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MAN VS. TECHNOLOGY (FORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF VIRTUALISATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE ERA OF TRANSHUMANISM)

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ABSTRACT:

The authors of the present study analyse various forms of virtualisation of the everyday as they appear in different theories and forms in contemporary media studies (see: Deuze, 2016; Floridi, 2019; Manovich, 2018; Lindgren et al., 2014; Gálik, 2011; Radošinská, 2021; Čábyová et al., 2024), including the transformation of physical space to cyberspace (exemplified by the virtualisation of home), social desertion via the digitisation of the self, transhumanism and the Quantified Self movement. The study is aimed at highlighting the current shift towards online culture and reflecting on some of the socio-cultural changes that are gradually establishing themselves under the influence of digitalisation and virtual forms of experience. At the same time, the authors reflect on some socio-cultural shifts from post-humanism to transhumanism. These shifts are gradually and inevitably establishing themselves under the baton of digitalisation and virtual forms of experiencing the everyday. The ambition of the text is to analyse the presence, manifestations and rise of phenomena related to the virtualisation of the everyday and socio-cultural reality as part of broader processes of digitisation (life-hacking and Quantified Self movement, transhumanism, artificial intelligence).

KEY WORDS:

artificial intelligence, cyberspace, digital media culture, Quantified Self movement, transhumanism, virtualisation of the home

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1 Introduction

Contemporary social practice requires social sciences to pay more attention to the individual and their specific needs, as the individual exists in a well-defined environment with their life manifestations and activities. In this context, the category of everyday life has been gaining in importance. Everyday life ceases to be an object of interest, apart from for specialised ethnographic or psycholinguistic research; it also has philosophical, sociological, cultural, anthropological and media dimensions. Its media dimensions represent the very focus of the authors of this study.

A few decades ago, it was virtually inconceivable for anyone to interact in a world of instant connections and to have unlimited opportunities of drawing from such an unheard-of database of knowledge as now. Inventions of the digital age intersperse the everyday life of an average human person, exercising considerable power over them. The "Internet landscape" was initially open only to a handful of experienced users, but today it is inhabited by almost everyone. As a result, the initial euphoria of the virtual experience eventually translated into the dull digital everyday life of a run-of-the-mill wanderer in the cyber-world. Civilisation trusts this spatiotemporally loose interface so much that it prefers storing information in web archives rather than in the minds of individual human beings. Since time immemorial, cultural values have been transmitted through mediating. The trajectory of the functioning of human society is thus tightly intertwined with the media, and whether they determine the character of society by their very nature or, conversely, are a response to its needs, this relationship structures our everyday life, and to a large extent.

The fundamental question faced not only by media studies, but almost all the humanities, including cultural studies, is how dramatic a change this phenomenon is bringing about, if at all. There is "dispute on revolution" going on between sceptics of the new media and optimists. Many express distrust of what they consider a radically new information society and the promise of a healing process as defined by early cyberculture. Opponents of tech-optimism reject the view of the new media as external agents, pointing out that they cannot be considered without taking into account a broader social context and its users. On the other hand, there is still a strong call for openness and unlimited access to information, including that which is crucial for political decision-making. The Internet should thus not only be a means of bolstering democracy, but also of providing a solid foundation for McLuhan's 'global village', i.e., the idea of connecting everyone with anyone and the breaking down of territorial, geographical and cultural barriers.

2 Methodology

In this study, we are primarily concerned with the interconnection of the everyday life online and offline, defining basic concepts including terms and related areas in the introductory section. We exemplify our findings with specific cases, trends and phenomena of contemporary media culture. At the same time, we highlight how much the media interfere in our everyday lives, in the experiences and individual processes we carry out. We selected just a few examples to demonstrate how contemporary media theories work in practice and how media theorists can develop their theories examining everyday life. The method of hermeneutics aids us in identifying possible future developments in this regard. In addition to formal and content analysis, we use discourse analysis, which is marked by an interdisciplinary approach to sources, i.e., it takes place at the intersection of media studies, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. It primarily concerns the theoretical anchoring of elementary concepts and approaches (digital media culture, virtualisation of the everyday), but also the relationship of traditional and digital media in relation to the everyday and socio-cultural reality. By this endeavour, we aim to present a critical appraisal of acquired theoretical knowledge and empirical observation, from which we attempt to derive specific manifestations, and we conclude our findings by summarising their implications and predictions for the future.

