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Digital Death in the Age of Narcissism

Summary

Pathological narcissism represents the dominant form of subjectivity in post-industrial society and its consumerist ideals. The fear one feels in connection with one's death, fear that is typical of pathological narcissism, frequently manifests itself as absolute denial of the idea of a mortal Self. According to Freud, primary narcissism prevents one from imagining or even thinking about one's own death. In the realm of the Unconscious, death does not exist. Death is absent from cyberspace in much the same manner and in this sense, cyberspace has become a fitting metaphor for the Unconscious. It is pathological narcissism that makes cyberspace and all actions that take place within it possible, reasonable and justifiable. It is what transforms all our cyber-actions into more than merely a waste of time. Upon entering cyberspace the subjects are given the chance to leave their mortality, their corporeity behind and embark upon a journey that offers countless possibilities and realities. Yet they have thus also entered the realm of digital death. The anthropological supposition that culture is our "natural environment" can now, when cyberspace and digital technologies function as a "natural environment" for pathological narcissism, be reconsidered and reinterpreted.

Key words: pathological narcissism, virtual reality, cyberspace, death.

Digitalna smrt v dobi narcizma

Povzetek

Patološki narcizem predstavlja dominantno formo subjektivnosti postindustrijske družbe in njenih potrošniških idealov. Strah, ki ga čutimo v povezavi z lastno smrtjo, in ki je značilen za patološki narcizem, se pogosto manifestira kot popolno zanikanje ideje o smrtnosti lastnega Jaza. Primarni narcizem po Freudu človeku onemogoča misliti lastno smrt. Smrt v Nezavednem preprosto ne obstaja. Na podoben način je smrt odsotna tudi v kiberprostru, ki je tako postal primerna metafora nezavednega. Patološki narcizem je tisti, ki omogoča, osmišljuje in opravičuje obstoj kiberprostora in naših dejanj v njem. Naša kiber-dejanja tako postanejo nekaj več kot le izguba časa. Ob vstopu v kiberprostor je subjektu ponujena možnost, da za seboj pusti svojo telesnost, svojo smrtnost, in se poda na potovanje neštetih resničnosti in možnosti. Ob tem pa neizogibno vstopi tudi na območje e-smrtnosti. Antropološko predpostavko, da je kultura naše "naravno okolje", lahko tako danes, ko se kot "naravno okolje" patološkega narcisa ponujata kiberprostor in digitalna tehnologija, razumemo in interpretiramo na nove načine.

Ključne besede: patološki narcizem, virtualna resničnost, kiberprostor, smrt.

Digital Death in the Age of Narcissism

1. The Age of Narcissism

According to the majority of modern psychoanalytical literary sources, pathological narcissism represents a dominant form of subjectivity within post-industrial society (Žižek 1987). It represents the ideals of consumerist society (Lasch 1982; see also Campbell 1987): authenticity and loyalty to one's desire, audacity and determination regardless of what happens (as represented by the "Just do it" slogan), creativity, non-inhibition (being "as free as a bird") and contempt for society, paradoxically accompanied by the desire for "fifteen minutes of fame". It is those exhibiting traits of pathological narcissism as subjects that give meaning to the existence of cyberspace, virtual reality and surfing the Internet. Without this dominant form of subjectivity of modern day society, all of the above would be primarily a waste of time. Yet when people with tendencies of pathological narcissism enter cyberspace, they become immortal – leaving their body behind they can begin a game of endless possibilities and virtual realities.

The term narcissism is most frequently associated with Sigmund Freud (1914), who distinguished between two types of libido: the ego-libido (also known as narcissistic-libido) and the object-libido. The distinction refers to two forms of libidinal cathexis, one of which is ego-directed, while the other is object-directed. Following this theory we find that a narcissistic person is in love with himself/herself and therefore with everything that he/she is, was, and would like to be.

