New Media Production, for the Master's in Communication
Design, fbaul, ULisboa—2022/23

Rodrigo Amâncio
rodrigotsamancio@gmail.com

BELIEVERS ALL, WE WAIT FOR A SIGN

RESEARCH PAPER—THEORY AND PROCESS

New Media Production, for the Master's in Communication
Design, fbaul, ULisboa—2022/23

Rodrigo Amâncio
rodrigotsamancio@gmail.com

01. FOREWORD

1.1. ABSTRACT

Science is constantly seeking to allow mankind to better itself and overcome the boundaries imposed by nature. However, with the evolution of technology and the growth of human knowledge, the paradigm is now changing: science aims to create a new human. By creating a new way of thinking towards the future, the project's subject is framed around the notion of Posthumanism, a term that advocates the possibility of human evolution beyond its current physical and cognitive limitations.

Through the lenses of this intellectual and philosophical movement, my proposal is to explore how aspects inherent to the human-being as we know it today can morph, adapt or transcend according to the premises of the posthumanist movement. More specifically, this framework proposes a reflection on faith, belief and religion—notions inherently human—and how they will transcend in a posthuman forecast. The goal is to explore how the decentralization of the human being and the centralization of the posthuman will reform organized religion, perpetuator of power and conflict, as well as an anthropomorphic deity.

The link between Posthumanism and the advancement of science might create an assumption of its removal from the concerns of faith, since mostly religion and science, belief and skepticism, theism and atheism are regarded as incompatible. But it appears there are also significant ways in which religion features within discourses of Posthumanism. My approach forms an hypothesis within the framework of Speculative Design and Design Fiction, with the goal of reflecting upon the social, moral and spiritual reconfigurations implied by the decentralization of the human being and the rising of the posthuman. The main objective aspires to a fictional world and the utopian creation of a non-dualistic unification of faith/religion—a way of critically approaching the human tendency of materializing belief in organized religion.

1.2. KEYWORDS

Posthumanism, Post-Anthropocentrism, Post-Dualism, Religion, Spirituality, Transcendence, Speculative Design, Design Fiction, UX Design.

02. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. POSTHUMANISM & H+

The goal of Posthumanism as an intellectual movement, in addition to analyzing the term "humanity" from an evolutionary perspective, is to face it in constant interaction with the technological and scientific advances, as well as dissecting how the development of the human being affects the space in which it is inserted.

From a philosophical perspective, the term of Posthumanity should be faced through multiple perspectives as an umbrella term when addressed by different frameworks, such as Democratic Transhumanism, Libertarian Transhumanism, Extropianism, Antihumanism, New Materialism, Metahumanism, etc. According to Francesca Ferrando, a posthuman philosopher and investigator of Liberal Studies, all of these movements share the same notion that the term of "human" as a closed concept does not reflect anymore who we are, so it should be addressed as an evolutionary, adaptive, technological, and ecological open notion.

As an existential approach, the philosophy of Posthumanism can be addressed through the lenses of Post-Anthropocentrism (the descentralization of the human by its relation with the Anthropocene, the Biosphere and the environment) and Post-Dualism (the denial of any kind of dualism because of its direct relationship with hegemonic structures and with the matrix of domination, underlying the structural problem of the dualistic construct of identity—there is a need of avoiding dualism as a social technology in order to avoid discrimination/domination, dualism is not enough to define the human being).

Since the end of the past century, the intellectual movements of Posthumanism and Transhumanism have gained growing awareness in the humanities and social sciences. As Francesca Ferrando clarifies in her introduction to the book *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019), both currents are connected in many ways but should be sharply distinguished from each other—transhumanism develops visions of human enhancement via technology, posthumanism is much more a critical enterprise which reflects on problematic anthropocentrism(s) and humanism(s) in all domains of natural and social life. A great deal of Posthumanism's attractivity is probably due to its unifying beliefs. Many critical movements and theoretical approaches who used to be practiced separately now seem to converge. Ferrando's Posthumanism integrates feminist theory, postcolonial studies, animal and robot ethics, bioethics, environmental ethics, and even string and multiverse theories, queer theory and intercultural philosophy.

2.2. POST-ANTHROPOCENTRISM & POST-DUALISM

One significant approach on Posthumanism is to face posthumanity as a way to redefine the human being as an open notion, as a species in constant relation with matter and the universe. The classic concept of humanity features the human being in the center of the universe according to the anthropocentric model, and portrays the structures around it from a dualistic perspective. Hence, if we want to separate a new conception of humankind from those systems, we must shed some light on a post-anthropocentric and post-dualistic approach.

According to Francesca Ferrando, the post-anthropocentric approach on mankind, from a philosophical perspective, decentralizes humanity from the model of the universe, from culture and knowledge and creates a rupture with the classic renaissance vision on the human-being as model of all natural and artificial structures. It denies any kind of speciesism, the discrimination against non-human beings, and the exclusionism typical of the notion of "anthropos" (which excludes not only non-educated beings, but also the conception of any divine realm as part of the human being). It advocates the denial of the classic hierarchical structures, as well as other kinds of discrimination, like sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and so on.