3 The Everyday and the Non-Everyday

Everyday life became a major reference point and a topic of discussion especially in the second half of the 20th century. This included thinkers such as Michel Maffesoli, Dilbar Alieva, Zygmunt Bauman and Gilles Lipovetsky. For a long time, the everyday was neither thought of as an important area of social life nor an object of inquiry. In art, issues of the everyday world had long seemed so obvious that there was no need to talk about them, because they carried with them the risk of the author appearing trivial and dilettante (Jakubovská, 2017).

In the history of philosophy, we see that philosophers very rarely commented on everyday life. Immanuel Kant, for example, in addition to his seminal works such as *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Critique of Judgment*, wrote *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in which he examined common-place attitudes and good manners. Similarly, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, best known for his works *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, *Science of Logic*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, wrote about dreams, intuition, revenge, simple pleasures and other everyday phenomena in his *Philosophical Propaedeutic*. It was not until the 1920s, under the influence of Max Weber and Georg Simmel (Weber, 1983; Simmel, 2006), that we see systematic investigation of the everyday in European social sciences. These authors developed methods that they applied to understanding the everyday as well as to forming the most typical values and theoretical attitudes seen in ordinary consciousness, activities and beliefs. They attempted to identify and categorise the phenomena of everyday life, thus laying the foundations for the later sociology of the everyday. In postmodernity, the everyday is understood not as a special, separate space in which we experience private conditions and activities, but as a space in which the public meets the private, the physical meets the spiritual, and the rational meets the mental. The everyday is represented in terms of way of life, the content of which consists of various acts and individual manifestations of everyday life – including banal and insignificant events, such as a telephone conversation, lunch, a sports event, but also the extraordinary – the celebration of a jubilee, a large family gathering, a national holiday or anniversary, etc. (Alieva, 2015).

As a rule, various authors examine the everyday by analysing the non-everyday as its opposite (see: Weber, 1983; Simmel, 2006; Bauman, 2006; Alieva, 2015). The non-everyday is used to delineate the limits and features of the everyday. If we define the everyday *per negatio*, the first thing that comes to mind is the idea of the opposite of the everyday. An example of the opposite of the everyday is a day off, a holiday or a carnival. It is the primordial idea of the non-everyday, deriving from the time matrix that has ruled human activities since biblical times. We encounter a similar notion in Weber, who highlights Sunday (as part of atheistic Protestantism) as a day reserved for "idle contemplation, which would be directly reprehensible if it were at the expense of one's daily work" (Weber, 1983, p. 315). Amongst the despicable phenomena, he included time devoted to entertainment, idle talk, luxury and even longer sleep. These did not have to take place on Sunday or a feast day, they could also occur on an ordinary day, but he implies a certain eccentricity to them, so he says that they belonged to the non-everyday. We can distinguish the everyday from the non-everyday not only by applying a temporal matrix that divides days and activities into the ordinary and the extraordinary, the routine and the exceptional, the profane and the sacred, and so on, but also by applying a matrix of metaphysical meanings limiting antinomic categories such as happiness and suffering, redemption and resurrection, peace and movement, the mundane and the adventurous, and so on. It was the matrix of metaphysical meanings that created the basis for theories of the everyday by Simmel (2006), Bauman (2006), Alieva (2015) and Lipovetsky (1998), and the subsequent creation of a sub-discipline – the sociology of the everyday.

3.1 Virtualisation of the Everyday

Virtualisation is a way of substituting a certain environment for another – apparent and artificially created. Macek (2011) refers to the French philosopher and theorist of digital media Pierre Lévy, according to whom it is

more appropriate to understand the word "virtual" in its original, philosophical sense of "now existing", while this word should not be linked to "real" or "actual", and rather to "momentary". In the context of our research, we focus primarily on aspects of virtualisation of the everyday in relation to digital media and cyberspace. It is therefore necessary to define theoretically the digital media culture and its contemporary forms in the media eco-system.