The difference between "normal" narcissism and pathological narcissism is in the type of Super-ego structure it addresses. Due to various factors of socialization the Super-ego of the narcissist remains personalized, does not acquire a structure of a formal (ethical) law and is thus far more active, more uncompromising and more burdening for the individual. This is the source of the basic indication of all the particular symptoms of pathological narcissism: "free-floating anxiety, which is not bound to a specific object, but appears as a general, indeterminate psychical state" (Žižek 1987, 109). Pathological narcissism is the perfect representation of a cross-section between two types of psychiatric diagnoses: the borderline personality disorder[1]

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[1]   The key characteristic of the Borderline personality disorder is "a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts" (DSM-IV-TR 2000, 706). To diagnose borderline personality disorder, at least five of the following features must be observed in an individual:
1. frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
2. a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation
3. identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self
4. impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating)
5. recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures or threats, or self-mutilating behavior
6. affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)
7. chronic feelings of emptiness
8. inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights)
9. transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms (DSM-IV-TR 2000, 710)

and the narcissistic personality disorder.[2]

Circumstances leading up to the genesis of such a subject are mainly connected to changes in structure, form and definition of family, where the gravitational centre "is no longer the loving couple, but the relationship between a mother and a child" (Kanduč 2003, 185). This leads to a whole host of new techniques and technologies of socialization, which nearly all contribute to the child's development of the grandiose self as a result of pressure from family and society.

Psychological features that can be found with pathological narcissism, such as obsession with fame, superficiality and short duration of personal relationships, as well as perceiving other people as a constant threat, all originate in the specific structure of the American family, which, in turn, originates in the new means of production. Industrial production takes the father away from home and diminishes his role in the life of the child. The mother then tries to compensate for the loss, but often lacks practical experience in raising children. She thus begins to rely more and more on "experts". Both parents try their best to protect their family from outside influences, but the standards by which they measure their success themselves mainly originate in industrial sociology, in "human resource management", in child psychology – in short, they originate in the organized instruments of social control. The struggle of the family to adapt to the idea of family solidarity and parenting, forced upon them from the outside, creates the image of solidarity for the price of spontaneous feelings, thus creating ritualized relationships with no real substance (Lasch 1982, 200–1).

The mother is bound to the cultural imperative of motherhood and the ideals of life that the child is to embody, while her loving attention smothers any chance of a "normal" development of narcissism in the child, thus practically forcing him to make object choices of the narcissistic type. The maxim of socialization that puts the child into the centre of family life and social values is expressed in the uniquely Western cultural imperative of "His Majesty the Baby" (Freud 1914, 19) and inevitably creates feelings of exceptionality, omnipotence and superiority in the child. All of the above are signs of the so-called "grandiose Self; a pathological formation which performs the integrating function in place of the 'normal' Self" (Žižek 1987, 115). This pathological formation can manifest itself in several ways:

1. Insistence on the image. This is when the highly aestheticized physical appearance of the body

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[2] "The essential feature of Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts" (DSM-IV-TR 2000, 714). To diagnose Narcissistic Personality Disorder, at least five of the following traits must be observed in an individual:
1. has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
2. is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
3. believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
4. requires excessive admiration
5. has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
6. is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
7. lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
8. is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her (DSM-IV-TR 2000, 710).

becomes prominent. Some of the key dimensions of the body image of a narcissist are the cult of youth and its antipode, the pathological fear of growing old and dying. Youth and old age are no longer perceived as biological facts, but rather as pathological goods which can be – and this is essential – bought. A body that exhibits signs of aging is not giving away age as such (as something biological), but represents instead the inability of one to purchase the features, attributes, signs… of youth (Lasch 1982, 235–47).

2. Low anxiety tolerance. One that is subjected to pathological narcissism is quick to allow his or her impulses to take over; he or she is incapable of tolerating frustration and is at the same time utterly devastated by even the smallest of narcissistic insults or merely by lack of appreciation and applause. The individual thus has no way of anchoring his or her identity, and turns to abolishing reality by means of primitive techniques of oblivion (drugs, consumerism, etc.) and trying in this way to fill the chronic feeling of void and calm the free-floating anxiety.

