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The Influence of Technology on Human Body and Mind in David Cronenberg's Films

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Introduction

Technology does not belong endemically to the sphere of science any longer. It has diffused into a variety of other discourses including cultural, gender, political studies as well as the art, painting and cinematography. Technology has become the subject matter of academy scholars, philosophers, and thinkers. It is the source of inspiration for writers, painters, and film makers. At first sight technology is associated with its practical usage; after all, people of all developed countries make use of the fruits of technology. However, some thinkers, as for instance Arthur Kroker, perceive technology as a basis for national identity; others, like Marshal McLuhan or George Grant, focus on technology's influence on people. However one of the most accessible sources of information about different discussions on technology is the cinema. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the birth of cinematography is simultaneously the beginning of a film in which technology is the main character, since one of the first films ever produced shows the locomotive which, as it is generally known, was one of the symbols of the progress in technology at that time. In today's cinema, there is a broad range of representations of technology. On the one hand we have Hollywood-like gadgets which main protagonists, like James Bond, use to make their way to the final victory over the villains. On the other hand, we have *Matrix* and the technology as an evil force the only aim of which is to annihilate humanity. Both approaches although very simplified and rather not very valuable aesthetically give the notion of a very general opposition between technophobia and technophilia. Other films, like Stanley Kubrick's widely interpreted, full of symbols and allegories *2001 – Space Odyssey* give more valuable perspective on technology.

Among a variety of such different voices on technology present in the cinema there is one which calls for special attention. David Cronenberg, one of the best known Canadian directors, opposes mainstream popular culture film makers, like George Lucas who in all of his productions celebrates technology only to fill

his viewers with technological "sense of wonder" [1] and aims at simple entertainment. Cronenberg does not merely describe the usage of technology, nor did he even try to use the latest and most spectacular special effects to convey his very unique approach to the interrelation between human and technology. He does not present technological products and human beings as two separate entities between which the relationship is the hero and helper or hero and foe. In his films the border between the human and the technological, and consequently between the organic and the synthetic is blurred. However it does not mean that his characters resemble those like Terminator or Robocop who in fact perpetuate the common science-fictional theme of human versus technology. It also may be thought that this crossing of the border between "flesh and metal" is indeed the topic endemic to science fiction and certainly those movies can be treated as simple representatives of this genre. But such an approach to Cronenberg's works is neither profound nor very analytical. Cronenberg in his films, which are full of grotesque and perverse imaginary, shows himself as a very conscious and knowledgeable observer of the contemporary world. He casts a new light on the facts to which people from the countries in which the access to the products of technology is almost unrestricted are either accustomed to or do not realize that the development of technology and its intrusion in human body has already gone so far. The "new flesh" – the name for Cronenbergian vision of a body which is the result of blurring of the borders between the organic and the synthetic – does not belong to the sphere of fantasy or science fiction.

Technology Is Us

Technology has already invaded the human body. One of the obvious examples for that is a rapid development of technologies used in medicine. The serious research on the artificial heart has been carried on since the middle of the twentieth century when the first heart-lung machine was used in the open-heart

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[1] Clute, John; Peter Nicholls. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 2nd, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

surgery by John Heysham Gibbon in 1953.[2] From that time researches seek to find the ways in which parts of the body could be substituted with their artificial equivalents. Transplantations, artificial arms or skin do not arouse astonishment of the public opinion any longer.

However, the latest achievements of modern science are used to enhance body functions not only in the field of medicine. As it is generally known most of the technologies, like the Internet, were originally developed for military purposes. Despite the existence of powerful technologies which can destroy and kill enemies it is still the infantry which plays the key role in the modern battlefield. Therefore, governments whose military domination is one of the priorities of their politics aim at creating a kind of super-soldier whose physical and mental abilities are significantly enhanced through technology. One such military programme is now run by Military Department Of the United States and is called "Future Soldier." In this system, soldiers are equipped with uniforms stuffed with electronics, computers, and sensors which check the moisture and temperature of their body, heart rate as well as their stress level and sleep status. According to Phil Copeland from American Forces Press Service such uniforms are equipped also with headgear optic subsystems which display information about the position on the area, position of enemy forces and provides 360° sense vision awareness. Copeland also says that it is just the beginning of such technological intrusions into a human body. He claims that in no far-away future such uniforms will stimulate soldiers' muscles giving them abnormal strength.[3]

However, one of the most controversial instances for the merging of body and technology is given by the experiments of Kevin Warwick, a cybernetics professor at the University of Reading, UK. In 1998 he implanted in his arm a micro silicon chip which gave his body wireless control over lighting, doors and heaters in his house. Although this achievement is perceived by most scientists as simple "gimmick"[4] Warwick is convinced that it is the beginning of serious trend

[2] "John Heysham Gibbon." *Wikipedia – Free Encyclopedia*. 16 Dec. 2006. <http://www.wikipedia.org>

[3] Copeland, Phil. *FUTURE WARRIOR: New Concepts for Uniform Systems* <http://www.military.com/soldiertech/0,14632,Soldiertech_Warrior,,00.html>

[4] Young, Emma. "Nerve Implant Experiment 'A Gimmick'." *NewScientist.com*. 16 Dec. 2006. <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn2078>

in science and that his "Project Cyborg" is the first serious step to develop the direct electronic communication between human body and computer.

Therefore, David Cronenberg in his films appears to be not only an astute observer and analyst of the development of the modern technologies but also a visionary [5], since his film *Videodrome* in which the theme disappearance of boundaries between body and the technological is predominant, was produced in 1983, when almost nobody thought seriously about micro implants or uniforms enhancing body functions. What is more, and what will be stressed in this research paper, his movies reflect not only the gloomy vision of technology as some critics would argue, but represent the general discussion on technology which is present in Canada since 1960s with Marshal McLuhan at the one pole and George Grant at the opposite one.

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[5] Skrzypczak, Piotr. "Niepodległość Filmowej Prowincji. O kinematografii Kanadyjskiej z polskiej Perspektywy." *Obraz Kanady w Polsce*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2003.

Chapter I

Canadian Discourse on Technology

According to Arthur Kroker, a Canadian theorist, the issue of technology is the one which occupies the special position in Canadian curriculum and is of crucial importance for the question of identity. Kroker claims that

> the Canadian identity is, and always has been, fully integral to the question of technology. Indeed a sustained and intensive technological experience *is* the Canadian discourse. (…) A general fascination with the question of the technology extends like a brilliant arc across the Canadian cultural imagination, from cinema and music to literature and philosophy.[6]

He states that Canada has a special position which makes Canadian discourse on technology very specific and privileged: "To enter into the Canadian discourse on technology is also to participate in a dangerous venture where everything is at stake and where anything is guaranteed."[7] According to him, this discourse occupies an intermediate position between traditional European and the new, American approach. However it is not merely this in-between position which makes Canadian discourse on technology so "highly original, comprehensive and eloquent."[8] Kroker states that it is in fact this deep rootedness of "technological nationalism" into Canadian state which resulted in the fact that so much attention has been given to the question of technology and so many trends have been developed.

