auratic atmosphere, once again, the jouissance felt in archaeological environments among ancient sculptures, monuments, and various antique fragments merges with the euphoria of a Golden Age utopia. But this is an illusion. In the

posthumanist present, jouissance has given way to melancholy, and euphoria has become a deep nostalgia. It is Rață's aesthetic strategy. In his treatise on Ingres' Oedipus, King explains just this point: ""Oedipus" fuses the imitation of the antique with living reality, imbues familiar humanity with epic elevation, clothes myth with flesh and blood, "humanizes the ideal."(King, 1942:72).

The scientific and artistic intersections of different time and space coordinates experienced in Renaissance, Neo-Classicism, and Postmodernism are also valid for posthumanist art. Ihab Hassan makes the following determination regarding the interaction of art and science: "The fusion of art and technology is probably most functional in contemporary painting and sculpture, in op, concept, cybernetic, and kinetic art, in forms that are simply inconceivable without current technologies" (Hassan, 1976:14).

Robert Pepperell's The Posthuman Manifesto naturally contains hints about posthumanism and Bogdan Rața's poetics:

I/1. *It is now clear that humans are no longer the most important things in the universe* (Pepperell, 2005:2);

I/9.*Posthumanists do not fall into the trap of imagining a society where everything works well* (Pepperell, 2005:3)

VII/7. *Good art always contains an element of disorder (discontinuity), bad art simply reinforces a pre-existing order* (Pepperell, 2005:15).

The Middle Way

Bogdan Rața's sculpture in the form of a giant hand entitled The Middle Way (2014, polystyrene, paint, metal, 350×150×60 cm) has two versions, the red one and the blue one. Both have been exhibited around the world as part of the "Moving Monuments" program. Therefore, these works are also the center of related public art installations. The Red One was placed in front of St. George's Hall during Liverpool Biennial 2014 or it was installed next to Casa da Música, in Cascais (2017) to celebrate 100 years of diplomatic relations between Portugal and Romania.

In this context, Rața makes the following statement: "The anatomic fragment has a much stronger presence than the whole. Rodin was the first to become aware of this reality. Of course, he would not have been able to draw this conclusion without the accidental amputation of classical Greek sculpture, but he was the first who felt that a fragment can transmit everything…The same emotional state or even discomfort produces also the anatomical oversize and undersize…I have always tried to downplay the elements that build an idea, which is probably why my works have and keep a classical aura… I like to place this oversize near buildings that were designed to overwhelm by their size". (http://thereart.ro/bogdan-Rața-interview)

The Blue One was installed in the place of Lenin's demolished statue in Kiev (2018) as a representation of "friendship and cooperation" between Romania and Ukraine (Davies, 2018).

The Middle Way is an example of post-communist art; it's a pastiche with saturated red color and blue color variations, and it evokes the splendor of the right hand of the colossal statue of Constantine (c.312–315 AD, Rome) on the one side, and the historical monumental statues of communist heroes on the other. Memetically, this is possible, but communism, for which red is a particular symbol, is now only a philosophical and historical reality. The blue version, with its position on erased *lieu de mémoire*, is indicative of an anti-communist/anti-Russian mnemonic strategy.

Rața has another colossal sculpture entitled The Hand Gun, Project 1990 (Bucharest 2011) before The Middle Way sculptures displays also an anti-communist ironic discourse.

Besides, the element of color is a stratum of meaning in Bogdan Rața's poetics like the yellow color of Curly (2007), the fuchsia color of Lonely (2011) or the blue of Untitled 5 (Madoana, 2017).

Deposition (After Rogier Van Der Weyden)

Bogdan Rața's Deposition (After Rogier Van Der Weyden) (2015, polyester, resin, fiber, metal, pastel, fabric, 160x105x66 cm, edition of 1) is a magnificent example of intertextuality. Rogier van der Weyden's (1400-1464) painting entitled Deposition (c. 1435, oil on oak panel, 220 x 262 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid) "is one of the most dramatic religious paintings ever executed" (Glover,2009).

According to Rața: "Deposition. After Rogier Van Der Weyden (2015), for instance, takes the classic image of the end but also of the beginning of a new era. I just ran imaginatively the biblical action of Van Der Weyden's Descent until the burial, just to interview the appearance of the place (which is missing from the work), and where the future begins. The Resurrection takes place in every moment of our existence" (http://thereart.ro/bogdan-Rața-interview/).

Bogdan Rața's sculptural version is a white monochrome abstraction and a neo-classical sublimation. On the other hand, Deposition is realized as a precise moment. However, during the contemplation process of spectators, this moment becomes fluid again and again. Because Deposition's time is not only the time of Kairos but also the time of Aion.

"The almost radiant, immaculate and beautiful body" of Jesus Christ, (Krén & Marx, n.d.), wrapped in a delicate fabric, one arm hanging out is affixed to the wall. There are neither Joseph of Arimathaea, Nicodemus, Saint John, his mother Mary, nor Mary Magdalene and other figures around him. The rest is pure sadness, and conceptual redemption, as pointed out by the Artist himself.

In addition, the compositional features of Deposition are very similar to Rața's other work entitled The Descent (2014).

In this context, Art History is Bogdan Rața's chronotopia, and his "after" adventures there continue like Balance Study (After Holbein) (2023) and Flow Study (after Millais) (2023). (https://bogdanRața.com/sculptures/).

Epilogue

Our century is the century of Cyber-Renaissance. The basic paradigm is shifting from postmodernism to posthumanism. Despite all the "other" discourses of posthumanism, the original Renaissance and Humanism culture is an increasingly powerful and intense source of inspiration for creative posthumanism.

Besides, netocratically human is a mobilistic element of the AI machine environment, and naturally, the technological evolution continues, but global problems also continue. However, posthumanist art represents new social realism.

In Jonathan Nolan's (2020) Westworld TV series, the main character, Dolores Abernathy explains herself as follows: "Some people choose to see the ugliness in this world, the disarray. I choose to see the beauty" (season 3, episode 8 "Crisis Theory").

Despite the chaos, "choosing to see beauty" is a political choice.

Travis Scott, on the other hand, explains the concept of the UTOPIA album— eventually Post humanist—(Released July 28, 2023) in this way: "Utopia is something that people feel is so far-fetched and out of reach, some perfect state of mind. But you

create it yourself. There are people who achieve utopia every day... People need to see that utopia is real." (https://genius.com/albums/Travis-scott/Utopia).

And, Bogdan Raṭa, as an artist who defines the new posthumanist sculpture art along autonomous historical coordinates visualizes the passion of the man who has lost his position as the center of the universe, for now…

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