3. A subject consistent with pathological narcissism sees him or herself as superior, as some kind of an outcast that wears the mask of a conformist individual, but does not take the game seriously, only playing it to become successful socially. At the same time he or she positions him or herself above the laws that govern this very game (Žižek 1987, 116),

4. Such a subject is superficial and incapable of empathy in intimate relations, because he or she does not know how to "manage" his or her anxiety. Every form of emotional attachment is seen as a limitation by him or her, a frustration of his or her own narcissistic tendencies, which is why he or she is incapable of intimate attachment that could provide him or her with the feeling of safety. His or her cynical attitude toward the world implies that such attachments are, in fact, a sign of weakness. He or she is only familiar with pathos in place of sentiment where interpersonal relations are concerned and he or she strives to acquire prestigious objects with the help of his or her image and in order to further improve this same image.

5. Another characteristic of pathological narcissism are distinctive paranoid tendencies. Such paranoid ideas are often "connected to hypochondria (pathological fear of microbes, food being poisoned, etc.), but can also take on a more general form: for example, ideas of being taken advantage of, being victims of a conspiracy, mere puppets in the hands of dark forces, etc" (Žižek 1987, 110).

2. E-mortality: Pathological Narcissism and Cyberspace

And what exactly is the connection between pathological narcissism and cyberspace? Without pathological narcissism, the existence of cyberspace is not only absurd and unnecessary, but also – impossible. We could even go as far as to claim that cyberspace is the perfect "natural environment" for pathological narcissism. While in it, "cut off from the real body, we construct a substitute body: ourselves online. We treat it as if it were our actual self, our real life. Over time, it does indeed become our life" (Ullman in Boler 2007, 159). Avatars or digitalized bodies represent a "historically constructed Western individualist subject" (Green in Boler 2007, 163). What is more, "ironically, this new digital Cartesianism, initiated by a rhetorical cheerleading of the mind/body split as a desirable aim of CMC, ultimately results in the invocation of

stereotyped bodies in order to confer authenticity and signification to textual utterances" (Boler 2007, 140).

Perhaps the most important aspect of cyberspace, one that secures the interest of those subject to pathological narcissism, is the freedom of image-changing: "The greatest freedom cyberspace promises is that of recasting the self: from static beings, bound by the body and betrayed by appearances, Net surfers may reconstruct themselves in a multiplicity of dazzling roles, changing from moment to moment according to whim" (Stallabras in Boler 2007, 151). In addition to these discursive uniformities, the narcissistic subject sees cyberspace as everything else in life – as a means to an end. Cyberspace can thus quickly become one of the primitive techniques of oblivion, a convenient field for building one's self-image, because it presents to the world an elaborately planned and carefully maintained identity.[3] It can become a playground of undreamed-of possibilities, a scene of secret rebellion in the form of piracy and hacking, a grateful audience for publishing various narcissistic banalities, a personal trainer or a tool that follows one's playlists and shares our tastes in music with other users; it can even become our very own television channel. The possibilities in cyberspace are endless, from flirting and exploring alternative sexualities to playing a fictive game of life and death – knowing that the Game Over will always be followed by New Game. Whenever an aspect of this virtual existence becomes threatening or does not coincide with the image desired by the individual, it can simply be erased and a new persona created. The user is given the opportunity to start anew, with a new password, a new avatar, new taste in music or a new blog. "Reality is perceived as malleable by Americans living lives of serial substitution, with the culturally acceptable premise that consciously manipulating or altering 'reality' is a reasonable, if not desirable, option" (Barnett 1986, 416).

One of the basic features of pathological narcissism is unreasonable fear of death, which manifests itself as complete denial (or concealment) of the idea of the mortal Self. Truth be told, this is not merely a characteristic of pathological narcissism. Freud (1914) was extremely persistent in his claim that primary narcissism disables one's ability to think one's own death. He claimed that there was no death in the Unconscious. In much the same way death is also absent from cyberspace and we could say that, at least in this particular sense, cyberspace is the perfect metaphor for the Unconscious.