All these types of discrimination are born from the dualistic preconceptions of power and dominance: male above female, white above black, west above east, culture above nature. All these demonstrations

underlie the fact that there is a structural problem in human social constructions—the dualistic creation of identity. According to Posthumanism, dualism as a social technology should be problematized, since even if we get to a society separated from any kind of discrimination (which obviously is not the case, we still live in a society that constantly discriminates), and if we keep dualism as a social tool, we will create other forms of discrimination. Just as Post-Dualism states, the dual is not enough to define humanity. Not only we are in constant interaction with each other, but also with non-human creatures, with the food we ingest, with the air we bread, with the planet as a whole. That is why Rosi Braidotti offers the solution of subjectivity not just as human but as an open frame that includes the human, the non-human, and the planet as a whole.

Just as explored in the next topic, there are significant ways in which religion features within discourses and representations of Posthumanism, and the approach of Francesca Ferrando's Ph.D. Dissertation "The Posthuman: Philosophical Posthumanism and Its Others" on the correlation between Post-Anthropocentrism and Post-Dualism views upon the posthuman is key to understanding the inevitability of such union. «Religions are characterized by a set of principles (dogmas) which define its specificities in respect to other religions, and are empirically sustained by hierarchical structures based on acquired knowledge, which are needed in order to preserve those same teachings through historical changes. Spirituality, on the other side, refers to a human tendency to conceive existence more extensively than the ordinarily perception of individual beings. Spirituality contemplates a non-separation between the inner and the outer worlds, and may culminate in mystical experiences, which offer non-mediated perceptions of transcending. While religions, in their hierarchical outfits, do not necessarily comply with a posthuman approach, spirituality and some of the spiritual trends and practices present in different religions, do. (...) I believe that a more exhaustive approach on the contribution of spiritual practices to the constitution of the post-anthropocentric, post-dualistic approach of the posthuman still needs to be undertaken.»

2.3. RELIGION & THE POSTHUMAN DISCOURSE

The common perception of religion is that it consists of 'belief' in or about God or the gods, which is then formalized in organized institutions. However, religion diversely encompasses law, ritual, sacred texts, devotional practices, material cultures and moral codes. While some understandings of religion are premised on the existence of a transcendent or supernatural being who intervenes in human lives and histories, such a definition would prove inadequate for Buddhist traditions, for example, in which no reference is made to a divine being. More satisfactory may be religion understood as a symbolic system concerned with ultimate questions about the origins of the cosmos, human destiny and transcendent meaning, that entails the search for something beyond ourselves, the belief that outside the boundaries of everyday living, something greater exists. Religious belief and practice may elaborate relations with the tangible world, embodied and concrete connections to a realm of meaning, or establish and maintain relationships with significant others, including supernatural, divine or deceased beings.

Various manifestations of religion can be traced in contemporary discussions of Posthumanism—technologies as magical and sublime, and capable of inducting humanity into sacred spaces and conditions; of the quest for human enhancement (and often, immortality); and representations of posthuman figures as holy, utopian or redemptive.

Advancements in biotechnology, AI, medicine and neuroscience tend to excite polarized responses. But, according to Elaine Graham in her theoretical exploration of the relations between Posthumanism and religious practices, both visions exhibit religious undercurrents. For example, advances in areas such as stem-cell research are sometimes opposed on the grounds that they interfere with nature and risk the consequences of playing God. For others, however, new technologies enable humanity to transcend physical limits, such as bodily boundaries, illness and mortality, or to transport their users to a higher plane of existence. «In the early days of the Internet, for example, there was much discussion of the numinous, other-worldly nature of cyberspace as transporting its users beyond the mediocrities of the flesh into a celestial world of divine omniscience and omnipresence, free from the limits of information, space or time.» [Graham, E. (2016). *Religion in Genealogy of the Posthuman*]

Similarly, the Transhumanist movement foresees a world in which digital, cybernetic, genetic and biomedical technologies become the instruments of the next phase of human evolution. Some writers have even argued that Transhumanism is some kind of religious movement, complete with charismatic leaders, sacred texts and carefully-delineated eschatologies (a part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind) of human perfectibility and theosis.

The proliferation of transhumanist thought beyond science-fiction and into the public space seems, at first, a minor ideological and physical threat. Cultural anthropologist Chris Toumey notes in an article in *Nature Nanotechnology* "I would like to see religious thought on nanotechnology develop well beyond a reaction to the more sensationalist parts of the transhumanist vision." Though the quote specifies nanotechnology, it must apply to non-secular fields surrounding transhumanism.

The only declaration near to the notion of any religious dimension in Transhumanism is that death is seen as an obstacle to eliminate. Transhumanists argue that the notion of an afterlife will wither away, and with it, the delusion of any kind of deity.