Multimedia, new (digital) media and media trends are linked to the momentous transition from analogue to digital encoding. This process can be seen not just as a change in technology, but as a change in culture, a shift in trends, in thinking, in opinions and even in people. Digital media are accessible instantaneously and anywhere. According to media theorist Manovich (2018), they represent the convergence of two historically separate trajectories of computing and media technologies (Manovich, 2018, as cited in Moravčíková, 2022a). Digital technologies are known to the general public as "new technologies". This includes a wide range of terms such as chips, materials, data transmission methods (the Internet, smartphones), technology linked to artificial intelligence, navigation systems, QR codes, game applications and many more. Virtual environments, social media platforms are an important communication hub and source of socialisation, shaping the referential framework for many digital natives (Moravčíková, 2022a).

For a deeper and more specific definition of digital media culture, we reach for a definition that will accentuate the emerging cultural phenomena of the digital media era, as in the concept of the so-called hybrid media culture by media theorists Lindgren, Dahlberg-Grundberg and Johansson (2014). According to these authors, the distinction between digital and non-digital worlds is becoming more and more untenable. This is due to the development of digital tools and technologies and also due to the fact that digital communication platforms are gradually becoming an absolute given for the user. At the same time, we are witnessing the immediacy and constant availability of information and communication technologies in socio-cultural reality (Lindgren et al., 2014).

> The only circumstance allowing the 'offline world' to be still able to compete with digital media in terms of cultural significance is the need to 'materialise' the emerging identities, opinions, attitudes and themes, and to transfer them into everyday life in material forms. (Radošinská, 2021, p. 21)

Despite the intensifying processes of deterritorialisation, digitalisation and virtualisation of our socio-cultural relations and everyday life, Jakubovská simultaneously points to the opposite processes – the re-emphasis of physicality within interpersonal interaction, the relationship to place and cultural values in the context of the revitalisation of traditions and local communities. As the author points out, these mutually divergent tendencies are shaping the contemporary individual and collective cultural identities, contributing to their diversity (Jakubovská, 2016). The connection to the category of place and to the aspects of physicality and collectivity are an important part of the cultural memory of particular physically defined communities and the culture of reminiscence, which return individuals to the offline space and the physical spaces of their homes and public places (Jakubovská & Jakubovská, 2023).

Discussing the concept of Lindgren, Dahlberg-Grundberg and Johansson (2014) the media theorist Radošinská points at the complexity of living both online and offline lives.

> Hybrid media culture represents a complete fusion of the digital environment and ordinary (lived) reality, i.e., virtual media and matter. It involves a competitive struggle between online and offline communication environments for our attention and interest. Its emergence was foreshadowed by the erosion and later the complete removal of the once firm boundaries between reality and fictional media images. (Radošinská, 2021, p. 21)

Digital media culture focuses less on the mass media and more on the virtual (network, digital) media. In addition, the emphasis is not only on theory and academic discussion, but also on implications of theoretical approaches and research methods in empirical research. Three dominant approaches concerning different aspects of digital media are usually critically discussed:

1. a cultural and sociological approach with an active creation of meaning, i.e., participatory culture, convergence culture, e-culture, the formation of online identity and social media analysis;

2. a political and economic approach, focusing on the power and stratification of digital media, i.e., digital categorisation, commodification, "big data", surveillance culture and algorithms;
3. postmodern and post-humanist approaches focusing on the changing relationship between humans and technology in society, such as science and technology studies, transhumanism, and themes such as artificial intelligence, cyborgs and the Internet of Things.