It is clear that death does not feel at home in cyberspace. There are many reasons for this and some of them certainly of quite pragmatic nature – generations that inhabit cyberspace are mostly not yet old enough to be dying of natural causes. That is why every death of a so-called netizen is, essentially, unexpected and tragic; following an accident, terminal illness, suicide and the like.[4] Western cultures have, so far, refused to deal with certain issues that arise from such

[3]   We refer primarily to social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. "The concern is that these Web sites offer a gateway for self-promotion via self-descriptions, vanity via photos, and large numbers of shallow relationships (friends are counted - sometimes reaching the thousands - and in some cases ranked), each of which is potentially linked to trait narcissism" (Buffardi in Campbell 2008, 1303).

[4]   The *www.deathspace.com* website, for example, seeks and posts links to profiles of deceased users of MySpace, a social networking site, while also enabling the user to comment on various news regarding death. The website reveals juicy details and speculations about the circumstances surrounding individual deaths of young, beautiful and seemingly immortal people, the most visible and

occurrences in everyday life, such as the problems of online legacy, user profiles and blogs of the deceased, e-mails, passwords etc. We have yet to negotiate the "correct", "proper" and "normal" actions following one's (bodily) death in cyberspace.

Blogs of the deceased and their profiles on social networking websites more often than not remain accessible online, frequently due to the fact that no one is familiar with the passwords. In such cases the websites are usually transformed into a kind of a "memorial album", while friends and acquaintances write on the "wall" of the profile or leave comments and expressions of condolences to the relations, or even directly address the departed by telling them how much they miss them, wish them a happy birthday or remember them on the anniversary of their death.

There are now several online initiatives that offer an insight into the future of solving various posthumous internet-related difficulties and it is not surprising that all of them should appeal to the mind of subjects exhibiting signs of pathological narcissism, for one of the fundamental characteristics of all of these sites is skilful concealing of the fact that they are dealing with death.

On the social networking site My Wonderful Life we can, for example, create a free account on which we then post our wishes and instructions regarding the particulars of our physical and also our virtual death. We are given the opportunity to choose up to six people (in accordance with the predominant Christian ideology they are called Angels) who are then given access to important information in the event of our death. We can plan just about everything, from a traditional last will to access to our mp3 archive and computer data, we can even write our own obituary or death notice and design our tombstone. The website tries to inspire its users by showing them examples of actual funerals of users (Featured Funerals), while also offering useful tips for the funeral (Funeral Ideas), not to mention the list of things one needs to do after a loved one had passed away (Survivor Checklist). A particularly interesting and somewhat roguish fact is that the account cannot be withdrawn or deleted – not even after death.

Facebook, currently the most popular and fastest growing social networking site, offers a similar concept of eternal life. Our user account can be withdrawn and seemingly deleted, but if we should change our mind sometime in the future we can always come back and find everything exactly as it was – not unlike a room of a tragically deceased child in a Hollywood movie. Facebook's Terms and Conditions (that we must, of course, agree to, if we are to set up a profile) include giving up all our rights in relation to pictures, videos, text, etc. that we have uploaded on their server. This transfer of rights ceases if the user decides to "delete" the account.[5]

active users of social networking sites. The numerous visitors, hungry for the most mediagenic of stories, are then presented with a series of paid advertisements that are generated by the website according to the content of posts. As with standard yellow press, the profit (which depends on the number of clicks or visits to the site) is closely connected to shocking content; this is therefore a well-known strategy of the "old" media, adapted for the virtual environment. An interesting analogy can be found in the film Untraceable, which is about a serial killer who decides to broadcast his murders live through a website called killwithme.com. He plans his murders in a way that ensures his actions are connected to the rising number of viewers, random virtual visitors. Theoretically that means that if no one were to visit the site, the victim would not have died. And just as the FBI contributes to the deaths of victims by visiting the website while chasing after the murderer, so do visitors contribute to the success and profit of MyDeathSpace – even when their supposed original motive for visiting the website is to moralize and be disgusted with its content.

[5]   In February of last year, Facebook changed their Terms and Conditions. The new terms of use stated that by posting any kind of

The website www.deathswitch.com enables us to create a password-protected account within which we then make all the preparations concerning our posthumous legacy. This includes writing letters to friends and the like. Deathswitch then periodically asks us for the password and if it does not receive an answer for a while or after several inquiries, it assumes that we are most likely dead and ensures that our final wishes are carried out.

Most users of this service find it to be a practical solution to a potential problem. This same majority also appears to be distinctly aware of the difference between their "first" and "real", and their "second", online life and it would seem that there is no doubt as to which one of the two is more "real". It is therefore interesting that this does not prevent the utterly explicit implementation of the fact that no one seems to believe in: if you are not online, you are probably dead. Even worse, if you try searching your name in one of the internet browsers and no results appear, then you most likely never existed at all. I google, ergo sum. Modern Westerners who swear by hardcore science, modern medicine, scientific certainty and similar ideological constructs are suddenly led to believe that the only final and convincing death is the failure of the digital, rather than the physiological function. You are dead – when you are disconnected.

Yet this is not a case of purely "social" death or other metaphors of this kind, as it can involve perfectly "real", physical death, too. It appears that biology is no longer that final instance that we cannot overcome and that at some point switches to autopilot as the survival instinct takes over. Proof of this are numerous cases of death connected to the internet game World of Warcraft. In 2005, a Korean baby died while the parents were playing the game and simply forgot about him.[6] The maternal and all other "instincts" appear to have failed once again and the "survival instinct" does not seem to be doing much better; several deaths have been caused by people playing the aforementioned game for days on end, usually due to a combination of dehydration, lack of sleep and excretion, which led to multiple organ failure. That is also why a Chinese player of the game, called Snowly, collapsed and died – after 160 hours of playing. Her co-players from all over the world, most of whom she only knew through the Internet, arranged a funeral for her in Second Life. There is a print screen of the funeral circulating on the Internet, showing virtual bodies mourning the loss of a physical body that failed to endure the virtual strain. In much the same way the death of an actual body could cause action to begin in the matrix (i.e. a computer simulation) in the cult film of the same name. Or, as Anne Balsamo put it: "Upon analyzing the 'lived' experience of virtual reality, I discovered that this conceptual denial of the body is accomplished through the material repression of the physical body. The phenomenological experience of cyberspace depends upon and in fact requires the wilful repression of the material body . . ." (Balsamo in Boler 2007, 159).

material that we own on Facebook, we automatically transfer all the rights to the company forever. This theoretically means that Facebook could use all photographs and other material of former – perhaps also dead – users in their advertising. This sudden change of Terms and Conditions was instantly met with resistance on the web in the form of petitions, blogs, Facebook groups and the like. After a few days the new Terms and Conditions were withdrawn and replaced with the former ones. Facebook is thus allowed to store all our information in its archives with no limitations, but is not allowed to make use of them once our user account has been "deleted" (www.facebook.com/terms.php, 23. 3. 2009).

6   The GameSpot Gazette. "Couple's Online Gaming Causes Infant's Death." http://www.gamespot.com/news/2005/06/20/news_6127866.html (accessed March 16, 2009)

3. Cyberdeath and literature

Death has always been beyond the grasp of our imaginations and that is perhaps why the only way we can approach it, at least partly understand or experience it, is by displacement; through the experience of other forms of ontological difference (McHale 1992, 140). In our culture, the most readily accessible experience of such difference and perhaps the most comprehensive model of all other forms of ontological difference was, for a long time, the television. We have now moved a step forward, into cyberspace, where more interaction is required, yet that is not to say that the television was any less likely to interfere with our "reality". One consequence of our daily interaction and intimacy with the television is that we may begin to perceive the border between our personal space and the space inside the television screen not as an absolute ontological boundary but as a somewhat porous membrane. It appears that TV has become "the medium in which postmodern culture prefers to represent itself *to* itself" and is often used to introduce "a second ontological plane or level within the plane of the fictional world" (McHale 1992, 125). In Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (1990), the characters are shown as perceiving the TV space as though it were continuous with theirs and they fantasize about climbing into the screen or have TV figures pass through into their "reality". Pynchon's work, in fact, foresaw what was to happen with the advent of modern computers and the Internet some years later – we have now done what his characters dreamed about, we have climbed into the screen.