James Hughes, a proponent of Democratic Transhumanism, writes in *The Compatibility of Religious and Transhumanist Views of Metaphysics, Suffering, Virtue and Transcendence in an Enhanced Future*, "elements of the transhumanist worldview and enhancement technologies are compatible with one element or another of most world faiths, even the most fundamentalist. We can thus expect that human enhancement technologies will be adopted creatively into the theologies of groups within all the world's faiths, producing many flavors of 'trans-spirituality.'"

Thweatt-Bates doesn't disagree with Hughes' argument for compatible elements, but analyzes the elements that matter, that will shape the reality of the posthuman. Some visions upon the posthuman reflect on the desire for happiness and eliminating suffering. Others are driven by the belief there is no God and no afterlife, so there is motivation to improve the quality of the world we inhabit now. What the author does is examine Christology in the posthuman by examining two prevalent visions and looking at critiques stemming from religious grounds with serious contemplation. She is critical of the field's unwillingness to engage seriously and accurately with theology. She ends with the conclusion to consider Christ as "ultimate human, the expression of humanity to which we aspire as the fulfillment of the potential and longing for goodness that characterizes us as creatures of God."

The idea that a fascination with technology is actually an expression or a resurgence of a kind of spirituality/belief provides an intriguing approach for critical Posthumanism. Even in a supposedly secular age, expressions of religion still fuel our technological ambitions and our visions of the ends to which advanced technologies might take us.

03. HYPOTHESIS

3.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The growth of the posthuman concept as a philosophical and scientific movement implies the configuration of different perspectives organized around the notion of "human being" and the need to redefine the term so that today it can be faced as an open notion. Such a premise raises questions as to the structures of our shared identity as humans among the complexity of contemporary science, culture or religion. "While conservative, religious social forces today often labor to re-inscribe the human within a paradigm of natural law, the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns." [Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*]

My proposal is to explore how aspects inherent to the human-being as we know it today can morph, adapt or transcend according to the premises of the posthumanist movement. More specifically, this framework proposes a reflection on faith, belief and religion—notions inherently human—and how they will transcend in a posthuman forecast. The goal is to explore how the decentralization of the human being and the centralization of the posthuman will reform organized religion as a way of denying any kind of conflict or structure of power and dominance, or even of speculating about the way humanity materializes belief.

3.2. OBJECTIVES

Whether this post-naturalistic approach (as Braidotti mentions in her book *The Posthuman*) of the decentralization of the human being leads to subjective experimentations or to moral questioning of the human "nature", my goal is to try to engage critically into present issues as well as possible future outcomes, while exploring my position in relation to the post-humanist arguments. I want to approach the posthuman theory as a speculative tool, since it might be useful as a term to explore ways of engaging with the present and the future, in a manner that is empirically grounded and remains critical. "I take the posthuman predicament as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming." [Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*]

The subversion of the human condition encompasses the transformation of a set of notions inherently associated to human's perception of the world and of humanity itself, from social structures and cultural significance, to religious dogmas and gender constructions. This might be a way to critically face that set of notions from a non-dualistic perspective, while approaching how they feature in religion and spirituality. The goal is also to reflect on the possible religious dimension of Posthumanism, related to its almost metaphysical power of a non-dualistic unification.

3.3. MODUS OPERANDI

My approach forms a hypothesis within the framework of Speculative Design and Design Fiction. Fiction is a practice and transforms the practices that use it. It is not used accidentally, rather it is applied in a premeditated way and positions Speculative Design in a space between reality and the impossible (a space for dreams, hopes, and fears—*10 Notes on Speculative Design* [2011], Metahaven). The creative method moves away from doctrinal and preconceived instruments to emphasize the alliance between fiction and design and the creation of narratives, which in turn lead to the suspension of disbelief—not to merely idealize utopian/dystopian future scenarios, but to debate the kind of reality we want to live in.

The term Design Fiction, a descendant of the Speculative Design category, includes the construction of speculative scenarios that anticipate the future. For Bruce Sterling, precursor of the term, this implies the deliberate use of diegetic practices (practices that make up the fictional dimension of a given

narrative) to suspend disbelief in relation to change. «I see design essentially as a storytelling process, in the sense that I understand all human artefacts to be implicated in telling the story of the universe. (...) For me, the fiction in design fiction is not primarily about the impossible, or the futuristic, but about the multiplicity of possibilities in any ordinary decision making process.» (*A School for Design Fiction* [2015], Francisco Laranjo and James Langdon).

Speculative Design allied to fiction assumes a different area of activity than social design or what emerges defined by Dunne & Raby as humanitarian design, and design thinking that still operates within the limits of reality. As stated by the authors of *Speculative Everything*, the aim of the field is not to experiment with the world as it is and as we perceive it, or even to make it better or different, but to create completely new possibilities. «We are more interested in designing for how things could be. Conceptual design provides a space for doing this. It deals, by definition, with unreality.»