4 Man vs. Technology

4.1 Transformation of Space into Cyberspace

The most natural and typical space for humans is the home (das *Heim* – home, household, shelter), which is identified with the notion of the domestic hearth or anything that radiates heat and light (Alieva, 2015). Sitting at the fireplace, warming up together at the stove, feasting together, and so on, bring people closer together since time immemorial. These moments create a special sense of privacy, belonging and security. Meanwhile, over time, the family hearth has become a metaphor, an expression that has nothing to do with the original meanings that associated the term with fire or stove. Nowadays we come across various substitutes for the forgotten domestic fireplace – gas stove, radiators, microwave oven, TV and others.

> [S]ubstitute hearths no longer radiate heat and are not adapted for serving or preparing material food, but they do radiate light, and they prepare spiritual food or spiritual pleasures for us. They bring us contents and meanings encompassing us as a secondary reality, becoming the very virtual reality in which we seem to actually experience our real subjective time, but live mostly the lives of others. (Alieva, 2015, p. 172)

So, for example, on the television screens in our kitchens, living rooms and for some even in bedrooms, we experience with strangers their stories, which may be real or not, and sometimes it becomes difficult for us to distinguish it. The ability to comfort our existence in foreign and transitory, technicised environments confirms that even modern human being remains a domestic creature who needs to nestle down their private self among familiar, close and sometimes archaised objects or their substitutes.

For the post-industrial and post-modern world, the lost cosiness of the (original) home is substituted by modern furnishing in an apartment containing "various displays for the home that provide digitised images and convey the virtual presence of other people and events. So, we can speak of the virtualisation of our homes. The boundaries of our homes expand significantly, but they are also greatly virtualised, thanks to television, teletext, the Internet and e-mail" (Alieva, 2015, p. 174).

The over-concern for the virtual world and the fact of living in it has been noted by British media anthropologists Madianou and (2012) even amongst the majority population, although it may still be far away from social desertion into the virtual world. These researchers argue that most people spend so much time with the media that they become the content of their lives and therefore they treat them as their own home. What they used to do in their homes, they now bring into the media context: they enhance their social media accounts, keeping them up to date, adding photos and changing profile images, personalising their smartphones, changing backgrounds on them as they do on tablets and computers, having documents and files stored (or scattered in chaos) in individual folders as if they were clothes, etc. (Deuze, 2016). What needs to be pointed out further, however, is that life in the media is inexorably malleable.

> Hyperreality, whose illusionist nature stems from overcoming one simulacrum after another in the name of the virtualisation of the present, seeks a perfect and pure allegory of the true nature of ourselves. Hyperreality promises us that whatever we are looking at, touching, or communicating with (be it inanimate recorders or audiotext robots) is an interpersonal 'touch' that has never been more alive than now. It often creates a

hyperbolised communication quality between the recipient and the information source and amongst the active recipients themselves. (Moravčíková, 2022b, pp. 41-42)

Luciano Floridi, a leading figure of the philosophy of information, believes that we might be the last generation to experience a clear distinction between online and offline environments. In making this prediction, he says: "If home is where your data is, you probably already live on Google Earth or in the cloud" (Floridi, 2019, p. 114). Slovak philosopher and media theorist Gálik speaks in this context about "new existential experiences of man and the disappearance of the classical coordinates of time and space, the breaking out of physical laws, the absence of three-dimensional space, the dominance of presence and immediacy, the feeling of unlimited freedom, the multiplication of identity, and even about new forms of the sacred and religiosity" (Gálik, 2011, p. 156).

Floridi (2019) and Gálik (2011) thus refer primarily to the fact that we increasingly delegate and transfer our memories, decision-making, routine tasks or other activities to artificial agents in a way that gradually integrates us with them, not to mention how we colonise and reshape these new media step by step with considerable emotional involvement. Anthropologist Miller (2011) found in his research that people spend so much time with the digital media that they actually treat them as their own home. This process leads to the translation of typically domestic expressions into the media context, as shown, for example, by constant adjustments to the hardware and software of one's personal computer, smartphone or social media profile.