However, among those different schools, two main, disparate views which can be observed are *technological humanism* proclaimed by Marshall McLuhan and *technological dependency* represented by George Grant. According to Arthur Kroker:

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[6] Kroker, Arthur. *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985, p. 12
[7] Ibid., p. 12
[8] Ibid., p. 7

> George Grant and Marshall McLuhan are emblematic figures in
> Canadian thought. Their competing perspectives on technology
> represent at once the limits and the possibilities of the Canadian mind.
> Indeed, Grant and McLuhan stand to one another as bi-polar opposites
> on the question of technology because each thinker provides the most
> intensive and elaborate account possible of two classic angles of vision
> which Canadian thought has contributed to the study of technology.[9]

Although both theorists represent so different perspective on the question of technology, their accounts should not be treated as contrasting, but rather as complementing each other. Both theorists seem to be aware of the existence of creative as well as destructive possibilities carried by technology, but they decided to advocate the opposing views. George Grant sees technology as a "prison-house"[10] which enslaves people's bodies and minds making them beings "half-flesh half-metal"[11]. He focuses on the side of technology which causes disintegration of both technological society and its particular members. Marshall McLuhan, on the other hand, also sees those dangers which come together with development of technology but his vision is full of hope for the future. He is aware of the gradual merging of human bodies with synthetic products of technology but sees it as the great possibility for humanity to step onto the another stage of evolution, a stage in which people will become a "cosmic men."

George Grant and the "darkness of technical age"

According to Arthur Kroker, Grant's technological dependency is "the dark side, (…) the angle of vision on the technological experience which focuses on technology as the locus of human domination."[12] However, it does not mean that technology gains consciousness, becomes intelligent and deliberately tries to entangle people to make them its slaves. By domination of technology over

[9] Ibid., p. 15
[10] Ibid., p. 30
[11] Grant, George. "A Platitude." *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, Toronto: House of Anasi, 1969, pp. 137-143
[12] Kroker, p. 30

human beings Grant rather means people's total dependency on the products of technology. People make themselves slaves of both the most simple products like wheel or construction and production machines which enhance people's physical abilities and of those more complex like mobile phones, the Internet, etc.. In order to exist, communicate and cooperate in this technological society people have to become fully entangled with technology's products.

Supporters of this pessimistic vision represent very sceptical approach to the issue of technology's influence on people. According to George Grant "we can hold in our minds the enormous benefits of technological society, but we cannot so easily hold the ways it may have deprived us, because *technique is ourselves.*"[13] George Grant does not try to undermine the obvious benefits of technology. He is aware that people owe a lot to its products. But, according to him, the tragic situation does not come from this total reliance on technology but from the impossibility of prediction of the future possible results of this dependence. According to Arthur Kroker, George Grant "stands closer to the more ancient practice of prophecy than to the narrow specialties of contemporary philosophical discourse."[14] George Grant is not only the conscious observer of the present but also, to a great extent, a prophet of doom. He prophecies that in the future the border between people's organic bodies and its synthetic extensions will not exist any longer; people will become "half-flesh half-metal." In order to exist within technological society and not to be excluded one will have no other choice than to participate in this technological craze. Those who would like to remain 'natural' will be able neither to communicate nor compete with people supported by technology.

However, George Grant focuses not only on the intrusion of technology into the human biology but also on its colonization of people's minds. According to Arthur Kroker

> Grant's thought moves and plays in that region of the most terrible of truths: the full penetration of technique, the will to mastery, into the deepest interstices of human personality. The analysis represents a brilliant psychology of the human condition: it discloses a suffocating vision of life

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[13] Grant, p. 137
[14] Kroker, p. 24

within the 'modern technical system' as a secret of dependent being in the

'unlimited' and 'functional' universe of technology and science[15]

According to Grant, technology is inscribed in the way we create our identity since "technique is ourselves (…) [and] all descriptions or definitions of technique which place it outside ourselves hide from us what it is."[16] People start to think about their life as if they were parts of a larger machine. They perceive themselves as "servomechanisms"[17] and identify with the function they perform within technological society. On the one hand, because of the technology they use, they may feel superior but on the other hand they

haunted by an overwhelming sense of loss of some good fundamental to

human spirit (…) [and] imprisoned in a social order which yields no

satisfactory response to the human demand for meaning, are condemned

to live in the desperate circumstances of a nihilistic culture.[18]

This fundamental "good" and "meaning", whether it is the contact with the natural, the traditional, or the state from the pre-technological times, in fact, cannot be achieved any longer, since it is impossible to reject technology which physically and mentally became part of human beings. Therefore, being aware of impossibility of becoming "natural" again, people have no other choice than find other basic values. Paradoxically, the way this fundamental "good" and "meaning" is tried to be achieved is technology. This loss is balanced with "the frenzied drive to 'freedom through technology.'"[19] It is a vicious circle which even worsens this nihilistic perspective.

George Grant, despite his attempts to pinpoint some optimistic and creative aspects of technology, appears to be too obsessed with the gloom and decay which technology brings. Although he is aware of technology's creative potential, he does not believe that this potential may be fulfilled. He claims "the darkness of technical age."[20] In fact, his one-sidedness may be treated with

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[15] Ibid., p. 28
[16] Grant, p. 137
[17] Kroker, p. 22
[18] Ibid., p. 23
[19] Grant, p. 137
[20] Kroker, p. 49

suspicion especially when confronted with the opposite perspective represented by another Canadian thinker – Marshall McLuhan.

Marshall McLuhan's "cosmic man"

Marshall McLuhan represents the technological humanism, the opposite angle of vision of technology. His perspective presupposes that technology is not a foreign body which like parasite intruders human organism but becomes a natural and integral element thanks to which humankind is elevated at the higher stage of evolutionary development. Arthur Kroker juxtaposing McLuhan and Grant claims that "Grant is an *existentialist* who focuses on the image of the dominated 'self' in technological society. McLuhan, however, is a *rhetorician* who privileges the aesthetic value of creative freedom as the locus of a 'redeemed' human civilization."[21] However, this redemption has not been achieved yet. What is more, McLuhan refrains from pinpointing when exactly this redemption through technology will take place. Therefore, his discourse on technology as a medium through which humankind will achieve a status of a "cosmic man" should be rather treated in terms of great possibility rather than an event to be expected.