Speculating about a world suggests an almost abstract construction, a position intrinsic to the worldmaking process, as defined by historian Nelson Goodman, who declares that there are no preconceived worlds, only constructed worlds (including those that we take as the ultimate components of the "real world"). «Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking.» (*Ways of Worldmaking* [1978], Nelson Goodman).

Speculative Design, when combined with the practices of Design Fiction, is positioned beyond the limits of the tangible and almost completely separates the possible spectator from reality through the diegesis, the notion of unreality and the concept of worldmaking to place it on a level of suspension of disbelief.

3.4. HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

The subversion of the human condition ("human" as an umbrella term) encompasses the transformation of a set of notions inherently associated to human's perception, from social relations and culture, to religious dogmas and gender constructions. In this case, the hypothesis surrounds the reformulation of faith and religious thought. "The patriarchal implications of the monotheistic concept of God obviously are in contradiction to the feminist theoretical perspective of posthumanism." [Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*]

The link between Posthumanism or Transhumanism and the advancement of science and technology might create an assumption of its removal from the concerns of faith, since mostly religion and science, belief and skepticism, theism and atheism are regarded as incompatible. But it appears there are also significant ways in which religion features within discourses and representations of posthumanism. Yet there is a kind of religious dimension of Posthumanism related to its almost metaphysical power of a non-dualistic unification and its ethical call to conversion. "This reflects the emergence of what some would call a 'post-secular' culture, in which new and enduring forms of religiosity co-exist with enduring secular and atheist world-views. Religion is regarded as both inimical to scientific progress and human advancement and as the source of ancient wisdom that continues to inform understandings of what it means to be human—and by extension, posthuman." [Graham, E. (2016). *Religion in Genealogy of the Posthuman*]

The principles advocated by Posthumanism are the way of achieving a posthuman forecast—the inevitability of the decentralization of the human will lead to the reconfiguration of belief and theism, morality and organized religion. My approach forms an hypothesis within the framework of Speculative Design and Design Fiction, with the goal of reflecting upon the social, moral and spiritual reconfigurations implied by the decentralization of the human being and the rising of the posthuman, through the practices of storytelling and worldmaking. The main objective aspires to a fictional world and the utopian creation of a non-dualistic unification of faith/religion—a way critically approaching the human tendency of materializing belief in organized religion, perpetuator of power and conflict.

04. THE PROCESS

4.1. SURVEY

During the design research phase, I created a brief questionnaire to analyze the knowledge and the interest of a random sample of people regarding the project's subject and its possible ramifications. The questions addressed the participants' familiarity on the premises of Posthumanism, and their personal interests regarding the subject. The survey also inquired the participants about some of their beliefs towards religion and spirituality, keeping in mind the private and personal matters featured in these types of questions and reminding them of the anonymity of the responses and the strictly academic purposes of the results.

The survey also questioned some perspectives related to the future of religion, and about the dualistic and patriarchal conception of organized religions. It ended with a question concerning some of the most urgent aspects of society, in order to trigger some of the participants' deeper perspectives.

I found the one hundred and thirty-six responses extremely promising. Most people surprised me with their disclosure of some of their personal beliefs and their multiple perspectives were key aspects in the creation of the user personas and to deepen the extent of the theoretical background.

4.2. PERSONAS

The creation of three personas was made according to the following parameters: identification (name, age, sex, nationality, location, occupation and characteristics), a short biography so that the interests, desires and goals of the personas were justified and understood when using the interface, goals/objectives, pain points, a personality map, and finally religiosity.

For the definition of the personality of each persona to be supported by a theoretical background, I designed a personality map according to the model of the Big Five Personality Traits, which is based on five personality factors: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness.

The first persona, Jacob Wood, age of 36, is a religious person. The notion that organized religions are historically in constant conflict, perpetually creates a crisis of faith, despite always staying true to the core of his education in the belief in a higher entity. Therefore, he would be dedicated to reflect on the inherence of religion to the human race, and to reflect on possible changes in the religions he knows today. By challenging his own belief, Jacob would also speculate about the opposition between the religious notion of "human being" and new conceptions about the future.

The second persona, Sienna Jones, age of 29, is an atheist whose attachment to the sciences culturally distanced her from any kind of religious belief. Despite her concern for the future of humanity, she faces science/technology and religion as incompatible. Hence, she represents the interest in reflecting upon the future of organized religion as well as its possible disappearance. To face the possibility of an alternative future would be a way of combining human evolution with other social reconfigurations.

Finally, the third persona, Tom Brooks, age of 22, identifies as an agnostic. His convictions lead to a certain disbelief in the human race, and he sees western religion as a carrier of conflict and patriarchal structures, and therefore defends humanity's departure from traditional dogmas. He represents the target audience who would be committed to reflect on alternatives to spirituality and, like the first persona, on the inherence of religion to the human race. Tom also portrays the interest of challenging social convictions and some beliefs concerning the future of humanity.