It is undeniable that nowadays technology is developing at an incredibly fast pace, and it is crucial to react quickly to these trends to be able to use the latest technological tools. One of the key elements of the current technological rise is AI, which is opening doors to new possibilities for humanity and transforming the way we live and work. Although some AI technologies have been around for decades, advances in computer power, the availability of big data and new software have led to significant breakthroughs in a short space of time. Authors Murár, Kubovics and Jurišová (2024) note that a few years ago, intelligent technologies typically applicable in sectors such as transport, energy, space or medicine were mentioned in connection with the use of AI. At that time, it was assumed that certain areas – especially creative activities – would be the domain of humans in the long run and would not be significantly affected by the advent of AI. However, the launch of generative models (both textual and visual) has shown that the opposite is true for creative activities. The way AI handles both text and images is forcing researchers to rethink their approach to the creation and processing of text and images, which among other things has a significant impact on marketing (Murár et. al., 2024).

4.2 Transhumanism

Transhumanism is a line of conceptual thinking about man and society from the perspective of future possibilities, with an emphasis on technological enhancement. This concept was formulated by several scientists and philosophers during the 20th century, especially in its second half. Then, from the late 1980s onwards, especially futurist-oriented intellectuals began to explicitly espouse this way of thinking (Bostrom, 2005).

Transhumanism expresses a post-Enlightenment, strongly rationalist approach that advocates both the rise of humanity and the overcoming of current limits of what it means to be human. Transhumanism is most strongly focused on improving cognitive abilities, intelligence, memory, but also physical capability, performance, health, emotional experience and moral decision-making. Meanwhile, its prominent theorists argue that the point of the enhancements proposed and discussed is not to achieve a perfect social state and then maintain it as a static utopia, but to continually transcend the limits of humanity (More, 2013). In 1957, evolutionary biologist Huxley suggested in his essay on transhumanism that the human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself.

The result of transcending the boundaries of biology was eugenics, which he advocated, and which aimed to keep the evolutionary process under control. Huxley, the first Director-General of UNESCO, believed that any means should be used to achieve the highest perfection and the highest well-being and happiness on Earth. He hoped that technology would help humanity to get rid of poverty, diseases, cruelty, oppression and overwork and

that by "mapping out human capacities" man would become "the director of the evolutionary process" (Huxley, 1957).

Petrjánošová offers a stimulating analysis of this issue in her study *Human Enhancement and Transhuman Technologies in Slovak Media Discourses* (2015), in which she presents the results of a critical discursive analysis on the topic of human enhancement and transhuman technologies in the Slovak press. The study focuses on how well or to what extent these new topics are covered and how the media reflect public opinion (if they have it), in three main areas with many sub-variants: A) Transhuman technologies and the survival of humans as a species; B) Transhuman technologies and superhumans; C) Transhuman technologies and changes in basic human nature (with consequences for ethics, morals and religions) (Petrjánošová, 2015).

The digital revolution has lent a new meaning to the word transhumanism. There is now a prevailing view that new technologies can change the world in the next century or two to such an extent that our descendants will in many ways no longer be considered human. This is to be achieved, inter alia, by harnessing innovations in areas such as genetic engineering, molecular nanotechnology and neurovaccines. Transhumans would resemble cyborgs, having, for example, brain-computer interfaces or multi-functional prostheses. New York artist Neil Harbisson became the first person in the world to have an antenna implanted in his skull. The antenna transmits electromagnetic radiation measurements, phone calls, music, movies, and even allows him to receive signals and data from satellites directly into his brain. In the context of Baudrillard's reflections, we can talk about our exhaustion of faith in reality and also about the idea that technology puts us in the role of an "endangered species". Baudrillard states that "we use our virtual clones, doubles and prostheses to make ourselves disappear" (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 49) while according to art historian Horrocks, "we attribute a special value to information and computer files that they should not have" (Horrocks, 2002, p. 36). Horrocks interprets Baudrillard's reflections on the fact that we are far from a Dadaist readymade, because we too are constantly being torn out of our routine reality to play the show of reality on the platform of the virtual world. The perfect crime, according to Baudrillard (2001), is the "realisation of the world through the transformation of all acts and events into information and data, as he calls it a form of extinction" (Horrocks, 2002, p. 37 as cited in Baudrillard, 2001). Reality becomes a sign system, while the sign system takes on real contours, and the highest function of the sign is to allow reality to disappear and at the same time to cover up this disappearance. The more perfectly virtual reality mimics real aspects of our society, the more easily everything can "disappear". Technologies achieving perfection constantly replicate reality.

4.3 From Transhumanism to the Quantified Self Movement

Transhumanism is associated with the desire of human beings to overcome biological barriers, to optimise themselves and become superhuman: more agile, stronger and faster. Ultimately, the aim is to become more productive in personal life and business in the current "age of agility". With the advent of ever newer and more powerful measuring devices, as well as the spread of information and communication technologies and behavioural psychology, a "life-hacking culture" is dynamically developing, which aims to find simple solutions to complex problems in an era of increasing volatility and uncertainty. One of its manifestations is the Quantified Self (QS) movement.

Measured data related to one's own body, social interactions or lifestyle have become daily guides for these people. For most of them, it is not just a purposeless hobby, but on the contrary, they know very well why they monitor this data and what it brings them. The motto of the Quantified Self movement is "self-knowledge through numbers". In this respect, data brings a powerful tool of self-knowledge and for solving some specific problems. Based on the collected data, indicators are created from which far-reaching conclusions can be drawn about improving one's body or one's performance – without considering a broader context. This method is intended to answer the main questions: What is the human being in the digital age? Can human nature be changed, and if so, how? How can limitations of biology be overcome? How can man "expand infinitely"? These questions are de facto related to the concept of transhumanism and the desire to get rid of the limitations of biological nature and to ensure

continuity after one's physical death in virtual reality (Reagle, 2019). In an article entitled "The Data-Driven Life" in *The New York Times Magazine*, Wolf wrote: "We tolerate the pathologies of quantification – a dry, abstract, mechanical type of knowledge – because the results are so powerful. Numbering things allows tests, comparisons, experiments. Numbers make problems less resonant emotionally but more tractable intellectually" (Wolf, 2010). Members of this movement measure everything they can, including what they eat, various vital signs, physical and sexual activities, stress levels, sleep quality, personal happiness, and even what they excrete. They do not keep the measurements for themselves but share their experiences publicly at annual meetings and on social media. The result is an unusually high number of published guides that help others solve almost any problem at work and in their private lives. An extreme case of this activity is the measurement of excreta, including that of one's partners – before and after sexual intercourse. These people break taboos and get rid of some of the last remnants of intimacy.

Big technology companies, insurers, biotechnology corporations and the management sector, especially human resources departments, have high expectations from the spread of the QS culture. Saner (2021) in her article "The smart toilet era is here! Are you ready to share your analprint with big tech?" details the commercialisation of ideas related to the popularisation of so-called smart toilets and the enthusiasm of some professors who believe that there is an incredible untapped opportunity for health data.

The health market is worth trillions of dollars, with the Big Tech being eagerly involved in it. Google patented a toilet seat sensor back in 2016. These smart toilets are equipped with several sensors and cameras coordinated with software that allows the collection of data, including what is called the users' unique anal imprint. The data is to be stored in the cloud and coordinated with information from other sources. This will give big technology companies a "holistic view" of the human being, allowing them to design specific products and services for the person, while, incidentally, at the same time increasing their control over them.

With the massive spread of the Quantified Self, but especially with the trend of information disclosure, new ethical issues and societal risks may arise, especially the misuse of a wide range of disclosed information. Furthermore, the possibility of access to data that would be sensitive, both from the position of the one to whom the data relates and from the position of service providers and potential third parties. Last but not least, the loss of an additional degree of privacy, but also the possible social disadvantage of those who refuse these practices or simply do not want to use these tools; they are therefore cut off from communication opportunities. For example, in the case of Facebook, from the often-important information that is published through this closed channel and from the possibility of using services that require logging in with a Facebook account or entering a mobile phone number. This issue is discussed in detail, e.g., by Morozov in his publication *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (2013). In the case of body and health data, the issue of sharing and accessing this data is even somewhat more pronounced. For example: can this data be further used by the service providers that the user uses to collect or process it, e.g., for research purposes, even in a non-anonymous form? Who owns this data and can also decide how it is handled? Can this data be requested by public authorities for the purpose of a criminal investigation? If so, could they be considered to be genuinely credible?

5 Discussion and Conclusions

Over the past few decades, the digital media have become ever more intensely and markedly entangled in the fabric of people's everyday lives, so the effort to search for intersections of the world of digital technologies and the history of human communication, socio-cultural movements, and strategies of being human means turning to some of the key features of human beings. For us, adapting to a changing environment means, apart from surviving, also constantly pushing the boundaries of our knowledge to new levels, reassessing the key questions of our existence with each turning point in history. We can only theorise about whether humanity is on the threshold of a sort of evolutionary adaptation, or whether we have merely succumbed to tech-optimism.

In the 1980s, transhumanists began to place high hopes in genetic engineering and nanotechnology. In the 1990s, greater importance was placed on computers with artificial intelligence. Today, there is discussion of a convergence of NBICs (nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive technology). The bosses of Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Tesla indicate a near rapid boost of machine intelligence. Some leaders of major technology firms warn of the consequences of these changes, among them Elon Musk, while others enthusiastically hope that a supermachine, a "posthuman", will soon emerge to become more intelligent than ordinary humans. This is becoming the topic of the day for Silicon Valley technologists and executives. At Google, the vision of transhumanism is being developed by futurologist and AI visionary, Ray Kurzweil, who optimistically believes that by 2045, human life will be disconnected from the physical, and humans will live forever through their connection with machines. When he began writing about what he believed would be future advances in computing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, his predictions took on a life of their own – in 1990, Kurzweil correctly projected that AI would beat the best human player at chess before the turn of the millennium, and that mobile devices connected to a global information network would emerge in the decade that followed. In 1999, he forecast that by 2029, computers would match human intelligence in every domain (Booth, 2024).

One of the key elements of the current technological rise is AI, which opens doors to new possibilities for humanity and transforms the ways we live and work. AI is not a new technology. Some AI technologies have been around for decades, but advances in computer performance, the availability of big data and new software have led to significant breakthroughs in a short space of time. At any rate, the world of AI driven by its algorithms represents a new kind of power and influence in both the virtual and the "offline" worlds. Nico in her book *Volám sa AI. Rozhovory s umelou inteligenciou* [*My Name is AI. Conversations with Artificial Intelligence*] offers an interesting insight. "Since artificial intelligence will have the ability to learn and adapt, it is up to us to teach it the values we want to see in the future" (Nico, 2023, p. 11). Another quote by Hawking is also worth pondering: "In short, the rise of powerful AI will be either the best, or the worst thing, ever to happen to humanity. We do not yet know which" (Wooliams, 2016).

The nature of the media ecosystem has changed, and we strongly believe that social sciences need to react flexibly, as society today does not work in isolation from the digital media. The apparent interconnectedness of our society with cyberspace indicates that individuals grow up in a more digitally demanding environment, receiving much more information and imagery. People are gradually transferring a considerable amount of power to the digital media, placing a high degree of trust in them. The addiction to the machine-like precision, accessibility and reliability of software has in a sense weakened people's natural instincts and vigilance. We uncritically, unthinkingly and irresponsibly put our data and intimate details in the hands of corporations and marketers driven by the philosophy of dataism, as they collect and monetise information about us. While the man of today has been "cosied along" that they can escape reality, reality has penetrated cyberspace in the meantime, being integrated into it to an ever-higher degree. The reception of information and communication technologies changes spatial and temporal experiences, while at the same time there is a mutual interpenetration of the two, an indistinguishable blending of the virtual and the real, as well as the experience of the near and the distant. The digital media have radically changed the perception and interpretation of socio-cultural reality, as well as the quality of experiencing the temporality of our existence. Their gradual integration into the everyday functioning of individuals and institutions through a subtle but constant and sophisticated permanent presence has created a controlled panoptic environment, in which the binary division of online vs. offline is slowly losing its relevance.

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