McLuhan's thought seems to be more complex than Grant's. Although he mainly focuses on the media, similarly to Grant, he devotes a good deal of his work to the issue of technology's psychical intrusion into the human body as well as to some dangers involved in that intrusion. According to Arthur Kroker

> McLuhan's imagination always played at the interface of biology and technology, His discourse took as its working premise that most insidious effect of technology lay in its deep colonization of biology, of the body itself, and moreover, in its implicit claim, that technology is the new locus of the evolutionary principle. (…) Humanity passed over into 'deep shock' over the inexplicable consequences of electronics as a practical *simulation* of evolution, of the biological process itself.[22]

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[21] Ibid., p. 53
[22] Ibid., p. 72

What is more, at some points, the tone of McLuhan to some extent resembles the dark vision of George Grant. According to McLuhan, technology spreads like disease. At some points his vision is even darker when he claims that

> Man becomes as it were sex organ of the machine world, as a bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. The machine-world reciprocates man's love by expecting his wishes and desires, namely by providing him with wealth.[23]

However, this symbiosis does not lead to human total dependency as presented by George Grant. According to McLuhan it is just a transitional period before achievement of the status of a "cosmic man". Therefore McLuhan, with his faith of the final human divinity through technology, should be regarded as a representative of technological humanism rather than a prophet of doom.

According to Arthur Kroker, McLuhan's technological humanism "seeks to renew technique from within by realizing the *creative* possibilities inherent in the technological experience."[24] It is this technology which caries the possibility of creation and development. This vision expresses people's pursuit of improvement, the hope of perfection of both human bodies and minds by the means of technology. However McLuhan's thought remains strictly theoretical. In his writings he refrains from giving any real life examples for how technology is to make human divine, or what the life of a "cosmic man" is to look like. We can only imagine that it may be a reality in which there will be no diseases, the life-span will be substantially increased or may be exceeded to infinity. People will travel faster and further. They will communicate with each other much more effectively than ever before. Blue pills will cure sadness and pain; red ones will enhance sexual activity and bodily sensations. Human body through implementing appropriate devices or extensions will become fitter, faster, and more resistant.

For McLuhan "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves."[25] For Grant, this would be a symptom of dependence, but McLuhan sees it as the way to freedom. According to Kroker "McLuhan wished to escape the 'flat earth approach' to technology, to

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[23] McLuhan, p. 56
[24] Kroker, p. 14
[25] McLuhan, p. 51

invent a 'new metaphor' by which we might 'restructure our thoughts and feelings.'"[26] McLuhan language is indeed very metaphorical. For him we are "like astronauts in the processed world of technology"[27] We are travelers fascinated with the unrevealed, mysterious lands.

But, what is special and unique about McLuhan's thought is his claim of strong connection between the technology and artistic creativity. According to Arthur Kroker

> The significance of the 'poetic process' as the master concept of McLuhan's technological humanism is clear. It is only by creatively interiorizing (*realistically perceiving*) the 'external' world of technology (…) that we can recover 'ourselves' anew.[28]

It seems that when attempting to achieve divinity through technology humankind should take the position of an artist in order to avoid being pushed into the marginal role of technology's "sex organs." Therefore "creative energies in human experience"[29] should be recovered.

> For McLuhan the 'poetic process' – this recovery of the method of 'sympathetic reconstruction', (…) this recovery of the 'rational notes of beauty, integrity, consonance and claritas' as the actual stages of human apprehension – was the key to redeeming the technological order.[30]

Therefore, according to McLuhan, there should be a harmony between artistic and technological creation; technology and its development not only should be seen from the perspective of an artist but itself may become the subject of art.

McLuhan perspective on technology definitely is not as one-sided as Grant's. Although he is aware of the dangers involved with the increasing dependence on technology his thought is full of hope about the future of humankind in a technological world. He believes that this symbiosis will elevate people onto the next stage of natural development since technology is becoming a

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[26] Kroker, pp. 56-57
[27] Ibid., p. 60
[28] Kroker, p. 66
[29] Ibid., p. 64
[30] Ibid., p. 64

new "natural" environment. For McLuhan, people will become mythic "cosmic men" endowed with almost divine power to artistically (re)create the world around them.

The Canadianness of David Cronenberg

Before I will move to discuss how particular Cronenberg's films reflect the bi-polar Canadian discourse on technology it may be useful to have a quick look at the director himself because his work has been already analyzed in terms of opposition, though a different one. William Beard in his essay "The Canadianness of David Cronenberg" discusses him as a Canadian director in terms of the schism between human and nature, and consequently between the 'self and the 'other'. Beard aptly observes that Cronenberg has always been a very problematic figure in Canadian cinematography. According to him Cronenberg's early productions were either overlooked or commonly considered as nothing more than average Hollywood-like horror movies which shocked viewers with revolting scenes of violent death and disintegrations of the body. However with time, his productions though still operating at the verge of good taste have evolved not only to gain the status of "the Canadian" as understood by William Beard, but also, probably thanks to vanishing of the traditional differentiation between low and high culture, they have become widely discussed by many contemporary theorists of culture worldwide. Beard states:

> It is in my contention, therefore, that Cronenberg, despite his anomalies
> is a Canadian (…) and that his work reflects and embodies the national
> culture by existing firmly within the boundaries of that culture's most
> central traditions and attitudes –again to the Frye-Atwood paradigm.[31]

At one pole of this tradition there is a hostile nature: "Canada is above all a country in which nature makes a direct impression of its primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism, its indifference to the supreme value placed on life within human society, its faceless, mindless unconsciousness, which fosters life without

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[31] Beard, William. "The Canadianness of David Cronenberg." *Mosaic,* Vol. 27. Issue: 2, 1994. p. 3

benevolence and destroys it without malice."[32] According to Beard at the opposite pole there is a thought of Margaret Attwood who

> describes it [this mentality] in terms of the human struggle to impose order on the chaos of nature [although] the attempt is inevitably frustrated and the human agent often destroyed or driven mad by the impossibility of the task.[33]

However, for Beard, human body is also understood as a part of this hostile nature. He writes: "When one contemplates the conquest of nature by technology [in North America] one must remember that the conquest had to include our own bodies."[34] Therefore all those Cronenbergian cancerous deformations of the body understood as a part of nature epitomize one of the results of this impossible human's attempt to control the natural. Beard adds that:

> disaster in Cronenberg's world devolves from the mistaken belief that nature is a knowable, that nature is not enemy, that rationality can be naturalized, or nature rationalized. In this respect Cronenberg is true to the Canadian model: nature is enemy of consciousness; it is unknowable, unconquerable. Nature is death.[35]

But traditionally perceived natural environment scarcely appears in Cronenberg's films. In most of them the action takes place in a city or in buildings, and when he decides to present some natural surroundings they usually constitute a virtually created world. Therefore, Beard approaches Cronenberg's works presupposing that human body is an embodiment of this hostile nature and that people using technology want to gain control over this nature, and their own bodies. As a result it seems justifiable to argue that in fact it is not only nature itself but also the (mis)use of technology that be can perceived as the direct cause of the tragedy of Cronenberg's main protagonists.

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[32] Frye, Nonorthtrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on Canadian Imagination*, Torronto: House of Anansi, 1982.
p. 146
[33] Beard, p. 7
[34] Ibid., p. 7
[35] Ibid., p. 9

Another issue that Beard's interpretation may be accused of is that it focuses only at the "isolation, failure and despair"[36] presented in the films by the Canadian director. The only optimistic accent that Beard notices is that Cronenberg's characters "were acting in good faith"[37]. Naturally it is true that because of their nightmarish imaginary those films evoke very pessimistic associations, but we cannot overlook the marvelous opportunities before main characters for achieving the status of McLuhan's "cosmic man" that are also present in Cronenberg's works. The faith in technology makes those characters believe that they can transcend the limitations of body, that they can become better beings, that through technology they can find a new way of artistic expression. In Cronenberg there is not only the gloom of decay and disintegration. There is also this strong, almost utopian pursuit to find a place in new era of technique. Therefore, it appears justifiable do discuss Cronenberg's interest in the relation between human and technology and in the opportunities and dangers for humankind that technological development may bring as reflecting not only a gloomy prophecy but also as presenting great hope.

Finally, it must be stressed here that Cronenberg does not treat works of McLuhan, Grant, or Frye as recipes for his movies. Beard rightly argues that it is "counter-productive to try to prove that these "Canadian" characteristics were deliberately put into the films by the actual author." [38] Therefore, David Cronenberg's films very naturally and smoothly fit into Canadian culture becoming, contrary to what some critics say, a new and very original manifestation of the so-called Canadianness.

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[36] Ibid., p. 10
[37] Ibid., p. 9
[38] Beard, p. 3

Chapter II

The Body, Mind, and Technology in *eXistenZ* and *Crash*

As it has been mentioned before, David Cronenberg is a very controversial film maker whose works, generally are appreciated more by theorists of culture than by the common public. Many mainstream critics still describe him as a director whose goal is to shock his audience with repulsive and perverse imaginary. His oeuvre is treated as the main representative of the genre of body horror whose main aim is to inspire revulsion and tends to be summarized in the following way:

> The films of David Cronenberg immediately spring to mind. Cronenberg consistently has displayed freakish creatures, freakish human beings and occasionally merges of the two. His films contemplate the effect of technology on the body, through teleportation, *The Fly*, (1986), gynecology, *Dead Ringers* (1988), sexual transgressions, *Crash* (1996), mutations, *Shivers* (1975); and the mind, via telepathy, *The Dead Zone* (1983), brainwashing, *Scanners* (1981) and hallucination, *Videodrome* (1983).[39]

Such an oversimplifying approach is definitely satisfactory for the needs of popular audience, but many thinkers find in Cronenberg's films a lot more that simple perversity and grotesque.

Jason Sperb even calls Cronenberg an active participant of the discourse of postmodernity and his films sees as the visual record of postmodern thought.[40]

For the purpose of this research paper which is to show how in the films by David Cronenberg the thought of Marshall McLuhan collides with the vision of George Grant I have chosen two of his works: *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Crash* (1996).

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[39] Higgins, Matthew. *Science Fiction and Organization*, Routledge, London, 2001. p. iii
[40] Sperb, Jason. "Scarring the New Flesh." *Kritokos, An International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text and Image*, Volume 3, February 2006. 21 Mar. 2007. <http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~nr03/sperb2006.htm>

However, in many of his previous films there also may be found this schism between great hopes pined upon the products of technology and great disappointments at the final results. In *Videodrome*, Max Renn (James Woods), producer working for the television company Civic TV is to transcend any limitations of physical body by starting a new life in Videodrome – a sort of virtual reality fixed on videotapes. However, tormented by hallucinations caused by the Videdrome, in which he sees deformation of his body, he commits suicide. Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum), the main protagonist of *The Fly* is a molecular physicist. When asked by a science journalist Veronica (Geena Davis) he answers: "What am I working on? Uh, I'm working on something that will change the world and human life as we know it." Brundle constructs a teleportation machine and tests it on himself. However, the results of this bold attempt are widely known; Brundle firstly becomes merged with the insect and finally with the teleportation machines itself, which is according to Linda Badley "a pathetically reversed metaphor of the man-machine or cyborg".[41] In *Dead Ringers*, Mantle twin brothers Beverly and Elliot (both played by Jeremy Irons) are gynecologists who use "the gynecologist's instruments, the sculptor's tools, and the filmmaker's art to 'correct' women's bodies.[42] They also designed and produced a new revolutionary gynecologist instrument ("Mantle Retractor") for which they gained awards and fame. However the traditional technology was not satisfactory for them. They wanted to make their instruments even more effective, therefore, they hired an artist who produced new instruments, which looked "like medieval torture devices or perverse works of art,"[43] and in fact resembled the claws of the monster known from the "Alien" series. But their invention encountered a very sceptical approach of other gynecologists who deemed it too radical. The Mantle twins falling victims to the addiction to all sorts of drugs, which were to enhance every sphere of their everyday life including falling asleep, waking up or sex drive and bodily sensations plunge into apathy and decide to end their lives.

 eXistenZ and *Crash*, which will be my main focus here, have been chosen because of a number of reasons. First of all, they are quite recent ones as compared, for instance, to widely analyzed *Videodrome* considered as one of the

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[41] Badley, Linda. "David Cronenberg's Anatomy Lessons." *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995.
[42] Ibid.,
[43] Ibid.,

most influential of Cronenberg's films. Secondly those films represent quite a dissimilar, though still representative for Cronenberg, approach to body and technology. *eXistenZ,* which is often referred to as continuation of the issues addressed in *Videodrome*, full of nightmarish imaginary close to the borderline between good taste and bold artistic expression, draws on the old tradition of Cronenberg's films. *Crash*, in contrast to many Cronenberg's previous films, is not set in a science fiction environment. It does not focus on some incredible technology of the future, but discusses the technology which is available in today's world. In this film, he examines the main protagonists' fascination with reshaping human body through mechanical injuries caused during prearranged car accidents which, in fact, becomes a form of artistic creation.

New Flesh Still eXistS

eXistenZ is the last of Cronenberg's science fiction films. The film portrays a group of volunteers who are to test a new game called "eXistenZ", a sort of virtual reality created by Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason-Leigh) from Antenna Research. However the demonstration is interrupted by the assassin who attempts to kill the creator of the game. Being afraid of another attempt Allegra hires a bodyguard, Ted Pikul (Jude Law), and makes him install in his back a bioport, a device which enables players to connect to the game, and tempts him to enter the virtual world of "eXistenZ." The game, which is the film's second level, is about the struggle between a Realist Underground which fights against production of games and game pods by a company called Cortical Systematics. At first it seems that it is Realist Underground which is to win this battle but when Allegra and Pikul quit the game they notice that they are still surrounded by flames and that the in-game conflict has spread to their 'real' world. Pikul suggests that they are still in the game but withdraws when Allegra kills the assistant who tries to make her quit Antenna Research and join the opposing faction. Then, also Pikul turns out to be a traitor but Allegra manages to kill him. Then suddenly, we see Allegra with a plastic Virtual Reality device on her head sitting among the other characters equipped with identical devices. Surprisingly, the third layer of the film is

revealed. It turns out that "eXestenZ" was the game within another game called "transCendenZ." When the amused group discuse and share their experiences with the game designer (Don McKellar) Allegra and Ted pull out guns and kill him leaving the rest of the volunteers as well as film's viewers with doubts whether it is still a game or not.

The issues addressed in the *eXistenZ* very directly correspond to Cronenberg's earlier film *Videodrome*, however, According to Lia M. Hotchkiss "*eXistenZ* picks up where *Videodrome* leaves off: far from far from having spoken his last word on representation and reality or the technologization of the body and the biologization of technology"[44] In fact this mutual merging of the synthetic and the organic may be seen from the very beginning of the film. The game pods which traditionally could be associated with such materials as plastic and silicon are artificially created living and feeling organisms made of organs taken from mutated amphibians. When those organic game pods get damaged, or it would be better to say injured, they can be repaired. They are put on the sort of operating table and cured by the group of engineers\veterinary surgeons who simply pull out the damaged organs and replace them with new ones, as if they were not a living creatures but ordinary mechanical devices. What is more, they are linked with the character's spinal cords with a wire which very much resembles the human umbilical cord. In the film there are even such game pods which whole are planted within the body. Consequently, characters via this grotesque umbilical cord become a part of this organic machine. This radically changes the traditional imaginary of both human body and machine. According to Lia M. Hotchkiss:

> Here again we must deconstruct the human\machine opposition and
> begin to ask a new question about ways in which we and our
> technologies 'interface' to produce what has become a *mutual*
> evolution. That is an evolution that long fascinated David Cronenberg,
> as eXistenZ's opening superimposed on increasingly complex
> biological diagrams of tissue, cells vertebrae, and muscles suggest; it is
> the drive behind the film's call for a postmodern conception of the real
> as contingent upon its construction and a recognition of the cyborg as
> the increasing norm. With its fleshy biopods and bioports, like ear

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[44] Hotchkiss, Lia. "'Still In the game': Cybertransformations of the 'New Flesh' In David Cronenberg's eXistenZ." *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television,* Fall 2003. Issue: 52.

piercings, readily available at local malls, eXistenZ portrays the hybridization of human and machine as the wave of the future and the figure for the current degree to which surgery and electronic technologies have made machines 'lively,' to use Haraway's term, and made cyborgs, either literally or metaphorically, of significant numbers of the population.[45]

This very closely corresponds to Marshal McLuhan's understanding of technology as people's new "natural" environment. Lia M. Hotchkiss adds:

> The more physical forms of cyborging, specifically, the technologization of biology and biologization of technology evident in eXistenZ and so many of Cronenberg's other films figure the breakdown of the nature/culture binarism that has led philosopher of science George Canguilhem to argue that machines are 'organs of the human species' and that 'technology is a universal biological phenomenon.'[46]

As machines are physically becoming parts of human beings, the natural consequence is that the traditional boundary between the human and the mechanic fades away. For McLuhan, this process is extremely smooth and "natural." It happens similarly to evolution processes, slowly and almost unapparently, without anyone's intention. Consequently, it is so easily accepted by people.

One of the most vividly sketched oppositions in Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* is the conflict between its main characters. Lia Hotchkiss writes:

> Consequently, eXistenZ strikes a balance between the two attitudinal extremes figured by [Allegra] Geller and Pikul as they appear in transCendenZ: she manifests a naïve celebration of virtual reality with little attention to the ways in which it can affect materiality, and he displays a naïve paranoia over the ways in which technology does penetrate human materiality. For instance, after the game encounters 'a weird reality bleeding through effect' and both the 'lively' pod and Ted appear infected, Allegra, pleased to have discovered the source of the problem, exclaims, "The poor thing was trying to tell us it was sick by introducing the theme of disease into the game!" Ted responds,

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[45] Ibid., p. 25
[46] Ibid., p. 25

"The '*theme* of disease'? I'm fucking really infected! What, is it going to crawl up my spine and rot my brain?" As a pair, the two characters, therefore, figure not only the cybercultural paradox of celebrations and fear of technology but also the two extremes of *Videodrome* criticism that ignore that film's ambivalence over the technological transformation of the body.[47]

As it may be observed, this directly corresponds to the similar fascination and fear of technology represented by the thought of Marshal McLuhan and George Grant or as it is put by Rob Latham: "The choice here is between a humanistic critique of technology's unspeakable contamination of the desire and a posthumanist embrace of it."[48]

It may be asked here why Allegra is so fascinated with the device she created and why she has so great hopes for the technology. One of the clues which helps to find the answer to this question is the title "transCendenZ". It is mainly about transcending the limitations of human body and of the world in which this body is placed. When she tries to persuade Pikul to join the game she says: "This is it, you see? It is your own cage. Would you like to be trapped in it and pace about in smallest possible space for ever? Brake out of your cage Pikul. Brake out now." She is definitely a person for whom the real world is not any longer a place in which she is willing to lead an ordinary life. She says: "There is nothing happening here. We are safe – it's boring." She appears excited not only about being within the game but also, to a great extent, about the existence of the technology which allows playing it. This may be observed at the very beginning of the film when she makes a short presentation. She talks about the "great possibilities" of this technology. Marshall McLuhan writes that: "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves."[49] Allegra plugging into the game pod automatically becomes a part of it. When Pikul ignorantly asks where in his gamepod he should insert batteries, Allegra answers: "You are the power source. Your body, your nervous system,

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[47] Ibid., p. 27
[48] Latam, Rob. "Screening Desie: Posthuman Couplings In Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Part* and David Cronenberg's *Videodrome." Trajectories of the Fantastic: Sellected Essays from the Fourteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in Arts.* Ed. Michael A. Morrison. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997.
[49] McLuhan, Marshall. "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters." *Christian Humanism in Letters*, Hartford, Connecticut: St. Joseph's College, 1954, p. 75.

your metabolism, your energy. If you are tired it won't work properly." What is more, the very fact of plugging the game pod into the hole on her back seems to attract her sexually. The game pod is a kind of fetish for her. She touches it, smiles, cuddles it close to her. There is a very intimate relationship between her and this "poor, little creature." It is evident that this strange organic game pod is sexually much more attractive for her than her bodyguard Pikul.

There is also another very important aspect of the game eXistenZ which seems to attract Allegra. Being a creator of the revolutionary game, she is addressed to as "Art God. God the artist, the mechanic." Here Cronenberg touches another very significant issue. He presents the technology as a means of artistic expression. Arthur Kroker writes that:

> Against the blandishments of an "official culture" to impose old meanings on novel technologies, McLuhan sympathized with "anti-social perspectives": the creative perspectives of the artist, the poet and even the young, who respond with "untaught delight to the poetry and the beauty of the new technological environment[50]

This "untaught delight" is very vivid in Allegra's attitude to technology in which she finds artistic inspiration. For her the technology becomes a very tempting material since the artificially created world of the game "eXistenZ" absorbs all senses. Cronenberg seems to present sort of an ultimate form of art. It opens an infinite number of possibilities for the artist who uses this material. Allegra could create the pallet of visual sensations which is beyond the reach of traditional painters or filmmakers. She can create any music or audio effect she wishes to. She is able to make food which tastes better than any real one. She can crate material of any texture or property. Therefore she is very accurately called a goddess of the game. She seems to be almighty during the act of creation. When Pikul, enters the game for the first time, seduced by Allegra's promising words "You will see how natural in feels" he is shocked by the way in which the objects he experiences in the game seem "real." However it is more than that. In fact the artificially created world of "eXistenZ" is more real that reality. When Pikul logs out of the game his perception of the 'real' world is fundamentally changed. He

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[50] Kroker, p. 77

wanders around the room touching suspiciously every piece of furniture. Arthur Kroker writes:

> Over and again in his writings, McLuhan returned to the theme that only a sharpening and refocusing of human *perception* could provide a way out of the labyrinth of the technostructure, His ideal value was that of the "creative process in art" ; so much so in fact that McLuhan insisted that if the master struggle of the twentieth century was between reason and irrationality, the this struggle could only be won if individuals learned anew how to make of the simple act of "ordinary human perception" an opportunity for recovering the creative energies in human experience.[51]

In *eXiztenZ,* this struggle between reason and irrationality is, in fact, a struggle between Pikul's and Allegra's approach to technology. Their perception of the world is definitely "refocused", but in a different way. Pikul, after experiencing this "technostructure" of the game seems to be even more sceptical than before. Allegra, on the other hand, becomes immediately absorbed by the new environment. What is more, the technology releases her "creative energy," she becomes "the goddess of the game."

In those respects Allegra Geller definitely may be perceived as a sort of embodiment of Marshall McLuhan's vision of a cosmic man. She feels very good in this new technology driven world. She finds it absolutely natural to connect to the game pod and to become an organic part of the game pod. She believes that this technology gives her an absolute emancipation from the 'cage' of the traditional world.

However, Cronenberg in his *eXistenZ* not only presents his approval of technology's creative possibilities, but also to a great extent criticizes its destructive powers; though the criticism is less harsh than in his previous works. Lia M. Hotchkiss writes:

> eXistenZ situates itself within the guardedly optimistic critiques of cyberculture whose excitement over electronic technology's potential

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[51] Kroker, p. 64

> to reshape identity is tempered by a realization of the degree to which
> we are bound by materiality, not only neurally but also ethically.[52]

This balancing skepticism about technology, which very much corresponds to George Grant's vision of technology, is represented by Ted Pikul, Allegra's adversary. According to Lia M. Hotchkiss technology "radically decenters the human body, the sacred icon of the essential self, in the same way that the virtual reality of cyberspace works to decenter conventional humanist notions of an unproblematical real."[53] This decentering of the body may be seen in Pikul's reaction to the game. From the very beginning he displays mistrust toward the idea of playing, and when he finally does so his initial enthusiasm very quickly gives way to a number of objections and doubts. He says: "I feel really vulnerable, disembodied (…) I am feeling a little disconnected from my real life. I am kind of loosing touch with a texture of it. (…) I don't want to be here. We are stuck in this unformed world." As we can see, his contact with technology, though a very brief one, has a great impact on him. Technology immediately makes him feel less human. Also his language is changed radically. When referring to his life he uses the very technical term "texture." His perception of himself is therefore fundamentally changed. When being in the game, he also finds it very difficult to identify with the role he is to play. Instead of enjoying his alter ego, he constantly makes cutting remarks. He cannot accept the artificially created world around him. He says: "everything is so dirt, absurd, grotesque." Lia M. Hotchkiss writes: "the new flesh may or may not be desirable state and is certainly not one accessible to ordinary consciousness"[54] Pikul definitely has such "ordinary consciousness." He very strongly opposes merging with his game pod. He is against what Arthur Kroker calls "colonization *from within.*"[55]

However Pikul is not the only character in which we can observe the devastating powers of technology. Allegra Geller, the character who is so fascinated with her game, and with technology which allowed its creation, is probably the main victim of technology presented in the film. Her tragic position comes from her unawareness of the changes that she underwent. Throughout the

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[52] Hotchkiss, p. 16
[53] Ibid., p. 20
[54] Ibid., 18
[55] Kroker, p. 29

film Allegra shows symptoms which are characteristic to the addicts. When she is outside the "eXistenZ" she is sleepy, she has dark rings around her eyes. But when she is to connect to her game pod she suddenly livens up, becomes full of energy, every sign of her apathy disappears. Lia M. Hotchkiss writes: "over and against the thrill of escape lies the fear of being by the very technology facilitating that escape from the body."[56] For Allegra, the possibility of transcending the limitations of her body and of the "boring" world fills her with thrill and excitement. However, when she leaves the game she again falls into lethargy.

What is more, in Allegra those symptoms of disembodiment are even more vivid than in reluctant Pikul. In fact, she seems to loose touch with her body. Once, when outside the game, referring to herself she uses the words: "my grotesque corps." Those are one of the key words in the film, which summarizes the changes of perception of herself. For her it is not the game but her 'real' body which is grotesque. This sense of disembodiment is even strengthened by her use of third person when she refers to herself. It seems that her body not only is not hers any longer but also is already dead.

Cronenberg in his film also criticizes the distortion and artificiality of communication and interpersonal relations in a technological environment. This may be seen in the relations between main protagonists. Allegra seems to be emotionally more connected to her fleshy game pod rather than to her bodyguard Pikul who, after all, saved her life twice. She often calls it her own child. But when Pikul asks her to call him by his name she answers that maybe latter, but in fact she never does so. This distortion in communication between characters may also be observed in dialogues between two main protagonists and other characters played in the game. Those characters behave and talk as if they were programmed and react only when they hear appropriate, predefined commend or sentence.

eXistenZ, though set in very imaginary science fiction world, seems to not only shock viewers with the grotesque and but also conveys the message that is typical to Cronenberg. The traditional borders between the organic and the synthetic, between body and the machine are blurring. At the beginning, main characters seem to share Marshal McLuhan's fascination but in the end we may observe how the initial enthusiasm changes into the state of total dependency on

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[56] Hotchkiss, p. 20

technology. Allegra and Pikul notice, to their surprise, that the game starts to take control over what they say; they loose control over both their "new flesh" and thoughts. This, probably contrary to what Allegra, the creator of the game, reduces both Allegra and Pikul to mere playthings of technology.

Metal Crashes with Flesh

Crash is often referred to as "technological pornography."[57] Although its setting and atmosphere is radically different from those in *eXistenZ,* the theme of the dissolution of boundaries between flesh and metal in the technological world seems even more convincing. Because of the fact that the film is set in contemporary Montreal and lacks any science fiction elements, it is much more difficult for the viewers to distance themselves from what they see on the screen. In *Crash,* though less vividly than in previously discussed *eXistenZ,* there also may be observed the dichotomy between McLuhan's and Grant's vision of technology. The film presents the history of James Ballard (James Spader) who causes a head-on collision with another car killing its passenger. In the hospital he meets Helen Remington (Holly Hunter) who also survived the accident. During their recovery they meet mysterious Vaughan (Elias Koteas) who is obsessed with car accidents and with injuries caused during them. Vaughan draws them into the world of his perverse fascination in which he enacts car crashes of famous persons using authentic cars and stunts. James and Helen, who turn out to be very fond of each other, discover that they can reach the state of sexual excitement only when they are in a wreck of a car. James, Catherin (James's wife) and Helen became the followers of Vaughan's "cult" and start to actively participate in preparations for another car crash shows. They help to collect photos of car accidents and their victims' wounds in order to be as accurate as possible in their unusual art. Car crashes become the only stimulus which can awake their sexual desires. In the end, Ballard takes the role of Vaughan who dies in a car accident. He also causes the accident of his wife's car, which turns out to be the cure for their marriage falling apart.

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[57] Wróblewski, Jerzy. "Technologiczna pornografia." *Kino*, 1997, no 2, p. 40.

Janusz Wróblewski, a film journalist, says that David Cronenberg rightly says in his *Crash* that development in technology changes our perception of the body and that if the dream of humanity is to humanize a machine we also have to bear in mind that it leads to the dehumanization of the body.[58] Those two aspects of human encounter with technology are very well sketched in the film. Christie Cornea writes that:

> The representation of the cyborgization process in *Crash,* as compared to films like The *Terminator*, *Robocop*, *Universal Soldier*, the literal melding of the human with the machine in *Crash*, is far "messier" than the relatively "clean" images presented in the three former examples. Also, in these popular mainstream films, the process of unification with the machine is largely articulated via the central and boundaried body of the cyborg, In other words, these images could be said to present the viewer with a kind of reunification, whereas the characters in Crash seem to be bound up in a constant process of change and alteration in which their bodies are seen to be more vulnerable and more fragmented[59]

From the very beginning of the film Cronenberg leaves no doubt that the main theme of the film is to present the condition of the individuals who try to "tame" the technology and for whom contact with technology is a very intimate one. The opening scene of the film is a very long shot which shows the interior of a huge hangar. The camera's eye slowly depicts the smooth curves of the planes, massive girders and the complicated labyrinth of roof trusses. In the centre of this, there is a couple making love. However, it seems that a woman snuggles more lovingly to the plane than to her lover. They make mechanic love within the mechanic belly of the airport building.

Here again the main protagonists, especially Vaughan, try to find their place in the technological world by making technology a tool for artistic creation. But, in contrast to what can be seen in *eXistenZ,* it is not only the technology itself which becomes the work of art. In the film artistic creation also takes place as a result of a *crash* between technology and the body. Fred Botting writes that "Scars

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[58] Ibid.,

[59] Cornea, Christie. "David Cronenberg's *Crash* and Performing Cyborgs*." A Critical Journal of Film & Television*, Fall 2003 Issue 52, p. 11

endow bodies with a value they would not otherwise possess."[60] Scars are something that makes body extraordinary, better from other ordinary bodies. When for the first time asked by Ballard about his "project" Vaughan answers: "Its something we are all intimately involved in. The reshaping of a human body by modern technology. (…) That's a future, Ballard, (...) car crash is a fertilizing, rather than destructing event, liberation of sexual [creative] energy." Vaughan's fascination with technology's fusion with human body may be observed from the very beginning of the film. When he goes to the hospital to see injured Ballard he starts to study deliberately James's broken leg which is immobilized with a metal orthopedic device with the maze of different screws and rods penetrating his bones.

It also seems that Vaughan's obsession with car crashes seems to be a sort of a reaction to the technological world in which he lives. Christie Cornea writes that :

> Certainly the characters in *Crash* actively insert their bodies into this hypertechnologized environment and, in turn, express/perform their experience of this world in a similar fashion to the way in which a performance artist can be understood as working. (…) It is probably more accurate to say that the characters as well as performers in *Crash* can be seen paradoxically, as attempting a resistive practice through their literal embrace of the cyborgization process.[61]

This "hypertechnologized" world is empty and artificial. This emptiness is emphasized by the very scarce presence of other people in the movie. Were it not for the cars moving on the motorways the whole city would appear completely deserted. The relations between people are also distorted. There seems to be no place for any emotions. Characters appear to display the similar apathy to those of previously discussed *eXistenZ*. Even the act of making love, which is traditionally perceived as the most passionate of human experiences, seems to give them no pleasure. During numerous love scenes they seem detached, non present, their movements are mechanic. There seems to be no stimulus for the character's actions. They seem to travel from place to place without any reason. As a result,

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[60] Botting, Fred. "Automatic Lover." *Screen*, Vol. 39. Issue: 2. 1998, p. 186
[61] Cornea, pp. 9-10.

for Vaughan, and for other characters, the only hope for escape from this mechanic world is their perverse art. The only moments when they display this McLuhan's "creative energy" is when they prepare and perform their shows.

To some extent Vaughan has some characteristics of McLuhan's cosmic man. He definitely is shown as a free person who, as opposed to other characters, managed to quit this transitory period of technological dependency. He is shown as a person who can make a full use of technological products. His car is for him a sort of a universal wonder machine. He lives in it, travels by it, and finally makes an art using it as a tool. He and his car appear to make up a perfect unity.

However, the message conveyed by Cronenberg's *Crash* is, in fact, rather pessimistic. Although Vaughan at first may be seen as an outcast who managed to find freedom from the dehumanized technological world, it quickly turns out that he fell a victim to the technological vicious circle. His perception of human body associates more with the vision presented by George Grant than with McLuhan's "cosmic man". For him the difference between human organic body and its synthetic extension does not exist any longer. Instead of a new, better human, a "cosmic man," there is a progressing dehumanization of the body which is not sacred any longer but becomes equal with cold metal. It is shown very vividly when Vaughan, together with a group of his disciples, arrives at the scene of a pile-up. The first words he utters after noticing the blend of destroyed cars and bodies are: "it's a work of art, absolute work of art." He falls into a frenzy and starts to chase around with his camera from one wreck to another taking photographs of injured people and cars. It appears that he perceives car damages and human wounds as equal. In his photos they look so similar that it is difficult to distinguish the difference between them. Victims' blood is mixed with car oil. Pieces of human flesh are fuzzed with shreds of destroyed vehicles. In Vaughan's eyes this apocalypse of destruction is art. For him, the accident which is traditionally perceived as something destructive is, in fact, something creative, and "fertilizing." His perception is distorted and it is only the viewer of the film who remains aware that the effect that technology has on the body and mind is mainly a destructive one.

In the film, cars seem to be treated as more human that other characters. Dr Remington makes the following remark: "The day I left the hospital I had the extraordinary feeling that all of these cars were gathering for some special reason I

did not understand." Botting comments: "Cars replace human subjects, equivalent units of mechanical and automatic motion."[62]Cars, one of the embodiments of technology present in the film, are given a special status. They are shown as endowed with their own will and consciousness. For Remington, not people but cars are intriguing and inscrutable. Again, it is technology which acquires the status of humanity.

Cronenberg's *Crash,* therefore, seems to present the fall of "cosmic man." The bodies of the main protagonists, although supported by technology, are weak and crippled. In fact, each character in the film is disabled in some way. Vaughan's body is covered with scars - records of his previous "artistic achievements." Gabrielle, Vaughan's partner, can walk only thanks to the orthopedic device which pins her whole body. James and Helen limp after their accident. Christie Cornea writes:

> Ballard's cyborgization does not make of him a macho, armored, hypermasculine figure; instead, his newly disabled body is revealed as vulnerable and only enabled through the medical and mechanical technologies that maintain its tenuous coherence while simultaneously signaling its fragmentation. [63]

The body which was supposed to be made perfect by technology, in fact, becomes handicapped. Medicine, instead of endowing it with divine capabilities, can only ineffectually cure the damages caused by technology.

The vision on technology presented by David Cronenberg in his *Crash* seems to be more gloomy than in *eXistenZ*. The main protagonists blindly believe that they achieved divinity and seem unaware of the state of disintegration in which they have fallen. Although they have to deal with a dehumanized technological world, the way of doing it they have chosen is doomed to failure. As the film unfolds, we observe proceeding degeneration. In the end, it appears that Vaughan's perverse art is more destructive than "fertilizing," and his deeds turns out to be the symptoms of desperation rather than acts of artistic free will. His car instead of being a miraculous tool, a magic brush or wonder chisel becomes a device which only scars "new flesh."

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[62] Botting, p. 189
[63] Cornea, Christie, p. 11

CONCLUSION

It appears that technology has completely transformed the way people from developed regions of the globe perceive themselves. There seems to be no area unaltered by computers, machines, medicine, or chemistry. Technological products become parts of human body at the both the physical and mental level. But in fact it is very difficult do predict whether such merging will lead humanity to another level of evolutionary development as it is believed by Marshall McLuhan, or will push it down to the abyss of technological dependency. However, the vision of a divine "cosmic man" seems to be too utopian. According to Arthur Kroker:

> McLuhan's mind was a magisterial account of the technological imagination itself. This was a discourse which evinced a fatal fascination with the utopian possibilities of technology. Indeed, McLuhan liked to speculate about the almost religious utopia immanent in the age of information.[64]

Controversial David Cronenberg appears to be aware of both the great possibilities and dangers of technological development. In his films, the majority of the main protagonists share McLuhan's fascination with technology. They believe that they can transcend the limitation of their bodies. They pin their hope on the possibility of perfection of human body by making use of the fruits of technology. However, the Canadian director is very critical about such a naïve approach. His characters usually fall victim to technology whose creative possibilities they overestimate. As a result, they suffer from progressing dehumanization which they are not aware of; and when they finally become conscious of their fall, it is usually too late for redemption. For David Cronenberg, it is impossible to recover something which has been technologically transformed. However Cronenberg should not be treated as a prophet of doom. Although the

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[64] Kroker, p. 80.

atmosphere of his films is so gloomy, there is a place for optimism. The destruction of the human in his characters is always caused by their gullible attitude. Although it is beyond their reach to achieve the status of a "cosmic man" they at least can struggle to avoid total dependency on technology.

STRESZCZENIE

Z racji tego, że technologia w coraz większym stopniu wkracza w codzienność ludzkiego życia, stała się ona tematem dla pisarzy, twórców filmowych oraz teoretyków. Jak pokazuje medycyna, robotyka czy też wojskowość, produkty technologii fizycznie wnikają w ludzkie ciało. David Cronenberg uczynił to zjawisko głównym tematem swoich filmów. Jednakże, jego filmy, w których tematyka zaniku granic pomiędzy tym, co organiczne i tym, co sztuczne jest nadrzędna, wydają się bardziej ambitne od wielu popkulturowych filmów z gatunku fantastyki naukowej. Jego unikatowe spojrzenie na technologię jest głęboko zakorzenione w tradycyjnej kanadyjskiej debacie o technologii, której głównymi przedstawicielami są Marshall McLuhan i George Grant. Reprezentują oni skrajnie odmienne podejście do tej tematyki. Marshall McLuhan wierzy, że dzięki technologii ludzkość osiągnie boski status nadczłowieka („cosmic man") - kolejny etap rozwoju ewolucyjnego. George Grant, natomiast, postrzega tą kwestię w mrocznych barwach. Według niego, postępujące przenikanie technologii w ludzie ciało doprowadzi do całkowitego od niej uzależnienia. Te dwa podejścia ścierają się w większości filmów Davida Cronenberga. Głowni bohaterowie „eXistenZ" i „Crash" – dwóch spośród ostatnich dzieł kanadyjskiego reżysera – podzielają zafascynowanie technologią typowe dla Marshalla McLuhana. Ślepo wierzą w to, że dzięki technologii uda im się przekroczyć ograniczenia ludzkiego ciała oraz, że dzięki wykorzystaniu technologii w sposób artystyczny będą w stanie przezwyciężyć odczłowieczenie typowe dla społeczeństwa technologicznego. Jednak ich bezkrytyczne nastawienie zawsze przyczynia się do ich końcowego upadku. Nie są świadomi tego, że gdy zaczną postrzegać technologię oraz jej produkty jako coś zupełnie naturalnego i nieodzownego w ich codziennym życiu, jest zwykle za późno, aby odwrócić zmiany, jakie zaszły w ich ciałach i umysłach. Jednak David Cronenberg nie podziela całkowicie tragicznej wizji przedstawionej przez George'a Granta. Wydaję się, że według niego jest możliwe ominięcie pułapki całkowitego uzależnienia się od technologii, pod warunkiem, że nie będziemy ślepo wierzyć w jej wielki potencjał.

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