4.3. USER JOURNEYS

The development of the three personas was followed by the user journeys, one for each persona, in order to explore as many possible interactions, goals and pain points as possible. User journeys are a schematic representation that depicts the user's navigation throughout the interface. They were organized by a set of five levels—phases, tasks, thoughts, emotions, and opportunities, which summarize the path one would take from the moment the navigation starts to the moment it ends or restarts. In the user journeys, three phases of interaction (in this case, Preface, Narrative/Fiction, and Prologue) are complemented by the various tasks done while navigating the interface, to which some possible thoughts and possible emotions are matched. For a better perception and visualization of the emotional journey, each persona has a linear graphic created to accompany the state of mind that mirrors the user's thoughts in each phase and corresponding task. As a complement to these four previous levels of information, each journey also maps some of the opportunities that each phase conveys.

The first phase works like the preface of a book, an initial moment that establishes a mindset and stimulates curiosity. It is a kind of initiation ritual in which the user has to face the first conditions necessary to start their "crossing" through the interface. The goal is to separate them from reality in order to achieve a certain level of belief in the narrative.

The second phase, the Fiction, materializes the fictional hypothesis of the narrative that intends to establish a set of conditions and uses storytelling to create a unified belief. The user proceeds to explore the interface and its content. This is the longest phase and includes the climax of the fiction. The practices of diegesis and worldmaking are relevant at this stage, to enable the creation of an alternative reality.

After the user has "crossed over", the third and final phase represents the conclusion of the narrative. It works like the prologue of a book and the goal is to keep the user perpetually suspended. They are already completely separated from reality and in a kind of acceptance phase, to analyze the implications and consequences of the fiction. It is a phase of reflection.

4.4. USERFLOW

The user journeys led to the development of the userflow, a schematization of the interface's architecture of information, where all possible paths can be visualized. It represents the global structure of the interface. The interface is organized around a main interaction—the fictional narrative. The narrative is conveyed by a set of scriptures that metaphorically represent a religious book, a new testament of a posthuman unified belief. It intends to transport its message not only by its content but also by the symbolic structure of the userflow.

The homepage gives way to the first phase of the fiction, a preface that materializes as the first book of the testament. It works as a kind of "Genesis". The following phase proposes a multiple exploration through five central books/scriptures. It materializes the fiction's "body". Several courses of reading are possible so that the user does not access all content in a single exploration. An immersive exploration is the goal. After exploring the five central books, the user is faced with the prologue (the last book). The goal is to keep them perpetually suspended.

05. THE FICTION

5.1. SYMBOLIC STRUCTURE

The narrative is conveyed by a set of scriptures that metaphorically represent a religious book, a new testament of a posthuman unified belief. It intends to transport its message not only by its content, but also by the symbolic structure of the fiction. A total of seven "books" (seven hermetic principles, seven days of creation, the number seven is even referenced 52 times in the biblical book of Revelations, the Apocalypse—seven signs, seven churches, seven stars, seven hills, etc) with a main immersive exploration of five books (five parts of the human body, five senses, five scriptures of the Pentateuch).

The homepage gives way to the first phase of the fiction, a preface that materializes as the first book of the testament. It represents a kind of initiation ritual in which the user has to face the first conditions necessary to start their "crossing" through the interface. It works as a kind of "Genesis".

The following phase proposes a multiple exploration through five central books/scriptures. It materializes the fiction's "body". The "scriptures" visually and verbally transport the conditions necessary to the creation of a unified belief. Each book represents a principle and uses symbolic charge to give way to the next. Several courses of reading are possible so that the user does not access all content in a single exploration. An immersive exploration is the goal. This is a phase of transcendence, a progressive abandonment of all preconceptions, a way of accepting a new set of principles as a way of creating a sequence of revelations.

After exploring the five central books, the user is faced with the prologue (the last book). The goal is to keep the user perpetually suspended. They are already completely separated from reality and ready to analyze the implications and consequences of the fiction. It is a phase of reflection, an ultimate revelation.

5.2. THE SEVEN BOOKS

The first book is called *Biogenesis*, and it works as an initiation, a preface to the fiction. Its name descends from a reference to an explanation of the origin of life on our planet, as the term intends the creation of life from pre-existing life. The structure of this first book is also inspired by the first biblical book, the book of Genesis, as we can see from the first sentences "In the beginning, from the formless void and the darkness of the deep (...) Let there be light, since energy generated matter, matter generated life, life generated intelligence—intelligence generated Posthumanity." This book sets the tone of the whole fiction. It casts the first principles of the unified belief, since it represents an abandonment of all preconceptions and expectations.