It was the television that began the "simulacral" trend of mass-media simulations uprooting reality, which in turn became "subject to the law of the precession of simulacra whereby the simulacrum precedes, indeed pre-empts, the reality it is supposed to simulate" (McHale 1992, 128). It is therefore not surprising that TV should serve not only as an ontological pluralizer in many postmodernist texts, but also as "*mise-en-abyme*, or reduced-scale model, of ontological plurality itself" (McHale 1992, 130), consequently also modelling death, in addition to other ontological differences. According to McHale, that is also why television as an object often appears in these texts as "something uncanny, almost other-worldly, associated (if only figuratively) with angelic visitors from some other order of being" (1992, 130), an example of which is most certainly also death. In Pynchon's *Vineland*, television is made into a tool "for cognitively mapping the place of death in a postmodern culture" (McHale 1992, 141), as its ontological plurality and its pluralizing effect are used to represent the ontological plurality of postmodern culture itself, and with it "the final, intractable ontological difference, the ultimate limit to all modelling and all representation, death" (ibid.).

Postmodernism as ontologically-oriented poetics is, of course, logically preoccupied with the ultimate ontological boundary, that between life and death. Many postmodernist writers of the second half of the previous century also associated and equated television with death, most notably Thomas Disch in *The Businessman* (1984), Don DeLillo in *White Noise* (1985) and Thomas Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Vineland*. According to McHale (1992, 131), "TV is associated with what in our real-world experience has always been the most salient example of "another order of being", namely death. This connection has now moved on to cyberspace and science fiction and cyberpunk writers in particular have embraced the idea of cyberdeath, of the plurality of deaths and dying on various different levels. In fact, it was not

until the emergence of the cyberpunk movement in the 1980s that a generation of science fiction writers "made the exploration of death its special province" (McHale 1992, 261). As life and death form a binary opposition, there appears to be no middle state in between. Yet it is this particular state that cyberpunk with its fusion of science fiction and postmodernist strategies for modelling death tries to imagine – "some middle state beyond or outside biological life, yet a state of non-being, not death itself" (McHale 1992, 264).

The two prevailing techniques chosen by cyberpunk writers in dealing with the aforementioned middle state are partial survival or "resurrection" by means of technology and bio-engineering. Plural deaths or "serial immortality" are not uncommon; in Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991), for example, a character dies two different deaths – first as he leaves the body and enters the electronic network, and then once again within the network itself. Another character of Cadigan's possesses the ability to shut down his metabolism and then restart it again through the use of special implants when he wishes to come alive again. In Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers* (1987), a character similarly dies twice, owing to the fact that her personality had been taped upon her first death. Human selves in cyberpunk frequently exist and persist outside the actual biological body in the form of configurations of information, sometimes within various communication and information networks or even inside computers. While "the dead manifest themselves to the living as uncanny posthumous voices" (McHale 1992, 265), they are actually nothing but constructs, mere computer simulations that never existed as biological organisms, but are created by artificial intelligence programmes. One's death can thus be understood on at least two different levels: the death of the organic body, as well as death into the half-life of cyberspace.

One of the first contemporary examples of posthumous existence as a configuration of information in cyberspace is present in Gibson's famous cyberpunk novels *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), the first beginning with the TV – death connection, a description of the sky, which was the "colour of television, tuned to a dead channel" (Gibson 1984, 3), while the second introduces various posthumous and out-of-body types, from computer simulations to personality constructs and dying "into" the cyberspace matrix. Cyberspace has thus become "the machine-mediated version of the World to Come" (McHale 1992, 266), a familiar topos of postmodernism, and at the same time a new context within which to explore the perennial human preoccupation with death.

In the light of the ultimate narcissistic fantasy of digital immortality, uploading the consciousness onto a super-computer (Harris 2001, 134), the physical body has become merely excess baggage, a burden, an inconvenient carrier of viruses. Realization of such fantasies of pathological narcissism may seem like mere science fiction and may be utterly utopian from the point of view of prevailing morale, if not from the point of view of technology. Regardless of that, or perhaps because of it, cyberspace remains a "consensual hallucination" (Gibson 1984), within which everything is possible.

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