The second and third books represent a set of scriptures called *The Posthuman Books*. The second book of the fiction is entitled *The Eyes of the Posthuman*, and it is a poetic, contemplative, almost metaphysical exploration of our relation with time and space. It is one of the most metaphorical books and it explores the premise of unification—"One Center, one Vision, one Law, one Light." The third book is called *Now All Bodies are Free*. It is a symbolic exploration of the body. This book challenges society's preconceptions of gender and sexuality, it is a celebration of fluidity, non-binarism, of gender as volatile, rather than biological and established. "It goes deeper to shed the layers of representation to get beauty out of it."

The fourth, fifth and sixth books created a set of scriptures called *Revelations*. The fourth book is entitled *The New Earth*, and it is inspired by the biblical reference of the creation of a New Heaven in the book of the Apocalypse. This book represents a Post-Anthropocentric approach on our relation with Earth, it is a spiritual look on our multidimensional existence—"We are going into a wonderful time, when the whole Earth is going to change." The fifth book is called *Essence Turning Into Existence*, an almost transcendental description of an entangled universe. It is an exploration of nature's fundamental laws and it challenges the illusion of separation—"All bright stars reflect our eyes on one side of the firmament, entangled with skies on the other side. Once connected, now devised. Ever entangled." The sixth book is entitled *The Eyes Turned Skyward*, the final book of the fiction's body. This is probably one of the most mysterious parts of the narrative. It has an extreme symbolic charge, since it explores

the relation between the earthly and the divine. This book creates a thrilling experience because of its verbal rhythm, its symbolism and its metaphysical exploration of divinity, it is the apex of the narrative. "Believers all, we wait for a sign, a revelation, our eyes turned skyward ready to accept the truly sublime."

Finally, the seventh and last book of the fiction is called *The Fifth Revolution*. This is the moment the circle completes, a final revelation, the key to understanding the importance of all previous books. This book works as an epilogue with the purpose of leaving the reader in an eternal suspension. "From now on, this is our new reality. We are heading towards a new tireless force upon the Earth. We are going to be a part of it."

5.3. THE SYMBOLS

Each one of the seven books has a symbol associated that expands the symbolic meaning of the book. They are all drawn by alchemical symbols, Hermetic traditions, and pagan beliefs. Therefore, here is a brief explanation of each symbol and its purpose to the fiction.

Name: Circled dot
Book: Book I—Biogenesis
Meaning: Descendant of Monism and featured in multiple philosophies like Neoplatonism or the Pythagorean School to represent the first metaphysical being, the Absolute. It attributes oneness or singleness to the concept of existence. It also represents the Sun in alchemy and Hermetic traditions, a symbol of the divine spark in humanity.

Name: Knot
Book: Book II—The Eyes of the Posthuman
Meaning: According to pagan beliefs, this is traditionally a representation of protection. However, the key aspect to understand this symbol is its drawing. It represents oneness by pointing to all four cardinal directions and the unending design reveals no beginning and no end.

Name: Mercury
Book: Book III—Now All Bodies are Free
Meaning: According to alchemy and Hermetic beliefs, the symbol of Mercury represents the mind, as well as a state that could transcend death. It is also said to resemble a cosmic womb, and its connection with the female is inevitable. It represents androgyny, the fusion of both sexes, female and male, a non-dualistic glyph.

Name: Earth
Book: Book IV—The New Earth
Meaning: It is used to represent the Earth weather in the sense of the planet, the inhabited world, or as a classical element. However, descendant from some traditions of alchemy and mysticism, it is said to represent the universe, the celestial sphere. The circle can also represent the round globe, with the rivers of the Garden of Eden separating the four corners of the world.

Name: Magnesium
Book: Book V—Essence Turning Into Existence
Meaning: Magnesium is not found in its pure form, so alchemists used magnesium carbonate (also known as "magnesium alba") when conducting experiments. Because magnesium can't be extinguished easily once it has been ignited, it represents eternity to alchemists.

Name: Hexagram (unicursal)
Book: Book VI—The Eyes Turned Skyward
Meaning: The unicursal (drawn in a single line) hexagram, according to pagan tradition, is said to represent the contact between the divine and humanity. The topmost vertex is said to be representative of the Divine or the divine plane, while the downward-pointing vertex is commonly believed to symbolize humanity or the earthly realm.

Name: Hecate's Wheel (Strophalos of Hekate)
Book: Book VII—The Fifth Revolution
Meaning: This symbol's true meanings remain clouded in mystery. According to the Chaldean Oracles, a two-millennia-old Alexandrian text, the three-spoked shape surrounding the spiral symbolizes a labyrinthine serpent. The serpent was a representation of rebirth. The dot in the center is a picturisation of the force that is said to bind Man to the Father (God). It is said to be a channel on which the celestial world communicates with the material one. As an homage to Hecate (the pagan goddess) and as a male personification of God at its center, it creates an enigmatic union of both sexes, of both aspects of the divine.

5.4. WEBSITE

As explained above, the interface created to convey the fiction follows the structure of the narrative itself. The homepage gives way to the fiction and its exploration across the seven books, and it also features an About page and a Teaser.

Graphically, the fonts (Boogy Brut for the capital text and Neue Haas Grotesk Display Pro for the smaller text) were chosen not only because of its visual intensity (in the case of the serif font), but also according to its readability on the web. The colors white and red for the text and symbols and black for the background (except in the About and Teaser pages, where the background switches to white and the text to black) were also chosen considering their visual intensity.

The videos present throughout the fiction were all chosen considering not only the ethereal ambience they would provide, but also the symbolic representation of the circle—the ultimate symbol of unification, unity and oneness.

5.5. SOUND AND VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Besides the text, the symbols and the videos, each book has a specific soundtrack associated. There are eight different tracks, one for the homepage (that starts by clicking on the speaker icon at the left corner of the bottom of the page) and seven tracks for the fiction, one per book, that start automatically once you enter the narrative.

As explained before, the videos used in the homepage and during the fiction are intended to create a symbolic and metaphorical power that contributes to the creation of an ethereal ambience. Thus, the soundtracks give more depth to such a goal, and each sound was selected specifically for each book and its message.

The religiously nuanced, constant, high-sounding experience creates an immersive environment to convey the fiction. The ambience aligns the experience and the verbal/visual content with the sound. It is a way of conceptually exploring the fiction, manifesting a sound that gradually increases the rhythmic intensity throughout the seven books to match the ambience to the narrative. The lack of light and the lack of image conveys more intensely the symbolic messages of the books and creates a certain sensorial suspension.

5.6. THE TEASER

The teaser was created as a representation of the core ideas of the project. It is a verbal and visual exploration of some thoughts behind the fiction, a brief journey that expands the symbology of the narrative and a personal view on the project's tender. Through a glimpse on some of the most significant expressions of the fiction, it conveys a mindset necessary to abandon all of our preconceptions and accept the belief the narrative proposes. The vocalizations of the soundtrack, combined with the contemplative set of images, suspend all believers from reality, shed light on some layers of faith, and propels them into a new, beautiful world.

5.7. USER TESTING

After developing the final prototype, in order to validate its content and navigation, I got to do some user testing interviews to better understand the expectations of the users towards the fiction as well as its effects on them.

To better conduct the interview, I used a model composed of three phases. During each interview I started by doing some screening questions, a set of questions intended to evaluate the test participant's qualifications in order to define how they are framed within the potential audience. This phase was followed by some in-test questions, a set of questions directly related to the testing objective, including both general questions and specific questions about the interface. Finally, the interview ended with some post-test questions. These were made using a brief survey with nine quick questions about the general experience and navigation. This survey was created according to the System Usability Scale (SUS), a model tool for testing the usability of an interface providing a global vision on the user's subjective evaluations.

The results were extremely promising, as well as very helpful. Despite this being the first phase of user testing, I was able to do some improvements based on the users' insights concerning the navigation, structure and design.

06. AFTERWORD

The development of this fiction that created an alternative reality, an alternative and speculative approach on faith and religion as well as on the Posthumanist discourse, proliferated through countless moments that, in retrospect, diffused into a single, non-linear narrative. Describing this feeling of eternal suspension, of expanded and addictive belief, of extreme transformation—a never-ending await for a revelation—invokes the essence of a dramatic shift in logic, a change in skepticism coupled with disbelief. The transformative qualities of a narrative that is constantly growing expand the possibilities of its own representation, of a subjugated scrutiny to non-dualistic representations that imbue this project with an extreme symbolic power.

Throughout the entire project, from the motto to the subject, from the fiction to its extrapolations, I invoke faith and the need for the principles of Posthumanism as a way of breaking the prejudices apparently inherent to the human being. The objective in invoking such principles and in proposing a reality that constitutes a next step in human religion is not to solve the problems mentioned, but rather to problematize the subject itself.

I remember the constant sensation going through my body and that crossed the various moments of development of a fiction that separated me from reality itself—a feeling of permanent suspension and adsorption caused by the symbols and scriptures that invoked transformative principles. The representation of the origin of life depicted in so many religious books, so similar to the story we know from the biblical book of Genesis, can even be transported to the development of this fiction. A narrative which departed from Rosi Braidotti and Francesca Ferrando's account on Post-Dualism and Post-Anthropocentrism, as well as Dolores Cannon's approach on spirituality. I might even say that there was a point from which all the fiction exploded and branched out almost infinitely. It represents a process materialized as a conceptual biogenesis, if you will, life from pre-existing life.

The most challenging aspect in building a fiction of this nature was perhaps defining the mode of its performance, the purpose of the statements created and its relevance. My main objective ended up by denying the resolution of any social, cultural or political problem, passing by problematizing the starting point and the different areas of action, producing new questions and creating tensions.

Throughout the entire process, my fictional approach proposed to create a limbo of concepts in permanent suspension related to faith, belief and spirituality. It was inevitable to analyze the conditions that build the notions of human religion, so that it would be possible to challenge precisely what is in the heart of my premise. The materialization of the fiction also proposed to place the user in an almost central position, but not quite. The goal was to create an experience that, above all, immersed the user in an ethereal ambience, overwhelmed by the statements of each book and their symbolic charge.

In order to convey these goals to the creation of a narrative and to challenge stabilizing concepts of dualism, the project proposed the fictional creation of a new universal and unified belief, a non-dualistic approach on faith and religiosity, a transcendental journey through some of the premises of Posthumanism. The possibility of the creation of a new testament, a new religious book, opens a range of possibilities for speculation regarding the detachment of humanity in relation to structures of power and doctrinal domination, to anthropomorphic dogmas and to gender dualistic constructions.

The plurality of possibilities invoked by the fiction also allows me to speculate about what follows the suspension that I advocate so much in this afterword. However, this extrapolation should not add noise to a narrative that by itself evokes extremely complex ideas. Each and every ramification related to the premise of the project was explored not as an alternative, but in a directed, holistic way, integrated in the larger unity of the fiction. It is this speculation that allowed the creation of the seventh book, the Epilogue, a culmination of a fiction that does not actually end, but rather fulfills the circle. It is by perpetuating the problematization of structures that must continue to be challenged that allows the narrative to go beyond the paradigms associated with organized religion, domination, conflict, and all kinds of dualistic structures.

As a final note, and considering that I leave you with some relevant projectual affinities and theoretical references at the end of this article, it is worthy to disclaim the way this new unified belief opens possibilities to reconfigure the way we approach multiple human ideals. After centuries of triumph of the patriarchal model, there are new revelations that finally go beyond structural social patterns. All intellectual movements, all data, all sciences are based on the study of the human being, on its mind, on its perspective. But humanity is no longer in the center of the universe. The whole universe is entangled, even if the illusion of separation makes us think otherwise, and the link between us humans and what for centuries we faced as the divine is perhaps within our reach, closer to us than what we might have imagined.

We are finally here, face to face with a new era where a new testament will set a totally different sequence of matter and energy relations, of belief and religious conditions. An eternal belief, unique and absolute, universal and perpetual, was capable of propelling me into its own logic—like a world onto itself. Believers all, we wait for a sign, a revelation. Our eyes are tuned skyward, ready to accept the truly sublime.

07. FICTIONAL AFFINITIES

7.1. THE X-FILES—BIOGENESIS: THE MYSTERY OF LIFE (1999), CHRIS CARTER AND FRANK SPOTNITZ

Biogenesis is the twenty-second episode of the sixth season of the science fiction series The X-Files. The episode, integrated in the set of beliefs that hover around the series, explores the possibility of the integration of an external entity in the development of terrestrial life, in mass extinctions and in the evolution of the human race. The sequence that makes up the episode's introduction—The Mystery of Life—, narrated by one of the main characters, describes the process of life evolution and invokes the concept that gives the episode its name, the term "biogenesis". The concept describes the process of production of living organisms, reiterating the premise that living beings can only arise from other living beings. The term emerges in parallel with the idea of "abiogenesis", as while the former describes a generation of beings originating from other beings, the latter refers to the creation of life from non-living materials through molecular evolution.

7.2. THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (1969), URSULA K. LE GUIN [BOOK]

Characterized as a science fiction book where the novel plays an essential role in the exploration of new entities, Hainish's universe corresponds to a fictional cycle that Le Guin explores in The Left Hand of Darkness, the fourth book in a series that addresses the existence of an androgynous alternate reality. With this fiction, the American author proposes an approach to the effect of sex and gender on culture, society and even religion, explored in particular through the relationship of the two protagonists, Genly Ai, a human being native to planet Earth, and Estraven, a being from the planet Gethen, where the natives are ambisexual, with no fixed sex.

08. REFERENCES

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman.* [book]

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* [book]

Cannon, D. (2001). *The Convoluted Universe—Book One.* [book]

Cannon, D. (2011). *The Three Waves of Volunteers and the New Earth.* [book]

Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism.* [book]

Graham, E. (2016). *Religion in Genealogy of the Posthuman.*
Available at https://criticalposthumanism.net/religion/

Hashmi, H. (2020). *Religion and the Posthuman Discourse.*
Available at https://traversingtradition.com/2020/02/03/religion-and-the-posthuman-discourse/

Le Guin, U. (1988). *Is Gender Necessary?* Redux version.
Available at https://americanfuturesiup.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/is-gender-necessary.pdf

Le Guin, U. (1969). *The Left Hand of Darkness.* [book]

Three Initiates. (1908). *The Kybalion: A Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece* [book]

Vita-More, N. (1993). *The Transhumanist Manifesto.*
Available at https://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-manifesto

Wirtz, M. (2021). *The Hidden Religious Dimension of Posthumanism. A Commentary on Francesca Ferrando's Philosophical Posthumanism.*
Available at https://journals.tplondon.com/jp/article/view/2096

World Transhumanist Association (2002). *The Transhumanist Declaration.*
Available at https://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration