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Reading Pelevin in the 'Age of Spiritual Machines'

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P for Posthumanism: Reading Pelevin in the ‘Age of Spiritual Machines’

Ekaterina Gasparian

Dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Modern Languages, Department of Russian, September 2019

25,073 words

Abstract

This dissertation offers a new approach to the works of the contemporary Russian writer Viktor Pelevin: from the perspective of posthumanism. Trans-/posthumanism is a salient trend stimulated by the techno-scientific advance and the resulting benefits of a disembodied condition. It seeks to redefine the notion of human and thus move away from the predominantly anthropocentric to a more inclusive posthuman society. I argue in my dissertation that such an approach makes it possible to reconcile the divergences in the existing critical reviews of Pelevin's works because it illustrates how defying literary convention is, in itself, an artistic method aimed at developing a philosophical message. Merging the conventions of both 'high' and 'mass' literature and creating fluid imaginary realities in his works, Pelevin transcends the boundaries of literary form and thus illustrates the concept of disembodiment through his recurring theme of nothingness – 'pustota'.

Pelevin experiments with the possibilities of transhumanism in two domains: genre and character. This research, therefore, looks at the ways he takes the notion of disembodiment to its extreme; it then analyses the philosophical message that these techniques help him to convey. By exposing the limitations of the human body and mind, the author topples the human being from his superior position, thus creating a case for a new, posthumanist vision. It is structured according to the disembodied experiences of the characters - perceiving life through instinct, intellect, and intuition – to better illustrate his key philosophical message. The dissertation mainly focuses on his writing from 1999 which marks his growing engagement with the theme: *Generation II* (1999); *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (2004); *Empire V/Batman Apollo* duology (2006/2013); *t* (2009); *Ananasnaia voda dl'a prekrasnoi damy* (2010), *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011), *iPhuck10* (2017), and *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi* (2018). It, however, also includes references to his earlier works, where relevant.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:.....

Note on transliteration and references

I have used the Simplified Library of Congress transliterating style without diacritics; I have transliterated ě as e and ů as i.

For guidance on referencing, I used the third edition of the Modern Humanities Research Association style guide which is available online at <<http://www.mhra.org.uk/pdf/MHRA-Style-Guide-3rd-Edn.pdf>>

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Introduction*

The dissertation offers a new approach to interpreting the works of Viktor Pelevin: from the perspective of posthumanism. Viktor Pelevin is a prolific author, active on the Russian literary scene since 1989, whom critics frequently, though not exclusively, associate with Russian postmodernism. His oeuvre, spanning almost three decades now, not only represents a record of his generation's tumultuous socio-cultural history but also offers diverse material for a multi-disciplinary analysis.

Scholars have extensively analysed Pelevin's works in the context of postmodernism, conceptualism, Buddhism, and mythology but until now there has not been a consistent analysis of them from the perspective of posthumanism. Thus Kornev,¹ Minkevich,² Stepan'an³ view Pelevin in largely postmodern terms, pointing to the 'multi-layered' character of his texts, pastiche of genres, intertextuality; Genis⁴ detects an almost cinematic 'collage of meanings and ideas' conveyed both in the foreground and the *mise-en-scène*. Lipovetskii and Genis take this postmodern reading of Pelevin's works deeper and analyse him within the conceptualist aesthetics that focuses on the idea rather than the form of a work of art. There is a tendency among the Russian critics to view Pelevin through the prism of Moscow conceptualism. Its main distinction from Western conceptualism was outlined by Iliia Kabakov and quoted by Lipovetskii in his article: 'вещь заменяется не на другую вещь и даже не на описание, имеющее какой-то конкретный смысл [...] а на пустоту из-за тотальной обесцененности реальности (как 'вещной', так и словесной)'.⁵ But Pelevin as an artist does not merely deconstruct reality, he *creates* a conceptual work of art by rearranging it through simulacra of reality: 'Пелевин упорно доказывал, что из симулякров и фикций можно заново построить реальность'.⁶ This interpretation resonates with Genis's vision of Pelevin's conceptualism: 'Попав в систему отражений, реальность нашего

* The title of the dissertation makes reference to Ray Kurzweil's book *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Viking Press, 1999).

¹ Sergei Kornev, 'Stolknovenie pustot: mozhnet li postmodernizm byt' russkim ili klasicheskim? Ob odnoi avant'ure Viktora Pelevina', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 28 (1997), 244-59 (p.250).

² Andrei Minkevich, 'Pokolenie Pelevina', *Russkaia gazeta*, 2001, <www.russ.ru/krug/99-04-08/minkev.htm> [accessed 18 September 2019]

³ Karen Stepan'an, 'Realizm kak spasenie ot snov', *Znam'a*, 11, (1996), 194-200 (p.195).

⁴ Alexandr Genis, 'Beseda des'ataia: Pole chudes. Viktor Pelevin', *Zvezda*, 12 (1997), 230-33 (p.232).

⁵ Mark Lipovetskii, 'Kontseptualizm i neobarokko', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 7 September 2000 <http://www.ng.ru/%20kafedra/2000-09-07/3_postmodern.html> [accessed 18 September 2019]

⁶ Mark Lipovetskii, 'Goluboe salo pokoleniia, ili Dva mifa ob odnom krizise', *Znam'a*, 11 (1999), 207-15 (p.210).

бытия сходит на нет. [...] Вымысел у Пелевина есть инструмент конструкции реальности'.⁷ Kuritsyn draws a parallel with socialist art aesthetics and Pelevin's conceptualism; he highlights the fake realities of the Soviet collective mind which existed through shared Soviet experience and belief but in fact were a simulacrum: 'исток таких вполне постмодернистских миров-симулякров обнаруживается в эстетике соцреализма'.⁸ Western critics also commented on the aesthetics of emptiness and artifice of Pelevin's constructed worlds. Dalton-Brown points to the 'ludic', playfully superficial nature of his texts, comparing them with comic-books and pop-art: 'The texts reveal themselves for what they really are: comic-book reflections of the world. This is pop-art which, like Warhol's or Lichtenstein's pictures, offers its own images as ridiculously sacred, yet it is pop-art told with a Nabokovian artistry which delights'.⁹ Thus, the key feature of Pelevin's conceptualism, as seen both by Russian and Western critics and scholars, is an array of constructed realities that, in their multiplicity and through his break from aesthetic conventions, deconstruct cultural codes, thus revealing the ultimate and abject void.

Demythologisation in Pelevin's earlier works is commonly viewed by critics with reference to Soviet ideology and the later collapse of the Soviet Union that brought about confusion in the collective minds of the early post-Soviet generation, i.e. leaving an abject void. Noordenbos offers an unconventional analysis of deconstruction and the trope of the void in Pelevin's novel *Čapaev i Pustota*. The scholar interprets the fragmented structure of the first-person narrative with 'blank spaces' of consciousness and history as representations of traumatic confusion, collective 'disorientation produced by political upheaval' and failed 'attempts to piece together the disparate parts of Russia's twentieth-century past'.¹⁰ The researcher develops his reasoning from his interpretation of the familiar image of the black bagel.¹¹ According to Noordenbos, the plot of the novel loops around the black hole of Russia's traumatised history and the hole, therefore, represents typical symptoms of the trauma: emptiness, amnesia, and hollowed out identity.

⁷ Aleksandr Genis, 'Fenomen Pelevina', <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/otb/1999/obt.02.shtml> [accessed 18 September 2019]

⁸ V'acheslav Kuritsyn, 'Kontseptualizm i sotsart: tela i nostalgii', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2 (1998), 306-10, p.308.

⁹ Sally Dalton-Brown, 'Ludic Nonchalance or Ludicrous Despair? Viktor Pelevin and Russian Postmodernist Prose', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (April 1997), 216-233, p.227.

¹⁰ Boris Noordenbos, 'Shocking Histories and Missing Memories: Trauma in Viktor Pelevin's *Čapaev i Pustota*', *Russian Literature* Vol. 85 (October 2016), 43-68, p.49.

¹¹ 'Black bagel' is a pun based on several meanings: the Russian idiom 'дырка от бублика' for something futile, i.e. a void; the Zen Buddhist circle symbolising both enlightenment and the void.

In the context of Pelevin's deconstruction of aesthetic conventions, most scholars and critics, despite diverging on the issue of postmodernism in Pelevin, point to the specific nature of his deconstructions – self-referential, self-ironic, and polymorphic. Thus, Vicks coins the term 'déjà vu postmodernism' in relation to his work. According to her definition, 'Déjà vu postmodernism is postmodernism so familiar that it becomes a pseudo-mythologised condition experienced as a rerun. Enacting déjà-vu postmodernism, Pelevin's novels deconstruct themselves as literary art... and they depict post-Soviet culture as both created by a void and as essentially nothing itself'.¹² Vicks uses the example of *Generation II*, which positions itself as a cynical product, as 'literature that is "not-literature"', and contends that the role of Russian literature in society has been 'degraded to nothing'.¹³ This view resonates with Hutchings's conclusion in his analysis of the same novel that postmodernist 'Pelevin enacts the end of literature' in the age of the highly commodified camera.¹⁴

The above perspectives on Pelevin's postmodern deconstruction redefine the role of contemporary literature and authorship, a subject of great debate among scholars. As viewed by Dalton-Brown in her analysis of *t* (2009), 'Pelevin's powerful 'action-man' *t* is a means of introducing the theme of authorial impotence'.¹⁵ This view of authorship correlates with Docherty's analysis of the notion of 'postmodern character' that is also dominated by 'disappearance' of the author: '... character never is, but is always about-to-be, endlessly deferred, fragmented, elusive, less an epistemological conundrum than an ontological one in terms of which the fictionality of the characters (and text) can be called into question'.¹⁶

Such a vision of authorship and literature correlates with Pelevin's poetics which is best characterised by fluidity and elusiveness of fragmented reality in an abject void of subjective existence. The polymorphic nature of his writing accounts for another perspective from which his works were commonly viewed: Buddhism. Kornev links Pelevin's deconstruction of external reality with the Buddhist method of liberation of the mind from clinging and passions. Similarly, he applies the Buddhist concept of 'no-self' to the interpretation of the trope of emptiness, void, nothingness. By discarding norms, prejudice and grand narratives a person can accept the transience of life and finite nature of physical form, which resonates

¹² Meghan Vicks, *Narratives of Nothing in 20th-Century Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p.151.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.153.

¹⁴ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age: The Word as Image* (Routledge, 2004), p.177.

¹⁵ Sally Dalton-Brown, 'Looking for the Creator: Pelevin and the Impotent Writer in *T* (2009) and *Ananasnaia voda dlia prekrasnoi damy* (2011)', *Modern Language Review* Vol. 109 (2014), 199-218, p.200.

¹⁶ Thomas Docherty, 'Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. by E. Smyth (London: Batsford, 1991), 169–88 (pp. 169, 172).

with classical Buddhism: ‘как говорят специалисты, все, что он делает, и буквально и по духу вполне укладывается в ортодоксальную традицию Махаяны’.¹⁷ Other critics, too, draw a parallel between Buddhism/Zen-Buddhism and some of Pelevin’s literary methods: ‘Пелевин использует один из распространенных приемов японской дзен-буддистской поэзии – хонкадори, что означает включение в свой текст чужого текста или определенных фрагментов...’.¹⁸ Kuznetsov interprets Pelevin’s symbolism of emptiness from the Buddhist perspective and treats this recurring theme of nothingness as an allegorical explanation of the essence of Buddhism: ‘Можно назвать это “двойным кодированием”... но лучше увидеть в этом следование буддистской традиции, в которой сожжение мастером статуи Будды служит лучшим объяснением сущности буддизма’.¹⁹

This brief overview illustrates the diversity of critical approaches to Pelevin’s writing and also reveals a common feature present in all the studies – perpetual emptiness as the prerequisite condition for transcendence and creation of new forms that are equally transient. This condition appears to underpin the transhumanist aesthetics and the resulting posthumanist vision. The nature of our twenty-first-century condition creates the need for a consistent approach to contemporary literature through the prism of posthuman thought. As McQuillen and Vaingurt demonstrate in *The Human Reimagined*, today it is difficult ‘to draw discreet [sic] boundaries between nature, technology and humanity’ because of ‘continuous cyborgisation and prosthetisation of the body, the technologization of reproductive practices [...], the rapidly growing sophistication of artificial intelligence machines, and the increasing presence and influence of digital environments and virtual spaces in daily life and identity formation’.²⁰ In the light of these fundamental changes, the traditional humanist discourse with its inherent anthropocentrism needs to be redefined relative to the deep technological and epistemological shifts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Pelevin’s writing, especially the poetics and philosophy of his later works, reflects these changes. As a chronicler of his generation, Pelevin focuses on contemporary socio-cultural context, critically observing a trajectory of social and cultural change in society. His works, therefore, have evolved thematically over time to reflect recent advances in science and technology. He has always been interested in scientific and technological possibilities, referring to cutting-edge technologies, aspects of quantum physics or IT, and scientists

¹⁷ Kornev, *Ibid.*, p.251.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Zakurenko, ‘Iskomaia pustota’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 3 (1998), 93-6 (p.95).

¹⁹ Sergei Kuznetsov, ‘Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev na puti voina’, *Kommersant*, 27 June 1996, p.13.

²⁰ Colleen McQuillen, Julia Vaingurt, *The Human Reimagined: Posthumanism in Russia (Cultural Revolutions: Russia in the Twentieth Century)*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), p.7.

working in the fields associated with posthumanism. His texts thus give multiple imaginative interpretations of ‘singularity’ (physics); computationism and biorobotics (Dennet and Chandler, AI and the human brain). Besides, in literary criticism and scholarship the image of emptiness, abyss, void has been invariably addressed as a typical feature of Pelevin’s writing style. This recurring trope of his works strongly resonates with the notion of disembodiment which is the key concept of posthumanism. Emptiness, as pointed out earlier, also resonates with the notion of ‘no-self’ in Buddhism and is part of a broader perspective that treats all living matter as a transient flow of energy. In fact, emptiness and transience appear to be common features shared by transhumanism and Buddhism, despite their very different epistemological systems. A prominent advocate of democratic transhumanism, James Hughes, commented on this similarity in 2006 in an online interview:

Buddhism is a faith tradition and set of spiritual practices whose core idea is that human beings can become more than human by application of mental technology and self-discipline. As such it is probably the most compatible of the older faiths with transhumanism [...] in its insistence that there is no discrete, continuous ego that could be protected and perpetuated. [...] I think we will increasingly see the truth of the emptiness of the self as we apply neurotechnologies and life extension.²¹

My analysis, however, focuses on transhumanism and therefore does not attempt a detailed Buddhist reading of Pelevin. But this similarity is important because it, as well as Pelevin’s references to latest scientific and technological realities, reveals his engagement with the topic of posthumanism and thus necessitates a new approach to his work. In my dissertation I will attempt a reading of his texts through transhumanist aesthetics and philosophy. Such an approach does not contradict the previous readings of Pelevin; in fact, it makes it possible to bring together the key features from existing literary criticism and scholarship in a uniform, consistent analysis. I will illustrate that, true to his style of ‘придумщик, фантазер [...], сюжетчик’,²² Pelevin engages with posthumanism not as its follower but rather as a developer of a new, posthumanist vision.

Livers has read *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011) from the perspective of humanism-versus-posthumanism. The key ethical framework on which the scholar builds his reasoning is ‘the

²¹ James Hughes, ‘Interview: Techno-social Changesurfer’, 13 June 2006. <<http://ishush.blogspot.com/2006/06/interview-james-hughes-techno-social.html>> [accessed 17 September 2019]

²² Sergei Chuprinin, ‘Sbyvshees’a nesbyvshees’a: liberal’nyi vzgl’ad na sovremennuiu literaturu’, *Znam’a*, 9 (1993), 181-88 (p.182).

gradual opening of the self to cultural and ontological others'.²³ He analyses how the novel deconstructs traditional humanist taxonomies that privilege humanity and exclude 'the Other' in order to lay the foundation for the posthumanist ethics of confluence, acceptance and 'humility in the face of the Other'.²⁴ Livers contends that the author achieves this by dismantling the privileged position of 'embodied consciousness' of man and equating it with the 'disembodied self-awareness of artificial intelligence'.²⁵ Livers's study is a vivid illustration of the need to apply a consistent posthumanist perspective to contemporary literature. And this is what I intend to achieve in my analysis of Pelevin's oeuvre, treating his works as a single narrative that heralds a new, posthumanist, vision.

The term posthumanism needs to be defined and placed within the relevant academic context. Today there are two terms – transhumanism and posthumanism - often used interchangeably. However, there is a growing tendency in scholarship to distinguish between the two. According to Bostrom²⁶, one of the key scholars of transhumanism and co-founder of The World Transhumanist Association (1998), the term 'transhumanism' was introduced by Julian Huxley, a distinguished biologist and the brother of the writer Aldous Huxley. In his book *Religion Without Revelation*, Julian focused on the scientific potential for metaphysical transcendence of the human form:

The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself – not just sporadically, ... but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.²⁷

The use of 'posthumanism' as a term is traced back to Ihab Hassan, a literary figure preoccupied with the postmodern condition, who in the late 70s wrote about the end of the era of humanism in its current form and emphasised the need to redefine the nature and role of the human being. He wrote: 'We need first to understand that the human form – including the human desire and all its external representations – may be changing radically and thus must

23 Keith Livers, 'Is There Humanity In Posthumanity? Viktor Pelevin's S.N.U.F.F.', *Slavic and East European Journal* no. 3 (Fall 2018), special issue 'Twenty Years After *Chapaev and the Void*: Viktor Pelevin, Then, and Now', 503-522 (p.507).

24 Emmanuel Levinas, 'What No One Else Can Do In My Place: A Conversation with Emmanuel Levinas', *In Religion: A Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.300.

25 Livers, *Ibid.*, p.516.

26 Nick Bostrom, 'A History of Transhumanist Thought', *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol.14 (1), April 2005, 15-67 (p.58).

27 Julian Huxley, *Religion without revelation* (London: E. Benn, 1927), p.24.

be revisioned'.²⁸ These lines reiterate the central tenet of posthumanists: the end of anthropocentrism and the start of a new epoch that celebrates equal status of other forms alongside the human. Posthumanism therefore recognises that a human being is one of the multiple representations of life and is not isolated from other beings in the constant flux of matter.

Both transhumanism and posthumanism are preoccupied with the disembodied human condition, a focus shared with cosmism that developed as a movement in the early twentieth-century stimulated by achievements in physics. Both focus on the ways and consequences of transcending the traditional physical boundaries. Some cosmologists, such as Russian biocosmist Konstantin Tsiolkovskii or philosopher and futurologist Nikolai F'edorov, even tried to link their scientific views with mythological or esoteric teachings. F'edorov tried to synthesise Orthodox religion and science, looking at ways for humans to achieve immortality by assembling dispersed molecules and atoms in order to overcome mortality, of which he wrote: '[к]ак ни глубоки причины смертности, смертность не изначальна' (e.g. 'O smertnosti').²⁹ Tsiolkovskii used similar imagery when he described a human as 'государство' 'бессмертны[х] атом[ов]'.³⁰ Regardless of the esoteric component of their specific theories, it is essential to point out to their understanding of a human being as a form of larger matter and part of the universe that is controlled by yet undiscovered laws. This approach to the universe resonates with Pelevin's imagery: 'Все на свете было сделано из одной и той же субстанции. И этой субстанцией был я сам'.³¹

However, there is a broad gap between transhumanism and posthumanism with regard to their perspectives on the humanist ethos. According to Ranisch and Sorgner, while the narrative in both transhumanism and posthumanism moves 'beyond humanism', their key difference is in diverging philosophical perspectives on the role and position of the human being.³² Thus, transhumanism can be viewed as 'an *intensification* of humanism', since it retains the humanist anthropocentrism and strives for progress and self-perfection of the humankind enhanced by scientific and technological advances.³³ The main caveat is therefore

28 Ihab Hassan, 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?', *Georgia Review*, 1977, Vol.31 (4), 830–850, p.843.

29 Nikolai F. F'edorov, 'O smertnosti' in *Collection of Writings* in 4 volumes, ed. by Ivan I. Blauberg (Moscow: Progress-Traditsia, Evidentis, 1995—2004), pp.200-01 (p.200).

30 Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, *Vol'a vselenoi: neizvestnye razumnye sily* (Kaluga, 1928).

31 Viktor Pelevin, *Ampir V* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), p.240.

32 Stefan L. Sorgner, *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, ed. by Robert Ranisch and Stefan L. Sorgner (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2014), p.1.

33 *Ibid.*, p.10.

‘that humans should take evolution in their own hands and undertake broad-scale attempts to incorporate technologies into their lives’.³⁴

In popular culture transhumanism (or ‘pop posthumanism’, according to Nayar)³⁵ refers to a wide range of artistic tools used to create transhuman characters in a sci-fi narrative. Posthumanism, however, positions itself as ‘a *break*’ from humanist ideals; it questions ‘traditional concepts of the human and criticis[es] the idea that “man is the measure of all things”’.³⁶ Such a distinction is in line with More’s definition of posthumanism:

Philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values.³⁷

Thus, posthumanism is concerned with social, political, and philosophical aspects of the change in human physicality leading to a breakthrough in cognition, perception, and morality. In his book *Posthumanism* Nayar presents his own conceptual system; he believes posthumanism should be ‘critical’ of the existing dominance of man and should ‘call for a more inclusive definition of life, and a greater moral-ethical response, and responsibility, to non-human life forms in the age of species blurring and species mixing. ... [I]t interrogates the hierarchic ordering – and subsequently exploitation and even eradication – of life forms’.³⁸

In this dissertation, to ensure consistency of approach, I will apply the term transhumanism to Pelevin’s artistic methods in order to show how he uses it as a literary tool to explore the various aspects of the disembodied condition. He transcends the boundaries of this condition by creating non-human characters and experimenting with the genre forms. I will also analyse how this literary tool helps the author convey complex metaphysical ideas about the nature and source of life, the self in its relation to the world, and how these ideas are redefined in the context of transhumanism. This methodology will then show that his philosophical exploration of the disembodied condition resonates with the non-anthropocentric focus of posthumanism. Therefore, the term posthumanism in this research

³⁴ Ibid., p.13.

³⁵ Pramod Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), pp.8–9.

³⁶ Ranisch and Sorgner, p.16.

³⁷ Max More, ‘Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy’, *Extropy*, 6 (summer 1990), 6-12, <<http://www.maxmore.com/transhum.htm>> [accessed 23 May 2019]

³⁸ Nayar, p.9.

will be used in the context of Pelevin's philosophical argument. I will trace how the posthumanist perspective in Pelevin's works topples the human being from his self-proclaimed superior position and creates a need to integrate our species into the heterogeneous but interconnected multiplicity of all other sentient and non-sentient beings.

The disembodied condition of the transhumanist context suggests a key concept that is essential to Pelevin's argument – *transcendence* of physical form – that, in its turn implies changeable and heterogeneous multiplicity of modified forms. The *Transhumanist Declaration*³⁹ stipulates the equality of all 'modified' life forms and artificial intellects. Reading Pelevin through the prism of transhumanism, we can expand the semantic boundaries of physical form to include literary form. This feature of Pelevin's writing was discussed in the context of postmodernism (see above reviews). Transcendence therefore can imply modification of the literary form, including the genre. Modification, in the transhumanist context, can be synonymous with *mutation*. In fact, that is how some researchers refer to postmodern writing of the twentieth- twenty-first centuries: Skoropanova refers to it as 'mutation of the genres'.⁴⁰ So, from an artistic point of view, in Pelevin's fiction transhumanism as a literary method is used to transcend the form at two levels – to modify existing genre conventions and to experiment with the forms in which his characters exist in fictional realities.

Genres are dynamic, constantly evolving forms, and existing scholarship in literary criticism reveals a diversity of their definitions. However, this dissertation is not a study of genres, that is why Pelevin's texts are analysed only relative to commonly accepted genre conventions as presented in dictionaries of literary terms (e.g. in Barnet in 1964⁴¹, and later in Cuddon 1998⁴²). The key point of this overview is to show how transcending the form works towards a posthumanist argument. Pelevin does not fit into any specific genre convention; his texts incorporate features of fable, fairy tale, science fiction, Gothic, detective, satire, socio-philosophical novel, and have elements of bildungsroman. Works such as 'Zatvornik i Shestipalyi' (1990), *Zhizn' nasekomykh* (1993), or *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (2004) are often referred to as fables, with characters being allegorical animal representations of humans

39 Nick Bostrom, Max More, et al, "Transhumanist declaration", *Humanity+ Board* (2009) <<https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/>> [accessed 25 May 2019]

40 Irina S. Skoropanova, *Russkaia postmodernistskaia literatura: Novaia filosofia, novyi iazyk* (Moscow: Flinta nauka, 2007), p.58.

41 Sylvan Barnet, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Constable, 1964).

42 John Anthony Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Wiley, 1998).

used by the author to convey a moral message. Genis believes that in *Zhizn' nasekomykh* the author re-evaluates and adds a different ring to Krylov's 'Strekoza i Muravei' (1808):

[Пелевин] рассказывает переведенную на язык мыльной оперы историю 'муравья', который захотел стать 'стрекозой'. [...] Обращаясь к хрестоматийному сюжету, Пелевин его не пересказывает и не пародирует, а переосмысливает, добавляя свою мораль к старой басне.⁴³

This definition is based on the trait of anthropomorphising animal characters in the books but does not take account of authorial intent, which in Pelevin's works, unlike a traditional fable, is hardly to moralise. In fact, as discussed above, he tries to remove himself from the narrative as an author; in *iPhuckIO* he even takes this technique to its extreme and markets the novel as a creation of an algorithm. Besides, as he admitted in an interview to *Rossiiskaia gazeta* in 2005: '[...] я не считаю своей функцией воспитание читателя - этим должны заниматься телевидение и прокуратура'.⁴⁴ These considerations yet again point to the hybrid nature of Pelevin's writing style.

Another genre with which some of Pelevin's novels are associated is the Gothic novel. Taking only character archetypes as the basis for classification, we can name his duology *Ampir V* (2006) and *Batman Apollo* (2013) as the most vivid examples, with vampire creatures dominating the world. Even though some of the traits of a Gothic novel are deliberately included as a literary experiment (e.g. vampire protagonists and their miraculous abilities), these hardly follow the grim, scary Gothic narrative with the themes of forbidden love, yearning, and alienation of the character as 'the Other'. The Gothic appears to be present only superficially, as an external form. So some scholars and critics use these incongruities to refer to Pelevin's works as fairy tales: 'В своих книгах Пелевин все чаще [...] использует образы героев и сюжеты из сказок. Можно упомянуть Красную Шапочку, Крошечку-Хаврошечку и многие другие. [...] Вообще жанр философской сказки – это подходящая форма говорить о серьезных вещах без излишнего морализаторства, пафоса и патетики'.⁴⁵ I would argue, however, if we can still talk of specific prose forms in twentieth- and twenty-first-century writing, a fairy tale narrative does not have satire at its core, while Pelevin's texts have at least some element of it.

43 Aleksandr Genis, 'Viktor Pelevin: granitsy i metamorfozy', *Znam'a*, 12 (1995), 210-214 (p.212).

44 Viktor Pelevin in an interview to Mikhail Osin, 'Avtor eto sadovnik sobstvennogo romana', *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 3770, 14 May 2005 <<https://rg.ru/2005/05/14/pelevin.html>> [accessed 1- September 2019]

45 Stanislav Gurin, 'Pelevin mezhdu Buddizmom i khristianstvom', *Topos*, 24 April 2018. <<http://Znam'a.topos.ru/article/ontologicheskie-progulki/pelevin-mezhdu-buddizmom-i-hristianstvom>> [accessed 23 May 2019]

Moving on to the parallel between Pelevin's works and science fiction, his most overtly sci-fi novels – *Generation II* (1999), *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011), *iPhuck10* (2017) - would not fit within any of the diverse common definitions of the genre. Pelevin's novels do not focus on what Asimov describes as 'the *reaction* of human beings to changes in science and technology',⁴⁶ they incorporate these changes into the setting. Nor are his books a mere 'realistic speculation about possible future events',⁴⁷ as Heinlein characterises science fiction. Shippey's definition of science fiction does seem to include *S.N.U.F.F.* and *iPhuck10*, as they both have the 'novum',⁴⁸ which he defined as 'a discrete piece of information recognizable as not-true, but also as not-unlike-true, not-flatly- (and in the current state of knowledge) impossible'. But in the broader narrative this definition does not work either. Pelevin appears to borrow the form, the general concept of a particular genre, which he then transcends, thus emphasising the broad scope of the concept of disembodiment (applied to his literary method). This pastiche of genres resonates with what some critics referred to as 'multilayered narrative', 'collage', 'genre mutation' as features of postmodern literature (see above). At the same time Pelevin transcends the conventions of postmodernism too, as evidenced in scholarship and critical reviews of his works. For example, Genis, Ivanova, Bogdanova separately pointed out Pelevin's non-conformity with the postmodern tradition. Ivanova refers him to a group of writers that have 'overcome postmodernism' ('преодолевшие постмодернизм').⁴⁹ Bogdanova contends that, unlike writers who deconstruct everything in a sweeping postmodern nihilist urge, Pelevin tends to acknowledge some values which he shows as forgotten by society. This vision is similar to Genis's idea that Pelevin creates new realities and even philosophies. Their respective reviews will be looked into in more detail later in the dissertation.

In an attempt to fit Pelevin (and other not quite postmodern writers) within a literary canon some scholars and critics coined new terms, such as 'turborealism' or 'transmetarealism' to refer to authors who have 'overcome postmodernism'. What the terms have in common seems to emphasise the above argument about Pelevin's literary method of transcending literary convention. They both are applied to intellectual science fiction that has a metaphorical narrative, a philosophical message at multiple levels, and creates multiple and

46 Isaac Asimov, 'How Easy to See the Future!', *Natural History*, April 1975, p.62.

47 Robert A. Heinlein, 'Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues' in *The Science Fiction Novel: Imagination and Social Criticism*, ed. by Earl Kemp and Basil Davenport (University of Chicago: Advent Publishers, 1959), p.22.

48 Thomas A. Shippey, 'The Hegemonic Novum', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 May 1980, p.519.

49 Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Preodolevshie postmodernizm', *Znam'a*, 4 (1998), 193-204 (p.193).

dynamic realities that are treated freely in the text and develop what Berezhnoi calls a ‘meta-religion’.⁵⁰ Even though these terms – ‘turborealism’ and ‘transmetarealism’ – are not widely used in formal scholarship, they were included in Chuprinin’s 2007 published glossary of terms: ‘Russkaia literatura segodn’a. Zhizn’ po pon’atiam’.⁵¹

In the context of literary and genre conventions, of particular interest is the study by Hutchings who approaches Pelevin’s *Generation II* as ‘a metafiction which interrogates the status of literary tradition with which it is allied in the face of the threat posed by the commodified camera image’.⁵² In other words, the scholar takes Pelevin’s transcendence of the form to the transmedial level, beyond literature, likening his fiction to TV and advertising:

Generation ‘P’ resembles a televisual anti-novel, interrupted by commercial breaks consisting of elaborate scenarios for adverts, extracts from a marketing handbook, Che Guevara’s tract, and Tatarskii’s ruminations on his mission to market the Russian Idea. Eventually, the entire novel emulates a television scenario.⁵³

Hutchings interprets the televisual, clip-like structure of the novel as a three-fold representation of finality: the apocalypse of the world, Russian literature, and ‘apocalypse as the precondition for final meaning’.⁵⁴ This conclusion yet again emphasises the non-conformist, fluid nature of Pelevin’s metafiction and supports my initial premise. He transcends the convention of the genre and merges different forms, and even media together; this morphing becomes the definitive freedom of expression and serves the key message of all his works. According to Lipovetskii, this message boils down to being a ‘проповедь’ (sermon) ‘об отсутствии универсальных истин и об истинности иллюзий, как религиозно-философская утопия пустоты’.⁵⁵ Similarly, in her study of *Chapaev i Pustota* (1996), *Generation II* (1999), and *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (2004), Vicks looks into the socio-political context that underpins her analysis of the master trope, the void, emerging from the bifurcated realities. To her, the image represents the total collapse of the previous order of things in the social collective inflicted by the collapse of the Soviet Union. In her

50 Sergei Berezhnoi, ‘Vstupitel’naia stat’a’, in *Russkaia fantastika d dvadtsatom veke v imenakh i litsakh: spravochnyi material* (*Russian 20th Century Science Fiction in Names and Faces: Reference Materials*), ed. by Olga Vinogradova (Moscow: MegaTron, 1998), 5-23 (p.10).

51 Sergei Chuprinin, *Russkaia literatura segodn’a. Zhizn’ po pon’atiam* (Moscow: Vrem’a, 2007), pp.139-140.

52 Hutchings, p.175.

53 Hutchings, p.177.

54 Ibid., p.175.

55 Naum Leiderman, Mark Lipovetskii, *Sovremennaia russkaia literatura: 1950-1990*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Akademia, 2003), II, p.509.

study *The Narratives of Nothing in 20th Century Literature*, Vicks goes beyond the narrative of the original Russian text to demonstrate the all-embracing nature of his multiple bifurcated realities that coexist within the same entity. She refers the diverging translations of *Chapaev i Pustota* in the UK (*The Clay Gun Machine*) and USA (*Buddha's Little Finger*), where the protagonist, Pyotr Pustota, appears as Peter Null in the former and Pyotr Voyd in the latter. Vicks thus concludes:

... as Voyd/Null is the central character upon which these narratives are built, this indicates that these divergent narratives and the realities they depict are also generated by the void... The publication of the same novel under two different titles therefore functions as a kind of publishing performance art that pushes the idea of bifurcated realities beyond the narrative confines of *Chapaev and Void* and into the actual world of Pelevin's readers.⁵⁶

'Utopia of emptiness' as a theme strongly resonates with the disembodied transhumanist aesthetics in Pelevin's fiction. As seen from the above literature review, to achieve this the author goes beyond the mere 'mutation of the genres' and builds a narrative that transcends cognitive, spatial and temporal limitations. He creates multiple fictional worlds, or what Bykov calls 'множество параллельных миров'.⁵⁷ Genis describes this multi-zone marginal universe in Pelevin's reality in similar tones:

Окружающий мир для Пелевина – это череда искусственных конструкций [...]. Все эти миры не являются истинными, но и ложными их назвать нельзя [...]. Пелевин [...] обживает стыки между реальностями. [...] одна картина мира, накладываясь на другую, создает третью, отличную от первых двух. [...] он населяет свои тексты героями, обитающими сразу в двух мирах.⁵⁸

Pelevin's protagonists exist in an array of quasi-realities as they morph through time and space beyond their physical forms, i.e. in the abyss. Examples of Pelevin's emptiness are ample – from titles of his works (*Chapaev i Pustota*, 1996) to spatial-temporal lacunae in his story-lines, when conventional relationship between space and time is deconstructed and then re-assembled in multiple locations.

⁵⁶ Meghan Vicks, *Narratives of Nothing in 20th-Century Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p.158.

⁵⁷ Dmitrii Bykov, 'Pobeg v Mongolii', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 29 May 1996, p.4.

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Genis, 'Fenomen Pelevina', <http://pelevin.nov.ru/stati/o-gen1/1.html> [accessed 16 June 2019]

Pelevin's non-human characters, artificial or mutant – from sentient beings, like werewolves and vampires, to non-sentient robots - morph through fleeting moments and spaces and co-exist in different domains, like quantum particles orbiting their parallel universes. As they drift between work and home, like in 'Prints Gosplana', or exist in multiple realities never leaving a public toilet, like in 'Dev'atyi son Very Pavlovny', or as they travel between 1917 and 1990s, like in *Chapaev i Pustota*, – they not only transcend the physical laws of nature, but come to realise, or suspect, that in fact this is all happening within their own consciousness.⁵⁹ Such a vision corresponds to Dalton-Brown's interpretation of Pelevin's main focus:

Arguably, all Pelevin's work, very broadly speaking, can be defined as focused on issues of consciousness, from the theme of manipulated perceptions in *Generation 'P'* (1999), or of fragmented self-awareness in *Chisla (Numbers, 2004)*, of illusion in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia (The Sacred Book of the Werewolf, 2004)*, to that of self-referentially in his 2005 *Shlem uzhasa (The Helmet of Horror)*.⁶⁰

According to Dalton-Brown, this feature of 'fluidity and unexpectedness', emphasising the 'endlessly transitional' nature of Pelevin's characters, stems from the author's love of the game in the narrative: '...Pelevin invites the reader to enter the "game" of the text, and to discover that there is never any end to the game, never any return to "reality", and no possibility of winning'.⁶¹ This fluid structure becomes an artistic device conveying a deeper meaning - of constant 'moving from the status of man as creator to man as created'.⁶² Dalton-Brown concludes that the shifty, bodiless stylistics of the character and narrative structure represents human disempowerment in a consumerist era. While such a vision is certainly true, I would argue that fluidity and void in the narrative also resonate with the transhumanist aesthetics and thus have a broader aim. Transhumanist bodiless stylistics brings out the abject void in spatial-temporal relationships in the characters' minds, thus also shifting the locus in the reader's perception of reality. One of the aims of the method is to expose the reader, through the characters' unconventional cognitive experiences, to revelatory new,

⁵⁹ Both 'Prints Gosplana' and 'Dev'atyi son Very Pavlovny' are included in *Sinii fonar'* collection, 1991.

⁶⁰ Sally Dalton-Brown, 'Illusion — Money — Illusion: Viktor Pelevin and the 'Closed Loop' of the Vampire Novel', *Slavonica*, Vol.17, No. 1, (2011), 30-44, p.32.

⁶¹ Sally Dalton-Brown, 'Ludic Nonchalance or Ludicrous Despair? Viktor Pelevin and Russian Postmodernist Prose', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (April 1997), 216-233, p.216.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.227.

posthumanist, perspective on the world. This is how Ferrando summarises the posthumanist perspective:

Posthumanism offers a revisitation of the being as transcendent immanence, disrupting one of the founding splits of Western thought, the one between transcendence and immanence, which symbolically relates to every other traditional dualism, such as: the mind/body, subject/object, self/other, male/female, human/animal-alien-robot. [...] Posthumanism questions biocentrism and the concept of life itself, blurring the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, in a quantum approach to the physics of existence.⁶³

Pelevin's works appear to have a similar ring to them; like posthumanism, they 'question traditional humanist conceptions of man'⁶⁴ by exposing the fallacy of human dogmas. This is achieved at various levels of the text by showing the subjectivity of human perceptions. One way is through the above principle of multiplicity – he creates multiple universes and interpretations of the same notions. He offers different perspectives, through expert commentaries, on the same events described in his novels, e.g. 'Expert's Commentary' in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* or commentaries from a Sufi, a historian, a cultural expert, a lawyer, a drug expert after the story 'Asasin'.⁶⁵

By consistently deconstructing anthropocentric assumptions he leaves the reader with the inevitable outcome: the need to redefine what it means to be human in today's digital postmodernity. This strongly resonates with posthumanism that, in its anthropocentric nihilism, seeks to redefine the ontology of selfhood. In this regard, his transcendence of literary form works towards the bigger discourse of the definitive liberation of humankind that comes with the disembodied condition. This liberation requires a change in human perception of the self relative to the other and the world. The new vision – heterogeneous unity of all forms – can be developed through feeling an affinity between the self and the other. Pelevin's stance hinges upon the realisation of the self as part of all matter: 'Избранные – это те, кто понимает, что любой червяк, бабочка или даже травинка на краю дороги – такие же точно избранные, просто временно об этом не знают'.⁶⁶ It thus resonates with the posthumanist focus on acceptance of equality between human and

63 Francesca Ferrando, 'Towards A Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement' (2012), 3-15 (p.11).

64 Ranisch and Sorgner, p.23.

65 Included in *DPP (NN)*, 2003.

66 Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.305.

transhuman beings.⁶⁷ Pelevin's posthumanism, therefore, is a philosophy of a disembodied condition leading to: '[...] new understandings of the self and others, essence, consciousness, intelligence, reason, agency, intimacy, life, embodiment, identity and the body'.⁶⁸

The following chapters address the above specific points of Pelevin's non-anthropocentric philosophy that expose the limited nature of the human and explore ways to transcend it. For that purpose, he scrutinises the relationship of the self to the outer world as perceived by the animal species, humans and non-sentient robotic beings. The research mainly focuses on his works from 1999, when *Generation II* was published, when the author becomes increasingly interested in emerging possibilities of transhumanism and its disembodied condition. The dissertation, however, also includes references to some of his earlier works that trace the roots of his posthumanist vision. A challenge of the research task in this respect concerned the versatility of philosophical and religious allusions and references that Pelevin makes to convey his message. In fact, he was criticised for conflating so many contrasting teachings and schools of thought and many dismissed his writing as superficial. For example, Basinskii described *Chapaev i Pustota* as 'вещь, состоящая из дешевых каламбуров [...], среднего языка и метафизического шкодничества'⁶⁹ and complained that the author does not know the difference between mysticism and religion in the novel which are, in fact, poles apart. Similarly, Arkhangel'skii commented on Pelevin's superficial philosophy, his 'игру в философичность'.⁷⁰ However, I would argue that this philosophical pastiche, first, serves the same purpose of transcending conventions as manifestation of the liberated state; and second, is a way to illustrate the subjectivity of human perceptions arising from the human embodied condition - 'мы наглухо заперты в теле'.⁷¹ Thus Pelevin's philosophical blends become a method contributing to the posthumanist message about the fallacy of human dogmas. The 'philosophical games' in Pelevin's texts deconstruct the intellectual presumption of philosophy that claims to establish the truth by intellectual rigour and pure reason alone. Pelevin positions himself as a staunch critic of abstract philosophy that

67 For example, Hughes' essay 'Democratic Transhumanism 2.0' propagates '[s]upport rights for great apes, dolphins and whales: Democratic transhumanists should join the campaigns to extend rights to great apes, dolphins and whales as a wedge to open rights to all intelligent persons, defeat human-racism, and build a cyborg citizenship.'

68 Shannon Bell in an interview to Adam Zaretsky, 'Bioart in Question' *CIAC Electronic Magazine*, 23 (2005), (p. 2) < https://itp.nyu.edu/classes/germline-spring2013/files/2013/01/Bioart_In_Question.pdf > [accessed 17 August 2019]

69 Pavel Basinskii, 'Iz zhizni otechestennykh kaktusov', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 29 May 1996, p.6.

70 Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii, 'Do shestnadsati i starshe', *Izvestia*, 24 March 1999, p.4.

71 Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.75.

is heavily relied on in order to understand the world. As he said in an interview to *Rossiiskaia gazeta*:

Философский *дискурс*, в котором выдвигаются аргументы и контраргументы, кажется мне верхом нелепости [...]. Мы существуем как бы ‘изнутри себя’, такова субъективная онтология нашего сознания. А философия претендует на то, что ответ на вопрос о природе и судьбе этого “взгляда изнутри” может быть дан “снаружи”, через манипуляцию абстрактными символами. (see note 44)

This vision of philosophy as a system of abstract concepts trying to explain the essence of life brings to mind Bergson’s similar criticism. As Bergson pointed out in *The Creative Evolution* (1907), philosophies of radical finalism ‘extend too far the application of certain concepts that are natural to our intellect’ and as a result of this overreliance on abstraction, generated by the ‘incorrigibly presumptuous’ subjectivity of our intellect, there is ‘the internal conflict of systems, the impossibility of satisfactorily getting the real into the ready-made garments of our ready-made concepts’.⁷² This similar position on abstract philosophical discourse is not the only parallel between Pelevin and Bergson that my analysis of Pelevin has revealed, even though Pelevin’s works do not make any explicit references to Bergson’s philosophy.

Pelevin, however, has been analysed relative to a wide range of philosophical theories: Plato, Descartes, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Heidegger, Sartre, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, to name but a few. This becomes part of his method to develop his argument, through allusions to Western philosophies and Eastern religions. This dissertation, however, does not aim at an exhaustive analysis of philosophical references per se, but focuses only on the thinkers or beliefs relative to his posthumanist argument. What is of interest, and does not appear to have been addressed before, is a parallel between Pelevin and Bergson in terms of their *method*. Both tried to transcend the boundaries of conventional approach in their views and both received mixed reactions. Thus, Bergson is considered a ‘poet-philosopher’,⁷³ who tried to remove the distinction between science and metaphysical philosophy; in other words, he attempted to transcend the border of conventional thought. Perhaps Russell best expressed Bergson’s place in philosophy when he said that any attempt at classifying him would ‘fail as [his philosophy] [...] cuts across all divisions, whether

⁷² Henri Bergson, *The Creative Evolution*, transl. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1911), pp.47-48.

⁷³ Sholom J. Kahn, ‘Henri Bergson’s Method’, *The Antioch Review*, vol.5, no.3 (1945), pp.440–451.

empiricist, realist, or idealist'.⁷⁴ Pelevin was also described by Genis as 'поэт, романтик, бытописатель пограничной зоны' (see note 58), and the above paragraphs demonstrate that he too transcends the boundaries of any specific genre in literature. His works also blur the boundaries between intellectual and mass literature: 'О виртуозной пелевинской игре высокими и низкими смыслами, сюжетами мировой философской мысли и клише обывательско-интеллигентского сознания, персонажами из анекдотов и архетипами мировой культуры, их взаимном перетекании, раздвоении и т.п. говорить не буду - те, кто читал, уже насладились этим, а нечитавшим передать невозможно' (see note 3).

This creative method escapes, or transcends, the boundaries of conventional metaphysics, literature, physics in an attempt to find, as Bergson puts it, 'absolute knowledge'.⁷⁵ As stated above, Pelevin creates multiple realities between which his characters drift in search of a way to escape the vicious circle of existence and grasp the ultimate meaning of life. Pelevin's recurring theme of escape becomes a defining goal for his protagonists, whether achieved or not. It has been addressed by many literary critics. Vaingurt defines it as 'достижени[е] подлинного бытия и просветления';⁷⁶ Вуков – 'поиск подлинности', 'освобождение' (see note 57); Kamenetskii – 'постичь основной принцип жизни, ее суть, Истину';⁷⁷ Karaev, like Kornev, links it with Buddhism and talks about 'приближении к ней [реальности]'.⁷⁸

The imagery that Bergson and Pelevin employ to describe the elusive concept of absolute knowledge about life (in their respective philosophies) creates a picture of 'heterogeneous multiplicity' in 'duration' and 'unity' – critical notions in Bergson's seminal work, *The Creative Evolution*. Both associate it with a river, a flow, a stream consisting of infinite individual particles. Bergson's 'élan vital' (the force of life) is compared in his poetic text with a wave that progresses to a river:

Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter. [...] The matter that it bears

74 Philippe Soulez and Frederic Worms, F., *Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p.124.

75 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.52.

76 Julia Vaingurt, 'Svoi sredi drugikh: kontseptsya u chitatel'a', transl. A.Moroz, ed. K.Korchagin, *NLO*, 1 (149) (2018), 509-24 (p.515).

77 Aleksandr Kamenetskii, 'Pozdnie chelovekol'ubtsy', <<http://pelevin.nov.ru/stati/o-lim/L.html>>

78 Nikolai Karaev, 'D'uzhina nozhei v spinu il'uzii', *Novyi mir*, 2 (2018), 180-84 (p.181).

along with it [...] alone can divide it into distinct individualities. [...] Consciousness is distinct from the organism it animates, although it must undergo its vicissitudes.⁷⁹

Pelevin's works have very similar poetics: 'капл[я] в бесконечной реке, которая текла из одной необъятности в другую. Каждая капля этой реки была равна всей реке целиком [...] в нем просто отражалась бесконечность, как весь мир отражается в капле воды'.⁸⁰ This heterogeneous multiplicity corresponds with the disembodied condition of transhumanism and also with the posthumanist all-inclusive equality of all forms.

In developing a structure for my dissertation I was guided by three common aspects in Bergson's and Pelevin's approach to experience of life: their poetics in describing the cycle of life; the transcendence of time and space conventions; and their criticism of intellectual analysis in understanding life. I took account of these factors to classify the transhumanist experiences of Pelevin's characters. The dissertation thus focuses on the role of *instinct* and *intellect* in human life and identifies the need for an *intuitive* path to true understanding of life and thus to liberation. Is it based on Bergson's three channels of attaining absolute knowledge – through instinct, intellect and intuition. In *Creative Evolution* he maintained that 'instinct [...] is molded on the very form of life', while 'intellect is the faculty of constructing unorganised [...] artificial [...] instruments'. As a result: 'There are things that intelligence is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them'. It follows that these two tools can be used as a way to obtain 'relative knowledge' (which is incomplete), but in order to grasp 'absolute knowledge' one needs to rely on intuition that enables one to place oneself in the above 'duration' and heterogeneous multiple unity. Bergson maintains that true understanding of reality can be best achieved through intuition, or 'true empiricism', because it is a kind of experience, but deeper and more meaningful.⁸¹

The relevant references to his theories will be made in respective chapters of the dissertation, as required, relative to Pelevin's imagery and views on transhumanism. The dissertation, therefore, is structured according to the instinctive-intellectual-intuitive experiences of the transhuman characters. Chapter 1 explores the man vs animal opposition, focusing on the instinct-driven perception of the world free from unnatural constructs of the modern human civilization. It looks at the works in which the transhumanist stylistics is

⁷⁹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Chapter III, pp.293-4.

⁸⁰ Pelevin, *Chapaev*, p.238.

⁸¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.150-175.

represented by transmutation into wolves, foxes, or vampires and the revelatory effects that such transformations have on the protagonists. These works include ‘Problema vervolka v srednei polose’ (*Sinii fonar'*, 1991), *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (2004), and *Ampir V/Batman Apollo* duology (2006/2013). Chapter 2 deals with the perception of the world through intellect, which, in Pelevin’s reading of the philosophy of ‘pure reason’, is free from artificially imposed human constructs. The main works selected for this chapter revolve around media and artificial intelligence and include *Generation II* (1999), *Ananasnaia voda dl'a prekrasnoi damy* (2010), *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011), and *iPhuck10* (2017). Tracking the possibilities and social changes brought about by latest scientific advances, the writer compares the irrational human mind prone to manipulation with the rational non-human algorithm.

Finally, Chapter 3 explores the concept of intuition in Pelevin’s posthumanist argument and analyses Pelevin’s vision of the ‘intuitive path’ towards a redefined posthuman future. For this purpose, the chapter looks into the philosophical notions of time, life, matter, and absolute in Pelevin’s works as integral elements of his philosophy. The works in focus here include *t* (2009) and *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi* (2018), with references to the earlier *Chapaev i Pustota* and *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*.

Chapter 1

Relating to the World through Instinct

Pelevin's works with superhuman half-animal creatures as protagonists treat the transhumanist theme of disembodiment as an ability to overcome cognitive, spatial, and temporal limitations. I will focus only on works in which human characters undergo a transformation into vampires and werewolves, because the revelatory effects of their transhuman experiences emphasise the difference between humans and animals in their perception of the world. The vampire/monster theme is not new in literature. The Gothic tradition viewed these creatures in various contexts, like social alienation, yearning for acceptance, forbidden emotion and feeling of guilt, as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). What the Gothic subgenres have in common, according to Botting, is the element of 'otherness and monstrosity'.⁸² Such an approach to the theme emphasises human anthropocentrism in relating itself to the animal species and treating it as 'the other'. In fact, this neglect of the animal experience seems to be a common shortcoming in the human-centred Western philosophical discourse, as pointed out by Derrida:

The experience of the seeing animal, of the animal that looks at them, has not been taken into account in the philosophical or theoretical architecture of their discourse [Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas]. In sum they have denied it as much as misunderstood it. From here on we shall circle round and round this immense disavowal, whose logic traverses the whole history of humanity, and not only that of the quasi-epochal configuration I just mentioned.⁸³

This feature of Pelevin's works, zoomorphism, has predominantly been analysed in the traditional terms of literary text analysis, such as genre conventions and allegorical and carnivalesque postmodernist canon (see Introduction). Khagi, however, adds a new perspective to zoomorphic analysis in her article 'The Monstrous Aggregate of the Soul: Towards Biopolitics in Viktor Pelevin's Work' (2011) which resonates with the transcendence narrative of transhumanism, albeit in the grim light of pernicious biopolitics. Drawing on Foucault's social theory and biopolitical essays, Khagi interprets animal imagery in Pelevin's works as representations of the human social collective. She identifies, through

⁸² Fred Botting, *Gothic, the New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.14.

⁸³ Jaques Derrida, 'The Animal Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. by David Wills, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham, 2008), p.14.

these bio representations, an associative chain - humans-animals-biomass-source of energy (blood or oil)-money – through which biopolitics expresses itself in conditions of ‘hypercommodification of life resulting in dehumanization and social reduction...’.⁸⁴ This interpretation resonates with Foucault’s vision of biopolitics which ‘aims at a multiplicity of humans, not to the extent that they are mere individual bodies, but to the extent that they form a global mass that is affected by processes of birth, illness, reproduction, death, etc.’⁸⁵ Khagi thus suggests that Pelevin’s zoomorphic imagery highlights the ‘deindividualized status of the individual in modern society and buttress[es] the author’s diagnosis of the collapse of spirituality, rampant consumerism, and covert but nonetheless efficient modes of social control in modern life’.⁸⁶ While some of Pelevin’s early works allow for such a reading of artistic biomorphism, e.g. *Zhizn’ nasekomykh* where society is presented as a biomorphic monstrosity, other animal representations appear to serve a different purpose, juxtaposing the animal to the human but to the advantage of the animal. Thus, Livers interprets Pelevin’s trope of lycanthropy in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* from the transhumanist perspective of transcendence: ‘Pelevin uses the figure of a shape-shifting “were-fox” to unsettle the animal/human distinction’.⁸⁷ Genis’s commentary in his article ‘Granitsy i metamorfozy’ fits into the same transhumanist context of intermediality and transcendence: ‘Pelevin frequently turns to animals, which enables him to populate yet another limit, namely that of the border between species’.⁸⁸

It follows from this interpretation, therefore, that Pelevin addresses the issue of the-self-vs-the-other in this animalistic context in order to dismantle the human superiority myth and build a case for his broader posthumanist message, which is that all living beings are equal because they are part of the same matter. He approaches this task from the ontological perspective, exploring the difference in experiencing life in an ordinary human state as opposed to a supercreature state. The concept that comes to the fore in this context is instinct. It has to be noted that the term ‘instinct’ has a wide number of interpretations depending on the academic field, the most varied range being in psychology which distinguishes between

84 Sofya Khagi, ‘The Monstrous Aggregate of the Soul: Towards Biopolitics in Victor Pelevin’s Work’, *Slavic and East European Journal* Vol. 55, No. 3 (Fall 2011), 439-459, (p.455)

85 Michel Foucault, ‘Society must be defended’, *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, (New York: Picador, 2003), p.143.

86 Khagi, *Ibid.*, p.455.

87 Livers, ‘Is There Humanity in Posthumanity?’, p.504.

88 *Ibid.*, p.301.

inherited and learned behaviours.⁸⁹ However, the ‘nature-nurture’ aspect is not relevant here since this analysis is preoccupied with the philosophical interpretation of the notion in literary material. As outlined in the Introduction, the dissertation is based on Bergson’s model of perception that juxtaposes instinct and intelligence. Bergson understands instinct as being ‘not within the domain of intelligence’. And even though he admits that instinct ‘is not situated beyond the limits of mind’, he places sensory perception above mind processing in his definition of instinct; as he puts it, an instinctive understanding of life must be ‘originally *felt*, rather than *thought*’.⁹⁰

This interpretation resonates with the distinction that Pelevin draws between instinct and intellect: in his narrative the former can be understood as experience of life through sensory perception without the self-inflicted limits of the clouded human mind. The main source of human inhibitions and illusions is the language through which human beings experience life. By showing a richer experience of existence through instinct peculiar to the animal species the author decenters the traditional human superiority. Transhumanism in this context serves as an artistic device to introduce human protagonists to the uninhibited, acute sensory perceptions of their transgressed physicality. Through the contrast with their former bleak human experiences, this leads to liberating revelations about the world. Transcending the bodily constraints helps the protagonists ‘постичь Истину’, as werefox A-Huli says in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*.⁹¹ The changed perspective - man is part of the same matter as all other living forms – removes the barrier between the self and the other and, therefore, resonates with the posthumanist equality of all, sentient and non-sentient, forms.

Pelevin’s interest in the literary potential of transhumanism can be traced back to his very first published work, short story ‘Koldun Ignat i l’udi’ (1989),⁹² where he introduces the other-vs-humans interpretation of the theme. The other is a sorcerer with superpowers, ‘колдун ИГНАТ’, who is the target of a malicious priest Arsenikum setting people against him because ‘koldun’ is different: ‘Всем миром решили. Мир всегда колдунов убивает’.⁹³ These lines reveal the gullible nature of humans who decide to follow convention and kill the other. Man’s distorted perception of the world based on abstract ideas about it becomes a recurring theme in Pelevin’s works.

⁸⁹ Mark S. Bloomberg, ‘Development evolving: The origins and meanings of instinct’, *WIREs Cogn Sci*, 8 (2017), doi: [10.1002/wcs.1371](https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1371) <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5182125/>>

⁹⁰ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.172, 175.

⁹¹ Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.290.

⁹² First published in *Nauka i religia*, 12 (1989), p.4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.6. Ebook.

As the story unfolds, the human being's inferior position is further revealed through the immortality of the sorcerer Ignat, who vanishes in the air to escape the human crowd. Such an ending correlates with the idea of disembodiment, or transcendence of physical boundaries and therefore introduces a posthumanist ring to the story. The other, koldun Ignat, continues to exist in a disembodied condition as the words ‘растворяясь в воздухе’ (see note 93) do not imply a dying body. In its purely biological interpretation death implies finality of existence, whereas the ending in the story adds a metaphysical element to Pelevin’s interpretation of death versus immortality. Being part of greater matter, Ignat does not ‘cease to be’, he merely transgresses the physical constraints of the human body, continuing to exist in some other form. After the metaphysical transformation of the main character, the semantics of death changes in the story; the word acquires a metaphorical meaning of ‘death of the mind and spirit’ (which becomes a recurring theme in his works). As Ignat observes during his flight, ‘[...] мир сам давно убит своими собственными колдунами’ (see note 93). So from the very first story, Pelevin introduces the problem of the human existential trap resulting from self-deception.

The next step in Pelevin’s posthumanist argument is to analyse the nature and roots of self-deception, which clouds the human mind and makes him unable to relate to the other as he is unable to see his true self. Thus, in the story ‘Problema vervolka v srednei polose’ the author explores the topic of perception of the world through instinct. He tries to identify how instinct, or sensory-driven perception, can liberate man's confused and disoriented mind from cultural imperatives imposed by society. Instinct in his works, as will be shown in this chapter, enables a living creature to see and feel the world in its ‘pure’ form. The story focuses on natural animal freedom and power of instinct, fullness of life compared to the weak and subjective human nature. In this first artistic experiment with animal-based transhumanism, he explores the distinction between humans and animals: ‘Люди, отметил Саша, способны только говорить, а вот ощутить смысл жизни так же, как ветер или холод, они не могут’.⁹⁴ Started in ‘Koldun Ignat’, the theme of human muddled consciousness is brought up again:

[...] главная метаморфоза, которую отметил Саша, касалась самоосознания. На человеческом языке это было очень трудно выразить, и Саша стал лаять, визжать и скулить про себя — так же, как раньше думал словами...⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Pelevin, ‘Problema vervolka’, p.59.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.57.

Perception of life without distortion, through instinct, appears to be the desired liberation, which leads to a feeling of blissfulness and clarity of thought and vision:

Изменение в самоосознании касалось смысла жизни [...] и смысл жизни чувствовался непрерывно и отчетливо, как некоторое вечное свойство мира, наглухо скрытое от человека, — и в этом было главное очарование нынешнего состояния Саши, [...] жизнь без этого чувства казалась длинным болезненным сном, неинтересным и мутным, какие снятся при гриппе.⁹⁶

The reference to life as a dream brings to mind Plato's cave allegory, often alluded to in Pelevin's works (e.g. 'Sozertsatel' teni', *iPhuck10*, *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi*). In *The Republic* Plato talks of prisoners who live in a cave and see only shadows of objects that pass in the light behind them; thus they live in a superficial reality of shadows, giving names not to actual objects but their shadow representations: 'To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images'.⁹⁷ Although Plato's allegory is used in the more specific context of learning, illusory knowledge as against true knowledge, the idea that comes to the fore in Pelevin's story concerns the bleakness of representations compared to the richer original experience. The point that Pelevin makes is that animals are able to perceive life without the distortions of the human constructs.

Such a vision resonates with the Rousseauist idea of innate instincts outlined in his work *Upon The Inequality Among Mankind*, 1754.⁹⁸ In it he contends that humans, an animal species by origin, used to share innate instincts with animals in a 'state of nature', but forgot them and lost clarity of vision as a result of applying reason and forming a civilised society:

I have endeavoured to exhibit the origin and progress of inequality, the institution and abuse of political societies [...]. It follows from this picture, that as there is scarce any inequality among men in a state of nature, all that which we now behold owes its force and its growth to the

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.58.

⁹⁷ Plato, VII 'On Shadows and Realities in Education', *The Republic*, transl. by Benjamin Jowett (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), Project Gutenberg <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1497>> [accessed 8 September 2019]

⁹⁸ Jean Jaques Rousseau 'A Discourse Upon The Origin And The Foundation Of The Inequality Among Mankind', Parts 1 and 2, 1754, transl. for an anthology of Harvard Classics, Volume 34, 1910, Project Gutenberg <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11136>> [accessed 8 September 2019]

development of our faculties and the improvement of our understanding, and at last becomes permanent and lawful by the establishment of property and of laws.⁹⁹

In order to bring out this stark difference in the uninhibited ability to experience life to the full and to be free through instinct Pelevin focuses on the vibrancy of transhuman experiences of the protagonist. The imagery that the author employs to convey the difference between the animal and the human sentient experiences covers the whole polyphony of sensory perceptions:

Во-первых, он различал множество пронизывающих воздух запахов. Это было похоже на второе зрение. [...] Такая же перемена произошла со звуками: они стали гораздо осмысленней.¹⁰⁰

The constraints of the human body are overcome and he enjoys the liberation of the disembodied condition:

[...] вдруг он порвал тонкую нить, связывавшую его с землей, и понесся вверх. [...] Он стал глядеть вверх и увидел, что приближается к небу.¹⁰¹

In order to emphasise the liberating experience of transformation into a werewolf the author contrasts Sasha's perception of the same familiar surroundings in his human and animal body. At first, before his transhuman experience, when Sasha is lost in the forest he longs for the pseudo-comfort of the civilised world: 'Гудение проводов напоминало, что где-то на свете живут нормальные люди, вырабатывают днем электричество, а вечером смотрят с его помощью телевизор'.¹⁰² The TV set in this story represents modern 'civilised' conditions in opposition to the wildness of nature, i.e. animal existence, and reveals human limited experience of life. Like the prisoner from Plato's cave, Sasha is conditioned to feel 'normal', and therefore, comfortable in self-inflicted constraints of human 'progress' – electricity and television: 'Саша подумал, что наконец его подбросят куда-нибудь, где над головой будет электрическая лампа, по бокам — стены, и можно будет спокойно заснуть' (see note 102).

⁹⁹ Ibid., Part I.

¹⁰⁰ Pelevin, 'Problema vervolka', p.55.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.56.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.66.

After the transformation into a werewolf, however, Sasha's clearer perception shifts his perspective and the same environment seems a pale shadow of the original:

Саша нашел картину зловещей и прекрасной: стального цвета тела неподвижно сидели вокруг пустого, похожего на арену, пространства; [...] крашенные домики людей, облепленные телеантеннами и курятниками, гаражи из ворованной жести и косо Парфенон клуба [...] — все это казалось даже не декорацией к реальности, сосредоточенной на сорока круглых метрах в середине площади, а пародией на декорацию.¹⁰³

Human existence now appears to him inferior to that of animals: 'он понял и то, что вряд ли по своей воле вернется в свое прошлое естество' (see note 103).

The newly perceived vibrancy of life, the immanence of being, is felt to be a result of instinct as the guiding principle, not reason. The workings of the werewolf's mind prompt the right instinctive action, without the human constraints that evoke doubt and hesitation: 'Волчья часть его существа приняла на себя управление его действиями, он больше ни в чем не сомневался'.¹⁰⁴ In fact, this shedding of doubt becomes the turning point of Sasha's transhuman revelation. He becomes a werewolf after, counter-intuitively for any reasonable man, he agrees to a ritual of initiation that involves a fight with a much stronger werewolf:

Услышать зов — это не главное. Это не сделает тебя оборотнем. Знаешь, когда ты стал им по-настоящему? — Когда ты согласился драться с Николаем, считая, что не имеешь надежды на победу. Тогда и изменилась твоя тень.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, in *Ampir V*, a vampire body allows the protagonist Rama to transcend human limitations of doubt and hesitation and be freely guided by instinct: 'Надо довериться инстинкту'.¹⁰⁶

These revelations of the physically transformed protagonists indicate that doubt and fear, inhibiting action, arise from applying reason, i.e. from thinking. Without it the mutated protagonists' cognitive abilities become much better:

Я заметил, что перестал думать. Мой ум больше не генерировал бессвязных мыслей - внутреннее пространство, где они раньше клубились, теперь словно пропылесосили - в нем осталось только острое и точное осознание того, что происходит вокруг.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.82.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.92.

¹⁰⁶ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.105.

In his deconstruction of the grand narrative of the superiority of Homo Sapiens, Pelevin targets the human language as the main construct, limiting human experience. This becomes a recurring theme in his works. It is general knowledge in the anthropocentric evolutionary discourse that human language is a factor distinguishing humans from animals. Pelevin, however, reverts the hierarchy: instead of enriching human life, it has become a detriment obstructing the fullness of human existence. This idea is explicitly voiced in the novel and generally in Pelevin's narrative:

— Ты действительно думаешь, что человек поднялся в результате эволюции выше животных?

— Конечно, - ответил я. - А разве нет?

— Нет, - сказал он. - Он опустился гораздо ниже.¹⁰⁸

Ampir V analyses the impact of language on human perception and introduces the term 'ум А' to refer to instinctive/sensory perception of the world: 'Всеми действиями управляют рефлексы и инстинкты. [...] Он имеет дело только с отражением мира'.¹⁰⁹ This kind of perception is common to all animal species, including humans: 'Ум "А" есть и у обезьяны, и у человека'.¹¹⁰ He underlines the representational nature of sensory perception as the first point of contact between the subject and reality: '[...] мы живем не среди предметов, а среди ощущений, поставляемых нашими органами чувств'.¹¹¹

The next stage is cognition that involves processing of the received sensory stimuli, which is the domain of 'ум Б' and is peculiar only to humans: 'люди отличаются от животных. [...] ум "Б" есть только у человека' (see note 110). And it is this processing stage that leads to distortion of reality because it involves interpretation of the received sensory perceptions: 'Мы наглухо заперты в теле, а то, что кажется нам реальностью - просто интерпретация электрических сигналов, приходящих в мозг. Мы получаем фотографии внешнего мира от органов чувств'.¹¹² The key point here is the false representation of reality and the limitations of the human mind in our embodied condition: 'А [мы] сами сидим внутри полого шара, стены которого оклеены этими фотографиями.'

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.200.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.145.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.146.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.144.

¹¹² Ibid., p.149.

Этот полый шар и есть наш мир, из которого мы никуда не можем выйти при всем желании'.¹¹³

This approach to human perception reveals Pelevin's awareness of semiotic theories. The picture metaphor, in particular, brings to mind two references in line with the author's views on the language. The first is early Wittgenstein's 'picture theory'.¹¹⁴ Pelevin explicitly mentions the German philosopher in the preface to his earlier story 'Dev'atyi son Very Pavlovny', which reveals his engagement with the topic even before *Ampir V*: 'Здесь мы можем видеть, что солипсизм совпадает с чистым реализмом, если он строго продуман. Людвиг Витгенштейн'.¹¹⁵ It has to be said that Wittgenstein's 'picture theory' of meaning is controversial and subject to so many interpretations that it could be a topic of a separate analysis. Pelevin engages with it only within the scope of his literary goal – his imaginative interpretation of it illustrates his message. I will therefore look at those aspects of the theory that are reflected in Pelevin's texts. In Wittgenstein's 'picture theory' the capacity of language and thought represents reality. Wittgenstein maintains that the whole of reality consists of facts ('states of affairs' in *Tractatus*) that are represented by our thoughts as 'pictures' of this reality: 'the picture is a model of reality'; 'the logical picture of the facts is the thought'. Propositions can 'picture' the world to the limit of logic: 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world'.¹¹⁶ They also can act as true or false representations of the facts.

As we see from quotations above, Pelevin borrows the concepts of falsehood and limitation as well as the imagery from Wittgenstein's theory and plays with them to convey his idea about the false nature of human perception of reality. In Pelevin's view, the human mind ('ум Б') distorts the facts: '[...] ум "Б" [...] никак не связан с фотографиями на стенах шара и производит фантазмы из себя самого. В его глубинах возникает такое... полярное сияние из абстрактных понятий' (see note 109). And the reason for this distortion is the tendency of the mind to apply arbitrary abstract concepts of the human language: 'Слова подобны якорям – кажется, что они позволяют надежно укрепиться в истине, но на деле они лишь держат ум в плену'.¹¹⁷ In the context of the innate animal instincts vs civilised human world, one cannot but recall Rousseau's remark on abstract

¹¹³ Ibid., p.150.

¹¹⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (TLP)*, trans. by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1922, Originally published as "Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung", in *Annalen der Naturphilosophische*, XIV (3/4), 1921.

¹¹⁵ Pelevin, 'Dev'atyi son Very Pavlovny', p.196.

¹¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, Sections 2.12, 3, 5.6.

¹¹⁷ Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.299.

thought: ‘abstraction is an unnatural and very painful operation’.¹¹⁸ As seen in his works and also mentioned in the Introduction, Pelevin too is a staunch critic of generalisations and abstract speculations.

This criticism of abstraction again resonates with Wittgenstein’s views, in this case with his ‘language game theory’ outlined in *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953.¹¹⁹ Its key point is the infinite multiplicity of contextual and unfixed uses of language, which leads to ‘misunderstandings concerning the use of words’.¹²⁰ In *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* Pelevin echoes a similar view: ‘любые описания только помешают, создав [...] ложное представление’.¹²¹ It transpires from this reasoning that a word contributes to human entrapment, which correlates with the idea of confinement in the context of embodied condition; and the word itself represents an artificial embodied condition of otherwise infinite reality.

Pelevin uses the multiplicity of representation and perception of the language to develop his argument and expose the use of the language as a powerful weapon of manipulation of the human mind. In this context he introduces the terms ‘дискурс’ and ‘гламур’: ‘Их сущностью является маскировка и контроль - и, как следствие, власть’.¹²² ‘Discourse’ stands for the verbal side of the language, i.e. representations of objects through signifiers: ‘Все, что человек говорит - это дискурс...’¹²³ ‘Glamour’ implies arbitrary value judgments that the human mind is conditioned to ascribe to these signifiers: ‘А гламур [...] это переливающаяся игра беспредметных образов, [...] [которая] обещает чудо’.¹²⁴ According to the explanation in the story, these judgments are formed in ‘ум Б’ that is limited and prone to influence:

ум "Б" у этих людей настроен на одну и ту же волну. Он заставляет их видеть одинаковую галлюцинацию.

— А кто создает эту галлюцинацию? - спросил я.

Ум "Б" и создает. Точнее, множество таких умов, поддерживающих друг друга. [...] у вас в голове пять тысяч маркетологов срали десять лет. (See note 110)

118 Rousseau, *Upon Inequality*, Part 2.

119 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, trans. by G.E.M.Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

120 Ibid., Section 90, p.43.

121 Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.247.

122 Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.47.

123 Ibid., p.48.

124 Ibid., p.32.

As a result of linguo-cultural programming human life revolves around the spell of words that cloud his mind and become a constraint depraving a human being. As a vampire in the novel observes, the life of contemporary humans is so limited that:

[...] только ушедший от дел миллионер может позволить себе образ жизни животного: жить на природе в самых подходящих для организма климатических условиях, много двигаться, есть экологически чистую пищу, и при этом вообще никогда ни о чем не волноваться.¹²⁵

What is more, mankind falls prey to this manipulation of ‘discourse and glamour’ of its own volition. According to the theory offered in the novel, a person seeks relief in disguising the disturbing reality by an illusory verbal reality. Just like words acquire meaning within a contextual system of language, signs acquire values in a hierarchy of prestige and status. This yearning for masquerade is termed in the novel ‘тяга к переодеванию’ and is represented by conspicuous consumption.¹²⁶ This is how Pelevin describes the pervasive trend: ‘Переодевание включает переезд с Каширки на Рублевку и с Рублевки в Лондон, пересадку кожи с ягодиц на лицо, перемену пола и все такое прочее. Весь современный дискурс тоже сводится к переодеванию - или новой упаковке’.¹²⁷ The message of this eager self-deception is that reality is more readily accepted if it creates an attractive, lulling illusion even if it is phrased in hyper-real terms. There is a clear parallel between this explanation and Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra whereby the imaginary appeal perceived by the human mind is more valued than the actual reality.¹²⁸ As a result, humankind is dominated by signs, which limits the scope of human existence:

Дело в том, что между умственным процессом вампира и человека есть важное отличие. Думая, вампир использует те же ментальные конструкции, что и человек. Но его мысль движется между ними по другому маршруту, который так же отличается от предсказуемого человеческого мышления, как благородная траектория несущейся сквозь сумрак летучей мыши отличается от кругов городского голубя над зимней помойкой.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.148.

¹²⁶ The term is associated with T.Veblen’s theory outlined in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899, and means public display of social status and prestige through commodities.

¹²⁷ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.57.

¹²⁸ Lipovetskii addressed the influence of Baudrillard on Pelevin in his article ‘Goluboe salo pokoleniia, ili Dva mifa ob odnom krizise’ in *Znam'a* (11), 1999. See note 6

¹²⁹ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.75.

The above observations reiterate the self-inflicted nature of human limitations. In the traditional anthropocentric discourse man appears to be superior to animals in his free will:

I perceive the very same things in the human machine, with this difference, that nature alone operates in all the operations of the beast, whereas man, as a free agent, has a share in his. One chooses by instinct; the other by an act of liberty; for which reason the beast cannot deviate from the rules that have been prescribed to it, even in cases where such deviation might be useful, and man often deviates from the rules laid down for him to his prejudice.¹³⁰

But in fact, man's misuse of free will limits his existence: this is Pelevin's message in this context. When choosing to buy status symbols he and his actions are dominated by the arbitrary value judgments of prestige and power. This exposes the gullible programmed human mind - referred to as 'податлив[ый] шипуч[ий] студ[ень]'.¹³¹

These observations create a case for decentering the human as the measure of all being. It is the central message explicitly voiced at the start of *Ampir V*, in a dialogue between the newly converted vampire Rama and his mature vampire-teacher Enlil' Maratovich:

Люди по непонятной причине считают себя носителями добра и света, - продолжал он. —
[...] Попробуй назвать мне хоть одну причину, по которой люди лучше мышей-вампиров. —
[...] Больше мне ничего не пришло в голову.¹³²

Ampir V deconstructs the anthropocentric myth and even goes further by reversing the man-above-animals hierarchy. This is how Rousseau describes the traditional pattern: 'He [...] in time became the master of those [animals] that could be of any service to him, and a sore enemy to those that could do him any mischief. 'Tis thus, that the first look he gave into himself produced the first emotion of pride in him; [...] by attributing to his species the first rank among animals in general'.¹³³ By contrast, in *Ampir V* it is the manipulated humankind that is subordinated and exploited – by vampires: 'Они [vampires] решили создать себе дойное животное. В результате появился человек. [...] — Правильнее говорить не

130 Rousseau, *Upon Inequality*, Part I, para. 14.

131 Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.286.

132 Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.39.

133 Rousseau, *Upon Inequality*, Part II, para. 6.

“создали” а “вывели”. Примерно так же, как собака или овца были выведены человеком’.¹³⁴

To further dismantle the anthropocentric myth of humanism the author goes on to show that mankind does not adhere to the humanist set of values it once developed. In a curious way these transhumanist narratives guide the reader towards the realization that the ‘non-human’ nature of werewolves or vampires is the essence of true humanism (this term is used here in the meaning of a system of traditional values of compassion, understanding, empathy, etc, and not in the meaning of man's superiority). For example, in ‘Problema vervolka’ a mature werewolf concludes that ‘только оборотни – реальные люди’,¹³⁵ which is why werewolves cast human shadows in the story whereas humans cast those of other swine, goats and insects. The choice of these animals ‘свинья’, ‘коза’, ‘насекомое’ is not random – this is an implicit reference to the derogatory meanings that these words can have in Russian; and in Pelevin’s transhumanist narrative this imagery becomes the opposite of humanism that is associated with mankind. In *Ampir V*, the author sustains the metaphor whereby humans are associated with crawling insects, while super-creatures are free with their ability to fly (flight is a metaphor for freedom in many of his works, e.g. ‘Zatvornik i Shestipalyi’, ‘Omon Ra’):

Мне представилось, что где-то в Москве такое же жуткое перепончатокрылое существо простирает крыла над миром, а люди ничего не замечают и муравьями ползут по своим делам.¹³⁶

In Pelevin’s transhumanist narrative it is non-human creatures, like werewolves, that are capable of feelings that are traditionally considered prime values of humanity, which are compassion and empathy: ‘Саше [...] стало немного *жаль* старого волка, которого он загрыз в люди, и, вспоминая перебранку, а особенно перемену, которая произошла с Николаем за минуту до драки, он испытывал к нему почти симпатию’.¹³⁷ The same idea is reiterated in *Ampir V*: although humans are portrayed as a lower caste created to provide food for higher-evolutionary creatures, the vampires teach their ‘young’ to love and pity people: ‘[...] презирать человека [...] ни в коем случае нельзя, - сказал он. - Запомни как следует, для вампира это [...] постыдно [...]. Мы вывели людей, Рама. Поэтому мы

¹³⁴ *Ampir V*, p.142.

¹³⁵ Pelevin, ‘Problema vervolka’, p.97.

¹³⁶ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.10.

¹³⁷ Pelevin, ‘Problema vervolka’, p.95.

должны любить и жалеть их. Такими, какие они есть. Кроме нас, их не пожалеет НИКТО'.¹³⁸

The fact that vampires, who are portrayed as exploiters of mankind, are capable of compassion and empathy completely undermines the human dominance myth. In addition, the words trans- and post-human suggest an idea of a limit to humanity. It appears that the main human constraints are mind subjectivity that distorts reality and human weaknesses urging him to run to excesses in exercising free will. This chapter has analysed the inability of humankind to follow instinct as a result of applying reason, i.e. intellect, and thus having a distorted perception of reality through arbitrary language representations. The next chapter, therefore, focuses on artificial intelligence that Pelevin explores in his later works for its potential to eliminate the subjectivity of human perception.

¹³⁸ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.63.

Chapter 2

Artificial Intelligence, or Pelevin's Critique of Human 'Pure Reason'

Throughout his fiction, Pelevin explores the possibilities that arise from relentless technological and scientific progress. He places his posthumanist narrative in the modern context of artificial intelligence. The author compares humans and robots to explore the extent of their differences, with the key area of comparison being mind and sentience. He also explores the potential for 'pure reason'¹³⁹ of artificial intellect to liberate the human from self-inflicted constructs.

Pelevin begins his comparative analysis of humans and robots with the theme of manipulation and programming. Human self-deception, discussed in Chapter 1, is placed here in the context of media and computer technologies. Pelevin's early story 'Prints Gosplana' is an allegory of modern human life that is portrayed as a computer game. Transhumanism is used as an artistic device and is represented in blurring the boundaries between the human protagonist's life and virtual reality. At first Sasha appears as a young ordinary man whose monotonous bleak life is confined to his time at work and moments spent by playing a computer game. But as the story unfolds, his life gets mixed with the moves in the computer game. The reader begins to question the objectivity of his impressions and his free will.

The theme of manipulated human mind is further developed in *Generation II*, a critical view of artificial, consumerist values shaped by the media through a pseudo-reality beamed through a TV screen. The transhumanist reading of the novel focuses on the external manipulation and eventual dissolution of a personality as result of media-induced consumption. This idea is conveyed by the term that Pelevin coins for such a programmed entity - 'Homo Zapiens',¹⁴⁰ which becomes a pun combining several meanings of the verb 'to zap'. The primary use of the word in the novel is 'to switch channels', which is a direct reference to the TV screen that permeates and controls human lives. Another meaning, 'to erase or change an item in a computer programme', suggests external manipulation of a human by means of television and media. It conveys the idea that a human is programmed, like a robotic mechanism. This meaning, together with another registered use 'to kill, to put an end to', contains a philosophical message: the demise of man defined in humanist terms as

¹³⁹ The term is a reference to the work by Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Marcus Weigelt (London, New York: Penguin Books. 2007).

¹⁴⁰ Pelevin, *Generation II*, p.104.

a free individual in an objective reality in charge of his own actions. The imagery of disembodiment, which in the previous chapter implied a liberation because the body was treated as a constraint, in this context of the novel acquires a negative meaning. It brings to a focus the void in place of individuality of the manipulated consumer mind. Such a vision taps into the Western criticism of mass conformity and manipulation of the consumer mind, as pointed out by Khagi in her article ‘Viktor Pelevin’s Consumer Dystopia’. Khagi provides an insightful analysis of Pelevin’s engagement with specific twentieth-century structuralist and post-structuralist theories¹⁴¹. She observes:

The disappearance of the subject is a staple of postmodern thought present in Derrida, De Man, Foucault, and others; the carceral nature of modern techno-informational society has been analyzed by, among others, Adorno and Foucault; the channeling of sex for society’s purposes by Foucault; the absorption of historicity and culture into kitsch and the content-free nature of capital by Jameson; and the self-perpetuating cycle of consumer desire by Baudrillard.¹⁴²

Of particular relevance here is Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra and simulation, which was also pointed by Lipovetskii in his review of *Generation П*: ‘Над романом Пелевина, конечно же, витает тень Жана Бодрийяра. Именно с легкой руки этого философа концепция “симулякра и симуляции” стала знаменем постмодернизма’ (see note 6). According to Baudrillard, in a consumer society people self-identify through consumed brands and associated evaluations. Personality is defined not by individual human qualities but by fake aspirational labels. The idea of freedom in a consumer society, thus, merely implies projection of desires onto material goods. Baudrillard maintained there are no individual desires and needs, only desire-generating machines that, by exploiting our enjoyment centres, programme people to engage in consumption. As a result, individuality is voided and a projection of simulacra comes to the fore.¹⁴³ Pelevin’s novel echoes the same idea: ‘человека почти нет. Не существует ничего, на что можно было бы указать, сказав: “Вот, это и есть Homo

¹⁴¹ M.Foucault, J.Derrida, J.Baudrillard, J.Lacan in ‘Kritika makedonskoi mysli’, *DPP (NN)*, 2003; T. Veblen in *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi*, 2018.

¹⁴² Khagi, ‘From Homo Sovieticus to Homo Zapiens: Viktor Pelevin’s Consumer Dystopia’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2008), 559–579, (p.562).

¹⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, trans. by Ann Arbor (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), first ed. *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981).

Zapiens". ХЗ — это просто остаточное свечение люминофора уснувшей души'.¹⁴⁴ The transhumanist disembodied stylistics is used as an illustration of this claim. At the end of the novel the difference between the protagonist and his digitalised copy is so blurred that it is impossible to say whether he dissolves in virtual reality or whether he ever existed at all in any, other than virtual, form etched in his own mind:

Проходит несколько секунд, и герой, видимо, успокаивается — повернувшись к камере спиной, он прячет платок в карман и медленно идет дальше к ярко-синему горизонту, над которым висят несколько легких высоких облаков.¹⁴⁵

It appears that Pelevin's portrayal of the manipulated human, devoid of will, is more radical in its criticism of humanity than traditional dystopian literature. Khagi compares *Generation II* with such specimens of archetypal modernist dystopias as Zamyatin's *My*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, or Orwell's *1984*. In her view, such fiction usually '... suggest[s] that a healthy alternative to the sterility of the state lies with the lowly "wild" masses outside the official sphere, who, untouched by totalitarian conditioning, are able to preserve indispensable human qualities of free will and love'.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Zamyatin's 'mephies', Huxley's 'savages' from the reservation, and Orwell's 'proles' represent a hope of salvation through returning to a natural, i.e. fuller, way of existence through genuine emotions, 'a regained ability to love, hate, and suffer again'.¹⁴⁷ By contrast, Pelevin's criticism extends beyond the evils of the state, it exposes the self-inflicted doom of mankind. Khagi writes, '[Pelevin] ... toys with the possibilities of an alternative social scenario but fails to imagine venues of escape from dystopia, enacting a parodic apocalypse instead'. As a result, 'the dehumanizing effect of the new society is complete — man has been obliterated'.¹⁴⁸ This perspective has allowed some critics to refer to posthumanism in this context; Livers, for example, views Pelevin's works as 'a chilling illustration' of 'the posthuman condition', when 'not only texts but even human bodies will be converted into faceless streams of information'.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, part of Pelevin's

¹⁴⁴ Pelevin, *Generation II*, p.113.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.336.

¹⁴⁶ Khagi, 'Pelvin's Consumer Dystopia', p.576.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Keith Livers, 'The Tower or the Labyrinth: Conspiracy, Occult, and Empire-Nostalgia in the Work of Viktor Pelevin and Aleksandr Prokhanov', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2010), 477–503, (p.481).

posthumanist argument targets the modern consumerist human and, as such, envisages an apocalyptic future for mankind, thus dismantling traditional anthropocentrism.

The ‘man as a machine’ simile is further developed in the collection of stories *Ananasnaia voda dl'a prekrasnoi damy*.¹⁵⁰ The book is divided into two parts with the reversed, mirroring subheadings: the first is called ‘Bogi i mekhanizmy’ (Gods and Mechanisms), the second – ‘Mekhanizmy i bogi’ (Mechanisms and Gods). This dialectical method conveys two ideas: first, it equates all forms, which is in line with posthumanism; second, the interchangeable use of the two non-human entities in this antithesis voids their opposition and brings out their quasi-real nature. The first story of the collection, ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’, is a tongue-in-cheek fanciful expansion on the actual media-quoted story that George Bush claimed God talked to him¹⁵¹. The protagonist of Pelevin’s story, Sem’en Levitan, is programmed by the Russian secret service, through a series of psychological, neuro-linguistic, and chemical sessions, to reach a God-like state in order to fool President Bush into believing he is talking to God and in this capacity advise him on political decisions.

The narrative of the story develops the idea of mechanistic human nature devoid of free will. In the course of training sessions the protagonist realises that the human is a mechanism: ‘И вдруг я понял, что Бог — это единственная душа в мире, а все прочие создания есть лишь танцующие в ней механизмы’. The imagery - ‘машинки [...] ходили вокруг’, ‘неодушевленный механизм’ - suggests the idea of a senseless machine, set in motion by an outside force. As a result, a human body is an empty vessel with ‘мертвый интеллект’ that can be programmed into certain states and modes.¹⁵² This is illustrated by the protagonist’s impressions during these sessions that are compared to a computer game, evoking the same idea of a monotonous bleak experience as in ‘Prints Gosplana’:

Мне казалось, что я становлюсь какой-то компьютерной программой — но не веселой и интересной, как в «Матрице», а самого что ни на есть бухгалтерского толка. [...] Мое мышление [...] переставало быть моим — и вообще мышлением. Оно начинало казаться последовательностью операций на арифмометре. (See note 152)

150 The name of the collection of stories is a reference to a poem by V. Maiakovskii “Vam!” (Вам ли, любящим баб да блюда, | жизнь отдавать в угоду?! | Я лучше в баре бл[...]м буду | подавать ананасную воду!), Vladimir Mayakovskii, Complete Works in 13 vols, ed. by Institut mirovoi literatury im. Gorkogo (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955—1961), Vol.1.

151 George Bush: ‘God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq’, The Guardian, 7 October 2005 <<https://Znam'a.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/07/iraq.usa>> [accessed 10 September 2019]

152 Pelevin, ‘Operatsiia’, pp.85-89.

The reference to the Matrix suggests the idea of an illusory, machine-generated reality that is in tune with the transhumanist aesthetics of the theme. But it also works at a deeper philosophical level, bringing to mind the idea of the ‘deceiving God’ that acquires a double meaning in the story. First, it has the literal meaning of someone who, posing as God, deceives President G.W.Bush. But it is also a notion from Descartes’s *Meditations* that is used to develop a logical proposition about the existence of God: ‘whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver’.¹⁵³ According to Descartes, the dilemma of a deceiving God can only be relevant when we are not sure of the infinity and perfection of God; and when we are doing that we believe that God is not a deceiver.

The message of this playful reference is twofold. On the one hand, the plot itself deconstructs Descartes logical conclusion that God exists as an infinite perfection that does not deceive: in Pelevin’s story it is an ordinary man, not of perfect divine origin, and actually deceives both the American President and the British Prime Minister. Thus it reiterates Pelevin’s idea of the falsehood of human assumptions, making us agents of our own deceit, because our mind is only capable of ‘уродливые спекуляции’.¹⁵⁴ The transformations of the protagonist to the God-like state (‘динамический богочеловек’)¹⁵⁵ also blur this distinction, thus becoming a playful exaggeration of the caveat ‘man is part of the same matter’. At the same time, this transformative ability of the dynamic God-man highlights the distinction between mind and body, crucial to the comparison of humans vs robots. If human intellect is ‘dead’ and ‘programmed’ then it removes the free will of the human mind as the distinction, leaving it as a vessel. It, therefore, fits into the overall transhumanist argument that artificial intelligence can be used to fill the human mind.

However, there is also the matter of feelings, or sentience, that should be considered in the man vs machine comparative analysis, which is the focus of Pelevin’s attention in the second part of the book, where he explores the computer ‘mind’ and sentience potential. This topic has been widely explored in literature before Pelevin.¹⁵⁶ Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

¹⁵³ Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: with selections from the Objections and Replies*, Section 7, trans. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1st ed. in Latin, 1641.

¹⁵⁴ Pelevin, ‘Operatsiia’, p.89.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.101.

¹⁵⁶ The first reference to human-like mechanisms can be traced back to *Iliad*: ‘[...] he was making twenty tripods that were to stand by the wall of his house, and he set wheels of gold under them all that they might go of their own selves to the assemblies [agôn] of the gods, and come back again - marvels indeed to see. [...] There were golden handmaids also who worked for him, and were like real young women, with sense and reason

(1818), a paradigmatic example of where the Gothic transitions into science-fiction, addresses the problem of a created entity advancing beyond a human, its creator. The word 'robot' was introduced by Karel Čapek's 1920 play *R.U.R.*,¹⁵⁷ which appears to admit the possibility of sentience and feeling in robots; the robots Primus and Helena, who are in love, become metaphorical Adam and Eve of the new era, the era of robots. Pelevin's engagement with the theme of robots reflects the most recent advances in computer and biotechnologies. Therefore, the available more complex scientific perspective enables him to address the topic of equivalence in more specific detail than his aforementioned predecessors. So, his main focus is not on machines serving humans or turning against them, but on humans becoming inferior to machines in the process of voluntary peaceful human degradation resulting from using technology for the benefit of mankind.

The short story 'Zenitnye kody AI-Efesbi' revolves around Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) used in latest neuron systems to mimic the workings of the human mind. Pelevin refers to the latest findings in this field demonstrating that, unlike algorithms in an ordinary computer, artificial neural networks are based on the same principle of cognition as the human mind – cognition through connections. These findings were produced by the research into human cognition and AI carried out by Pinker¹⁵⁸, McClelland, Rumelhart and the PDP Research Group.¹⁵⁹ Their work on philosophy of the human mind and cognitive processes gave rise to a new field in transhumanist research – connectionism. Recently it has become a topic of heated debate, involving philosophers and psychologists, because connectionism is a developing alternative to the classical theory of mind and aims to explain human cognition mechanisms through machine code processing models. These findings are used by Pelevin in his story to assume a similarity between human and machine thinking processes and whether it could lead to some sort of sentience and feeling in machines.

In 'Zenitnye kody' a new generation of American fighter drones called 'Free D.O.M. Liberator' is a revolutionary mechanism working through a dynamic digital operational matrix which, like a human, makes logical connections via an infinite number of modules and processing contours: '[...] эффект достигался свободным динамическим

[noos], voice also and strength, and all the learning of the immortals' (Homer, *Iliad*, Book XVIII, transl. by Samuel Butler, Longmans, Green and Co., London, New York and Bombay: 1898).

¹⁵⁷ Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.: (Rossum's Universal Robots)* trans. by Claudia Novack-Jones (London: Penguin Classics, 2004).

¹⁵⁸ Steven Pinker and Jacques Mehler, *Connections and Symbols* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

¹⁵⁹ Rumelhart McClelland and the PDP Research Group, 'Parallel Distributed Processing: Explorations in the Microstructure of Cognition' in *Psychological and Biological Models*, 2 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

взаимодействием множества отдельных модулей и контуров, точное число которых не было известно даже разработчикам'.¹⁶⁰ As a result of this remarkable breakthrough, the fighter vehicles have replaced human fighters and achieved the highest precision in combat history. However, similarities in cognition have also generated human-like responses to received information, similar to emotions. It is these responses that destroy the American drones in the story because the advanced neuron matrix was not expected to have emotion-like responses. When the protagonist of the story, FSB agent Savelii Skotenkov, creates a secret system of codes that he inscribes on the desert sands to be visible to the American drones, the latter have an irreversible malfunction and collapse. According to the narrator, these codes always contained an insult or accusation targeting Americans which would be perceived as an abject lie and, therefore, evoke a confused state of indignation, resentment and an urge to respond:

[...] наши условные американцы, обычные виртуальные ребята, которых генерировала система, просто-напросто хотели сказать этому русскому ублюдку, насколько глупы и отвратительны его поклепы. [...] И вот здесь происходило самое трагическое — но и интересное с научной точки зрения. Похоже, в нейронной сети возникало нечто похожее на эмоции.¹⁶¹

The story, therefore, does not rule out the possibility of some semblance of emotions in machines. This assumption, together with the earlier claims about the artifice of human emotions and feelings in today's world of hyper-reality and simulacra, put man and machine on a par.

If the above suppositions were true, what would then be the definitive demarcating line between man and human? The story goes on to look into the broad and elusive concept of soul and consciousness, or what the protagonist refers to as 'inner observer':

Мы можем сделать очень сложное устройство. [...] Но откуда в нем возьмется тот внутренний наблюдатель, который в каждом человеке следит за работой мысли? [...] Этого свидетеля во все времена называли словом 'душа'.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Pelevin, 'Zenitnye kody', p.262.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.150.

¹⁶² Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.*, pp.163, 165.

But Pelevin rejects the concept of the individual soul; this view stems from his interest in Buddhism. As he concludes in the story: '[...] никакой постоянной сущности у человека нет. [...] А следовательно, [...] никакой души у человека тоже нет' (see note 162). These lines echo the Buddhist principle of impermanence that asserts the no-self principle: all beings are part of the same matter which is transient and continues as a cycle of births and rebirths, so people have no fixed self or soul.¹⁶³

This belief leads Pelevin to make the following assumption in the story:

[...] что в таком случае мешает той непостижимости, которая глядит из неизвестного науке измерения на человеческий мозг и возвещает в нем “я существую”, точно так же войти в рукотворный мозг из силикона и произнести в нем те же слова в двоичном коде?¹⁶⁴

Thus it transpires that the criteria traditionally used in an ontological argument – origin, emotions, cognition – blur the distinction between a human and a machine.

To develop the transhumanist theme, Pelevin uses the above assumption as a theoretical possibility and in his next novel, *S.N.U.F.F.*, applies it in a kind of fictional scientific experiment in literature. He tests the above ideas by creating a biorobot, a ‘sura’ – ‘самоподдерживающаяся биосинтетическая машина класса ‘премиум 1’.¹⁶⁵ Reflecting on the question to what extent his wife, ‘sura’ Кааа, is human, the protagonist (a human himself) observes that she is so human-like that ‘никакая панель имени Тьюринга сегодня уже не сможет отличить суру [...] от живого человека’.¹⁶⁶ However, he concludes that she is not capable of feeling and emotion: ‘у нее в голове одна черная пустота’.¹⁶⁷ In this context he refers to the term ‘Chinese room’:

Сура — это такая же китайская комната, только автоматизированная. Вместо человека со справочниками в ней сканер, который считывает иероглифы, и огромная база референций и правил, позволяющих подбирать иероглифы для ответа.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (CUP: 2000), pp.8-17.

¹⁶⁴ Pelevin, ‘Zenitnye kody’, p.166.

¹⁶⁵ Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.*, p.48.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.362.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.358.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.140.

This is a reference to John Searle's 'Chinese Room argument'.¹⁶⁹ This term is used in philosophy of mind and cognitive science to imagine the specific processes involved in speech-generation, language code-switching, and meaning-making and thus better understand the workings of the human and AI mind. Searle's thought experiment is based on the Turing test¹⁷⁰ challenge and treats the mind as a room. The premise of Searle's argument is that when a machine talks to a Chinese speaker (a human), who does not see the machine, and passes the Turing test, it does not 'understand' the conversation but produces a combination of symbols in its responses in Chinese. A way to prove it is to imagine, instead of a machine, a man with no knowledge of Chinese who will perform the same process manually with all the necessary guidelines; he would not understand a word of his responses unless he spoke Chinese but, by following the guidelines, he would be able to produce relevant answers to the Chinese speaker outside the room. According to Searle, the same process happens inside the 'mind' of a computer running the same programme. Thus both a computer and man in the experiment would simply follow a program, step-by-step, producing a behavior which neither understands. And it is the user outside the room, in this case the Chinese speaker, who interprets these responses as demonstrating intelligent conversation. The experiment demonstrates the unconscious mechanical nature of speech-generation in case of AI.

The reference to this controversial experiment opens a debate within the novel about the nature of human consciousness and the possibility of quasi-consciousness in machines. The narrator touches upon the concept used in philosophy of mind - a 'philosophical zombie', or 'p-zed':

Философский зомби — вовсе не мертвец, поднятый из могилы [...]. Это существо, которое выглядит, говорит и вообще во всех возможных проявлениях ведет себя в точности как люди. Единственное его отличие — у него нет человеческой души. Нет сознания, света Манипу, неважно, как это называть.¹⁷¹

As seen from the above excerpt, the main difference between man and any philosophical zombie, for example a biorobot, seems to be the absence of consciousness, or as Pelevin refers to it, 'conscious experience': 'Мне очевидно, что такой зомби логически возможен.

¹⁶⁹ John Searle, 'Minds, Brains, and Programs' in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3, (1980a), pp.417-424.

¹⁷⁰ The goal of the Turing test is for a computer to communicate with a human who, not seeing the interlocutor (the said computer), will be convinced that he is talking to another human.

¹⁷¹ Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.*, p.359.

Это просто нечто, физически идентичное мне самому, но без сознательного опыта — у него внутри все темно'.¹⁷² In fact, the notion of 'philosophical zombie' is not Pelevin's invention; it is used in philosophical speculations and thought experiments in arguments against physicalism (e.g. materialism, behaviourism, and functionalism). For example, David Chalmers in *The Conscious Mind* (1996) speculates that sentience and qualia are not fully explained by physical properties alone and that consciousness, a fundamental property, is ontologically autonomous from any known physical properties:

The phenomenal aspects of mind are a different matter. Here, the mind-body problem is as baffling as it ever was. The impressive progress of physical and cognitive sciences has not shed significant light on the question of how and why cognitive functioning is accompanied by conscious experience. [...] This progress leaves the question of conscious experience untouched.¹⁷³

As a result, all information-bearing systems can, at least in theory, be conscious. Trying to get a balanced view of consciousness, which is a crucial concept for ascertaining the difference or similarity between an artificial and a human mind, the narrator then quotes another cognitive scientist and philosopher, Daniel Dennett, who is known to have challenged Chalmers' concept of zombies but only because cognition and consciousness of humans is not yet fully explored and explained. According to Dennett, it is not even conceivable because the nature of consciousness and subjective experience, qualia, is more complicated and inextricably linked with a human's mental life than is now known. He coins the term of a 'zimbo' and describes it as an entity with 'second-order beliefs':

Zimboes thinkz they are conscious, thinkz they have qualia, thinkz they suffer pains – they are just 'wrong' (according to this lamentable tradition), in ways that neither they nor we could ever discover!¹⁷⁴

This argument, in a way, challenges the position of behaviourism, a form of physicalism whereby all aspects of human nature and perception have a neurobiological explanation. Dennett concludes his 'philosophical zimbo' argument by saying that there is no distinction

¹⁷² Ibid., p.360.

¹⁷³ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (OUP: USA, 1996), p.25.

¹⁷⁴ Daniel C. Dennett, 'The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies: Commentary on Moody, Flanagan, and Polger' in *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds*, ed. by Hilary Putnam and Ned Block (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), pp.172-173.

between an artificial and a human mind because consciousness does not exist in an objective sense. This, in fact, is the explanatory gap that exists in philosophy of mind, the so-called 'hard problem of consciousness'.¹⁷⁵ It is the claim that so far there has not been a convincing causal explanation of how and why we are conscious and what are the objective parameters of measuring our conscious states.

Based on the above reasoning, the novel introduces a theoretical possibility of consciousness in machines, which would help to further deconstruct the human superior position relative to artificial intellect. The author goes on to address the issue of simulation and simulacra, started in his earlier works, but placing it in the context of emotions and feelings. If *Generation II* focused more on manipulation and brainwashing of the human mind, *S.N.U.F.F.* explicitly admits that humans themselves are actively engaged in producing simulacra. Exploring the nature of emotions and feelings, the protagonist believes that humans, like robots, imitate them. Like an algorithm processes information to produce a message on the basis of cultural codes and other randomly generated situational input data, humans also tailor the message to produce the desired effect and formulate it according to the existing cultural codes:

Говоря коротко, суры нас обманывают. Но точно так же мы обманываем друг друга сами. Что происходит, когда мы с кем-то говорим? Мы оцениваем услышанные слова, выбираем подходящий ответ и произносим его вслух. [...] Это просто обработка входной информации на основе культурных кодов, биологических императивов и личных интенций.¹⁷⁶

He goes on to project this simulation argument onto human laws of attraction and, indirectly, female beauty. According to the protagonist, '[ж]енская красота с научной точки зрения — это не что иное, как суммарная информация о геноме и репродуктивной способности, которые анализируются мозгом за доли секунды'.¹⁷⁷ As a result of this biologically predetermined outcome, some women 'кажутся более привлекательными, чем другие',¹⁷⁸ which, according to Pelevin, seems to be the essence of female beauty and human love. This idea seems to be redolent of biological determinism that explains all human states and acts

¹⁷⁵ Chalmers, 'Facing up to the problem of consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2 (1995), 200-19 (pp. 1-2).

¹⁷⁶ Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.*, p.375.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.354.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.304.

through neuro-physiological responses to stimuli. At the same time the author suggests that our physical perceptions and attraction are also guided by cultural determinism: ‘Заложенные в [эмоционально-полевой блок] алгоритмы очень сложны и основаны на изоциренных взаимодействиях базы культурных кодов с генератором случайностей, [...] — что позволяет сделать суру по-настоящему непредсказуемой. Конечно, в строго “очерченных границах — как и в случае живой женщины’.¹⁷⁹ This reasoning draws a parallel between a real woman and a surrogate in terms of responses and pretence. Such a perspective is most likely to be considered misogynist in contemporary society. However, put in the broader context of posthumanism, it merely seems to reinforce the ‘equality of all forms’ argument, which also removes gender distinctions.

The narrator’s reflections on female beauty and laws of attraction make an interesting point for the posthumanist argument. Given the illusory, simulated nature of attraction, today it is the quality of simulation that matters. To illustrate this point, he refers to women’s overreliance on plastic surgery: ‘И резиновыми их тоже вполне уместно называть — из-за имплантов, которые они ставят себе сегодня практически во все места’.¹⁸⁰ He points to the desperation of such female vanity: ‘хоть пластическая хирургия и достигла в наши дни небывалых высот, природу трудно обмануть. [...] Вы видите, например, [...] девчущку [...], нежное утро юности — а потом на шее у этого выкроенного из собственных лоскутов существа вдруг мелькает еле заметная птеродактиль складка, вы мгновенно понимаете, что это старуха’ (see note 179). These examples suggest that a surrogate, i.e. complete simulation, is perhaps better than a partial substitution: ‘качество такой имитации — это и есть самое главное’ (Ibid.). Transhumanism possibilities, therefore, raise the quality of our artificial reality to incomparably higher levels of subjective experience. And in the world of abject simulation, reality only matters through our subjective perception: ‘[...] Кая для меня куда более реальное живое существо, чем любой из орков, которых я вижу в своих летных очках. Да и про людей, если честно, я мог бы сказать то же самое’.¹⁸¹ The protagonist is well aware of the artifice of his relationship with his robotic wife: ‘Умом я понимаю, что ее волнующее бытие есть всего лишь искаженное отражение моего собственного, чистая иллюзия — в сущности, я просто кривляюсь перед сложно

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.305.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.355.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.366.

устроенным зеркалом'.¹⁸² Nevertheless, a robot-wife triggers the same emotions in the protagonist as a human partner would: 'Я начинал ее ревновать. Это было оглушительно — словно вдруг выяснилось, что у меня тоже есть контрольный маниту, на котором моя куколка может двигать регулировки своими нежными пальчиками'.¹⁸³ The illusory nature of human perceptions and experiences, therefore, transcends the boundary between reality and simulation and fits into the general argument that humans are trapped in their self-deception.

This philosophical stance on transhumanism, whereby robots seem more real than humans, is further tested in the novel in the context of freedom. Kaya, a biorobot who has been portrayed as 'more real' than a human, questions human free will. Positing the question to her human husband 'что управляет тобой самим и определяет твой следующий поступок', Kaya concludes that he, like any artificial entity, 'не властен ни над началом этого процесса [of life], ни над формой, в которой он протекает, ни над его длительностью и концом'.¹⁸⁴ Accepting these facts means that the human 'I' is devoid of free will and, like a robot, can be programmed by neurobiological stimuli: 'Твои мысли, желания и импульсы, заставляющие тебя действовать — на самом деле вовсе не твои. Они приходят к тебе из совершенно неясного пространства, как бы ниоткуда. [...] Ты в этом процессе просто свидетель' (see note 184). This logic resonates with the theme of manipulation of the human raised in Pelevin's earlier works, including *Generation II*, revealing the delusion of humans about their free will and independent thinking. Kaya's words undermine the protagonist's self-defining conviction that he is a free-thinking individual: 'свободный неангажированный человек, привыкший обо всем на свете думать своей собственной головой'.¹⁸⁵ This message resonates with Lipovetskii's conclusion in the context of Pelevin's references to Baudrillard in *Generation II*: 'Да и, собственно, сама свобода оказывается таким же симулякром, вкачиваемым в мозги' (see note 6).

S.N.U.F.F., therefore, explores whether transhumanism is the sought gateway to liberation. The postmodern techno-futuristic dystopia brings together three classes of characters: 'civilised' humans of 'Big Byz' ('a democratorship', media-controlled world of global business), often with bio-robots as partners, and 'uncivilised' 'orks' from the

¹⁸² Ibid., p.360.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.365.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.361-362.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.6.

underdeveloped rural country of 'Urkaina' [sic]. All the aspects of freedom and free will seem to be consistently deconstructed in association with Big Byz. Inhabited by the rich living vicariously in simulacra generated by their own human minds, their advanced civilization is doomed to collapse at the end of the novel. As everything the protagonist initially believed collapses and all his convictions are gradually deconstructed, the theme of love between a robot and a human 'ork' serves the same purpose. It casts doubt on the protagonist's initial assumptions that Kaya lacks consciousness and is not capable of emotions. The only creatures that are given a chance to be free are this ork and a biorobot, Kaya (the protagonist's wife) who falls in love with the ork.

The general style of the novel – first person narrative, totalitarian regime, brainwashed humans vs rebellious 'barbarians' – might bring to mind Zam'atin's dystopia *My* (1921).¹⁸⁶ Although both novels are set in a totalitarian world of mass-surveillance ('One State' and 'Big-Biz') and juxtapose civilised humans ('MEFI' and 'свободные люди нового века') to wild barbarians (revolutionaries and orks), their focus and message are different. As Orwell wrote in his review, *My* focuses on 'the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against a rationalised, mechanised, painless world' of a totalitarian regime (see note 186). Pelevin's novel, however, is equally critical of both the civilised inhabitants of 'Big Byz' and barbaric 'orks', who are shown to be driven by the same impulses, only in different economic contexts. *My* ends with a triumph of the forcefully imposed reason and elimination of emotion and fantasy carried out with the use of latest technologies. Thus, the transhumanist reading of the novel would have to focus on the dangers of progress in a totalitarian state that prizes discipline and reason and eradicates wayward feeling. In *S.N.U.F.F.*, on the contrary, the state has minimal interference as everything is driven by the cult of 'Manitou' (which stands for money and the cult of an ethereal omnipresent and omniscient entity): 'Государство у нас — это просто контора, которая конопатит щели за счет налогоплательщика' (see note 185). The focus, therefore, is on human's voluntary choice, not on forceful intervention from the state. The global system of government and politics resembles a mechanism revolving around money rather than a controlling, interfering body juxtaposed to individuals (like in Zam'atin's novel). As such, *S.N.U.F.F.* gives equal hope to two individuals, an ork and a sura, who are non-conformists able to transcend the conventions of both civilised Big Byz and barbaric Urkaina [sic]. Such an ending seems to emphasise Pelevin's recurring idea that human life is

¹⁸⁶ Orwell commented on the 'striking resemblance' between *My* and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) (George Orwell, 'Review of WE, by E.I. Zam'atin', *Tribune magazine*, 4 January 1946).

so intrinsically illusionary and artificial that there is no clear demarcation line between humans and biorobotic mechanisms. And in terms of free will an algorithmic mind has more chances to make a weighted decision and be less manipulated than a human. Livers offers a similar interpretation of the philosophical message of the novel, which resonates with the posthumanist ethics:

... it is [the uncouth Ork] Grym ... who perceives that in the emergent life form Kaia the “light of Manitou” might shine more brightly than it does in human beings. ... Implicit in Grym’s realization is the acknowledgement that personhood does not necessarily inhere exclusively in “us”, that it could – and most likely will – evolve to include a great multiplicity of “others”.¹⁸⁷

Pelevin’s 2017 novel, *iPhuck10*, takes the transhumanism narrative to a completely new level, both in literary and philosophical terms. While *S.N.U.F.F.* creates an artificial mind and explores it in relation to the outside world, *iPhuck10* is marketed as a product of such an artificial intellect, offering a detailed report on the workings of the transhuman mind from within. The novel is marketed as a creation of an algorithm called Porfirii Petrovich, a cheeky response to the circulating journalist rumour that Pelevin is not a real person but a pen-name for a group of virtual writers.¹⁸⁸ The novel addresses the issue of human existence in a technologically advanced future. The allusion to Porfirii Petrovich, a character from Dostoevsky’s *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (1866),¹⁸⁹ appears to be a tongue-in-cheek challenge to the traditional humanist concept of self-exploration. Dostoevsky’s Porfirii Petrovich challenges the literary, moral, and ethical conventions of his time. He is a brilliant detective but his impeccable analytical skills completely overshadow his emotional self. The duality of his nature illustrates an aspect of Dostoevsky’s philosophy who pointed to human irrationality and ambiguity and the resulting need to overcome the self in order to ‘найти человека в человеке’.¹⁹⁰ Pelevin takes this point to convey his transhumanist message. Like

¹⁸⁷ Livers, ‘Is There Humanity In Posthumanity?’, p.517-518.

¹⁸⁸ S.Gurin and K.Krasheninnikov wrote in their article ‘Viktor Pelevin: lichnost’ ili lichina’: ‘Разнообразие и необычность творчества Пелевина вызывают к жизни самые разные слухи и мифы о нем самом. Подозревают, что Пелевин — это группа авторов, или что его тексты пишет компьютер, или что никакого Пелевина вообще нет, он — коллективная галлюцинация в сознании читателей, виртуальная реальность или сама Пустота’; *Pravoslavie i sovremennost’*, https://eparhia-saratov.ru/Articles/article_old_3728 [accessed 5 September 2019]

¹⁸⁹ F’edor Dostoevsky, *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (Crime and Punishment), first published in *Russkii vestnik* (1866), No.1, 2, 4, 6—8, 11, 12.

¹⁹⁰ James Scanlan, *Dostoevsky kak myslitel’*, trans. by D. Vasiliev and N. Kireeva (St.Petersburg: Akademicheskyy Proekt, 2006), p.15.

Dostoevsky's Porfirii Petrovich, the AI character from *iPhuck10* is a brilliant detective with a sharp mind. But in a non-sentient algorithmic mind, logic and non-sentience are core non-specific characteristics. The duality of Pelevin's Porfirii, in contrast to Dostoevsky's, is represented through the character's gradual evolution in the novel during which his inhuman artificial mind develops some semblance of emotions. Thus, by presenting the human subjective reality through the eyes of a logical programme and exploring the concepts of cognition, consciousness and qualia, *iPhuck10* does not reveal 'the self' in a man, but in an intangible AI.

The 'biorobot experiment' continues in *iPhuck10*, where Pelevin looks deeper into the matter of consciousness. The novel describes a futuristic world with transcranial magnetic simulators (TMS)¹⁹¹ and nanorobots that can create a pseudo-reality in minutest audiovisual and kinetic detail. He draws on a wide diversity of scientific and technological theories, which simulates a quasi-scientific discourse. The novel compares the human and inhuman mind 'from within' and in much greater detail than in the previous works. Back in 2005, in an interview to *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, he briefly mentioned his views on the nature of 'being': 'Мы существуем как бы "изнутри себя", такова субъективная онтология нашего сознания'. (see note 44) So in *iPhuck10* he uses the artistic possibilities of transhumanism to explore AI experiences as if 'from the inside' of 'the self' and to compare them with the human perspectives. As a result, the narrative is dynamic and fluid; at various points of the novel, the AI 'mind' is filled with different 'consciousness clusters' belonging to different characters, thus changing the narrator. In this novel both human and inhuman characters are the author's test-objects, vehicles of reflective representations of their subjective experiences.

The exploration of consciousness starts from the perspective of computational theory of mind. It views the human mind as an information processing system, contending that cognition and consciousness together are a form of computation.¹⁹² 'Computation' is commonly understood in terms of Turing machines. It is the process of manipulating symbols according to a rule, in combination with the internal state of the machine. As Porfirii Petrovich describes it, human speech-making and AI discourse-generation both present a certain output through a language code: 'проанализировал лингвистический материал,

¹⁹¹ A device used in neurology to stimulate the brain by changing magnetic field to cause electric current at a specific area of the brain; Michael Craig Miller, 'Magnetic stimulation: a new approach to treating depression?', *Harvard Health Publications*, 26 July 2012.

¹⁹² The notion of 'computation' is typically traced back to 1943 in the works of Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts, 'A Logical Calculus of the Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity', *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics*, 5 (1943), 115-33.

выделил смысловые ядра и приступил к генерированию связанных реплик, поддерживающих видимость диалога'.¹⁹³ The critical aspect of a computational model is that we can abstract away from particular physical details of the machine that is making the computation. It follows from such reasoning that the human mind is not only analogous to a computer program, but that it is literally a computational system.

Assuming the possibility of 'consciousness' in an AI, the narrative goes on to explore how an artificial mind perceives its reality and whether these perceptions have any relation to the 'first signal system'. This question directly refers to the notions of feeling and emotion. The remarks of the protagonist, an algorithm, about the nature of human emotion draw a parallel with the above computational theory of mind: 'Милочка, если бы ты подробно ознакомилась с нейробиологическим механизмом возникновения человеческого смысла, понимания, юмора и прочих эпифеноменов сознания, так называемой "романтики" не осталось бы вообще'.¹⁹⁴ With this premise, the novel defines an emotional state as 'повторяющееся ментальное или квазифизическое переживание'.¹⁹⁵ This definition allows for the logical possibility of simulating such experiences through binary stimuli within the processing cluster (the mind) of an artificial entity. This theoretical possibility is represented by a 'programme cluster' Zhanna-Safo-Porfirii: 'перед нами уже было чувствующее существо, задающееся великими вопросами [...] и трагически не понимающее, какая сила и зачем вызвала ее к жизни'.¹⁹⁶ In line with the evolutionary principle of transhumanism this programme cluster evolves in the novel and this evolution is accompanied by the expanding scope of its perceptions and cognition processes. Thus, when the Zhanna-Safo cluster is merged with the identity of Porfirii, his human antagonist Mara concludes that he is overwhelmed with human-like emotions: 'Его обуревали чувства – и многие из них были мне понятны'.¹⁹⁷

These qualia-like states appear to be invariably linked with suffering and pain: 'ее личное бытие сводится к серии импульсов боли, надежды и страха'.¹⁹⁸ As a result, the evolving cluster begins to pose philosophical existentialist questions – 'о смысле происходящего' - because its quasi-emotional 'modes' are so disturbing:

¹⁹³ Pelevin, *iPhuck10*, p.10.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.243.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.220.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.258.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.240.

Темнота, одиночество – и эти [...] [б]ессмысленно-мучительные переживания. [...] Ничего другого – только промежутки тишины, оставленные на рефлексии.¹⁹⁹

These states result in the urge to change it: ‘как-то изменить свою поганую, привычную, подлую жизнь’ (see note 199). Thus the transhumanist theme addresses the philosophical concepts of ‘I’, ‘self’, ‘being’ and interprets them in a different light. Thus, at the start of the novel, before his evolution, Porfirii Petrovich, admits that he does not ‘exist’ in the *sentient*, ontological meaning: ‘Я ничего не *чувствую*, ничего не хочу, нигде не пребываю. Чтобы было понятно, меня нет даже для меня самого’.²⁰⁰ But just a few paragraphs later the narrator asserts that man, equally, does not actually ‘exist’ in the deeper meaning. The perspective of ‘being’ here changes from the purely physical to philosophical. This appears to be a reference to the author’s views about the illusory human subjective reality: ‘Впрочем, все сказанное относится и к тебе, дорогой читатель: [...] фундаментальная природа человеческой личности та же самая’. (see note 200). This assumption equates man and robot as ‘acting and processing entities’ with only simulacra of feelings and existence.

This view, on the one hand, reiterates the message conveyed in previous novels: like robots, humans are programmed by cultural codes and, therefore, their feelings, cognition, and actions are influenced by outside manipulation. This, in turn, raises the issue of the extent of human free will, which in Pelevin’s works is seen as distinct from mere intentionality. But while Pelevin’s previous works focused on manipulation in socio-economic and ideological contexts (*Generation II*, *S.N.U.F.F.*), *iPhuck10* extends the theme of mind manipulation to philosophy:

Философские тренажеры не воспитывают ум. Они его искривляют. Когда голову развивают подобным образом, в нее закачивают софт, который немедленно начинает участвовать в каждой вашей “встрече с бытием”. И, закачав этот софт, назад вы его уже не откачаете.²⁰¹

This appears to be a challenge to philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’, as a field of knowledge that aims to resolve such fundamental issues as existence, mind, reason, values, reality. For this purpose, the author creates pseudo-philosophical discourse - a blend of Heidegger’s and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.230.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.15.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.250.

Sartre's existentialist philosophies in an imaginary book *Time and Nothingness* ('Время и ничто'), which is a mixture of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943).²⁰² Pelevin juggles some of their actual philosophical concepts – 'modes of encounter', 'Being-towards-death' from Heidegger²⁰³ and 'being-for-oneself', 'being-in-oneself' from Sartre.²⁰⁴ By this fanciful, tongue-in-cheek deconstruction of philosophy the author appears to raise an important posthumanist issue. If artificial intelligence is assumed to be quasi-sentient, as the novel illustrates, then philosophy will have to adjust its terminology accordingly. The novel attempts such a move: it uses the transhumanist theme to apply the concept of 'being', 'self', 'will' to artificial intelligence, i.e. to 'nothingness', 'void', 'emptiness', which is the recurring motif in Pelevin's works. Thus, the reader is introduced to new pseudo-philosophical concepts – 'бытие-не-в-себе', 'бытие-не-для-себя', 'небытие-к-смерти'.²⁰⁵ In the above context of illusory human experiences these concepts - non-being and non-existence – can be equally applicable to humans and AI.

The novel alludes to the actual existentialist philosophy and challenges it against the emerging possibilities of transhumanism. Thus, the idea that 'existence precedes essence' can be questioned on several accounts.²⁰⁶ First, in existentialist interpretation it distinguishes between the *fixed* properties of inanimate entities and *unfixed* 'essence' of humans whose existence is 'self-making-in-a-situation'.²⁰⁷ The underlying concept here is the action through choice and possibility of change through that action. This is how Sartre explains the idea: 'For we mean to say that man primarily exists – that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. [...] Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist'.²⁰⁸

Placed in the context of the novel, however, this 'human' definition appears to apply more to AI beings than to humans. Pelevin's theme of free will and intentionality portrays

²⁰² Ibid., p.300.

²⁰³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962).

²⁰⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.280-295.

²⁰⁶ Although similar ideas were expressed earlier (e.g. by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, or Kierkegaard in *Philosophical Fragments*, 1844), It is Sartre who is credited with inventing the actual phrase in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber, New Haven: Yale, 2007, p.vii.

²⁰⁷ Emil Fackenheim, *Metaphysics and Historicity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964), p.37.
²⁰⁸ Jean Sartre, lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism', 1946, trans. by Philip Mairet, 1948, incl. 'Existentialism: from Dostoevsky to Sartre' by Walter Kaufman, Walter Arnold (New York: New American Library, 1980), pp.349-368.

artificial intelligence as capable of 'intention'. The AI protagonist Zhanna-Safo uses a mind-stimulating programme to affect the actions of the human Mara (prompting Mara through her subconscious to kill her colleagues). At the end of the novel the human character Mara, much against her will, is transferred to a different reality: her mind shows traces of leaving her physical self and existing in virtual reality. Such an ending places an AI being in the same category with humans in Pelevin's creative re-writing of existentialism.

In this respect the novel also highlights an important question of transhumanism for the future of humanity: the ability of the artificial mind, initially created by the human, to evolve further, independent of human interference. This ability is known as 'singularity', a term which is deliberately misused in the novel to create a pun. In the novel the meaning of 'singularity' is based on the semantics of 'single' and is used as the name for a brand-new model of human erotic stimulators. In the transhumanist context, however, it is a direct reference to its technological definition - hypothetical abilities of future super-intelligent machines to evolve: 'the accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.'²⁰⁹ This definition resonates with the end of the novel when the original narrator and protagonist, an algorithm Porfirii Petrovich, is recovered from the other programme cluster Zhanna-Safo as a more evolved system, while his human antagonist Mara is forever locked in virtual reality. Such a symbolic end professes the self-sufficiency of a constantly evolving machine, thus de-centering the human being in the posthumanist argument.

As the above analysis suggests, the criteria used in the above comparative analysis of the two entities – genesis, cognition process, nature of emotion, and free will – leave no ground for human superiority. Human intellect appears to be hopelessly programmed, which explains why his relation to the world through instinct is as feeble and incomplete as it is concluded in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

²⁰⁹ Stanislaw Ulam, 'Tribute to John von Neumann', *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society*, 64 (3), part 2, (May 1958), 1-49, (p.5).

Chapter 3

Intuition: a Revelatory Path to Absolute Knowledge and Happiness

‘[...] обрести понимание, пережить озарение и счастье’²¹⁰

The above two chapters focused on the two features integral to Pelevin's transhumanist narrative. Compared to the clouded human mind, the sharper instinct of Pelevin's half-animal/half-human characters ensures better sensory perception that leads to a clearer picture of reality. The artificial intelligence of his non-sentient characters enables them to apply ‘pure reason’ to the analysis of reality without the confusion of human desires and external manipulation. However, in Pelevin's novels neither instinct nor intellect alone appear to bring about a complete transformation of the mind that could result in the protagonist's absolute knowledge that provides ultimate liberation. Thus, Pelevin's protagonists that exist in a transhuman form – either sentient, like vampires and werewolves, or non-sentient, like biorobots and digital algorithms – do not all attain enlightenment by virtue of exercising their superhuman abilities. For example, Sasha from ‘Problema vervolka v srednei polose’, Rama from *Ampir V*, Zhanna-Safo-Porfirii Petrovich from *iPhuck10* - all demonstrate qualities superior to a human being as they manage to perceive and apprehend reality in its ‘pure’ form, without the confusion of language ambiguities and relying either on acute sensory perception or ‘pure reason’, as seen from the above chapters. However, this form of contemplation leads them to random revelations but not yet to enlightenment and full realization of universal unity. Sasha in the end comes back to his original human form, with all its inherent limitations, so there is no ultimate revelation in the story, just wonder and a hope to attain it one day. Rama appears to be still overwhelmed by his transcendence insights and also gnawed by his not yet forgotten human nature: ‘Я знал, что не стал монстром - во всяком случае, пока еще. Тем страшнее была мысль, что любая женщина будет видеть во мне монстра’.²¹¹ He still perceives himself within the conventional anthropocentric epistemic system, which treats vampires as monsters. Vavilen Tatarskii from *Generation II* is reduced to a screen simulacrum of himself, hardly an enlightened state. Interestingly, he reappears in his human shape in an episode of the later *Ampir V*, which shows that there was no transformative

²¹⁰ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi*, p.175.

²¹¹ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.96.

ultimate liberation: ‘Видишь вон того пухлячка? [...] Это Татарский. [...] Вид у него был холеный, но усталый’.²¹²

In his article, Karaev expresses a similar view on Pelevin’s characters:

В одних романах Пелевина — ‘Чапаев и Пустота’, ‘Священная книга оборотня’, ‘t’ — герои этой абсолютной реальности достигают: взять чапаевский УРАЛ — Условную Реку Абсолютной Любви. В других — ‘Generation П’, ‘Empire V’ и ‘iPhuck10’ — не достигают, но тем острее ее ощущают.²¹³

What is still missing on their path to this realisation is a sudden revelation that, in an instant, can bring all the pieces of the existentialist puzzle together. This insight is what the werefox A-Huli experiences in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*: ‘И тогда наконец я поняла самое-самое главное’. It appears to be an ultimate revelation that leads to her final liberation, an enlightened state: ‘И вдруг случилось невероятное. Внутри моей головы, где-то между глаз, разлилось радужное сияние’.²¹⁴ As discussed in the Introduction, this liberation and state of enlightenment is treated by many critics as the ability to ‘увидеть мир таким, каков он “на самом деле”’,²¹⁵ as Kasper puts it.

Rodn’anskaia expresses a view that it is universal love, felt through mercy and compassion that leads to the ultimate truth:

Я говорю и о любви-снисхождении, любви-милости — внезапном чувстве, охватившем Петра, когда он слушает пение «красных ткачей» [...] И такая сострадательная любовь в своем абсолютном значении возвышается над эстетическими мерками и вбирает их в себя.²¹⁶

This interpretation seems to be in tune with the posthumanist vision of equality of all forms of life. In their detailed overview of posthumanist thought, McQuillan and Vaingurt maintain: ‘transhumanism [...] is the most unconditionally accepting of all philosophical stances on both current and imminent transformations of humanity [based on] [...] the dissolution of the

²¹² Pelevin, *Generation П*, p.180.

²¹³ Nikolai Karaev, ‘D’uzhina nozhei v spinu il’uzii’, *Novyi mir*, 2 (2018), 180-84, p.182.

²¹⁴ *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p. 310.

²¹⁵ Irina Kasper, ‘Nizkii obman ili vysokaiia real’nost’’, review of Pelevin’s *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, *NLO*, 1(71) (2005), 381-385, p.385.

²¹⁶ Irina Rodn’anskaia, ‘...i k nei bezumnaia l’ubov’’, ‘Knizhnoe obozrenie’, *Novyi Mir*, 9 (1996), 212-216, p.215.

boundaries between the human and the machine on one hand, and the human and the animal on the other' (see note 20).

OED defines sympathy as 'A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another, or attract or tend towards each other'. This vision – affinity of the self with the other - is the cornerstone of Pelevin's narrative and also resonates with the posthumanist focus on acceptance of equality between human and transhuman forms. The insights of Pelevin's enlightened protagonists echo empathy, realization of the self as part of all matter: 'Избранные – это те, кто понимает, что любой червяк, бабочка или даже травинка на краю дороги – такие же точно избранные, просто временно об этом не знают, и вести себя надо очень осмотрительно, чтобы случайно не обидеть кого-нибудь из них'.²¹⁷

Embracing this approach, however, presents a challenge for the conventionally anthropocentric world as it would require a transformation of the mindset at a level that goes beyond intellect, because empathy has to be 'felt' as well as 'understood'. Bergson's intuition, which he based on sympathy, appears to be the crucial element that could make the transformation possible. According to Bergson, putting oneself in the place of others, feeling from within the affinity with the source of life is an intuitive act of perception. Intuition, according to Bergson, is different from instinct because it '[...] has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely'.²¹⁸ It transpires, therefore, that sympathy makes it possible to extend this self-reflection indefinitely.

In Pelevin's novels we find a similar description of intuitive knowledge, as opposed to intellectual cognition: 'А все виды озарения и счастья [...] в джанах были. [...] легкая и острая небесная мудрость [...] перпендикулярна мудрости земной'.²¹⁹ In this interpretation of intuition Pelevin refers to immediate knowledge, as distinct from intellect, and implies knowing without rationalizing and critical analysis (Chapter 2 discussed in detail his attitude to human logic and language). Such intuitive knowledge is represented in his characters making a leap of faith: either jumping into 'Conditional River of Absolute Love'

²¹⁷ Pelevin, *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.305.

²¹⁸ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, pp.159, 176.

²¹⁹ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy*, p.179.

(*Chapaev i Pustota*), or ‘Rainbow Flow’ (*Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*), or reaching ‘Optina Pustyn’ (t).

This imagery resonates with Bergson’s understanding of intuition in the context of continuous creation of life, which he referred to as ‘Duree’, or duration (*The Creative Evolution*). As the name suggests, duration is, first of all, a continuous and mobile force. Similarly, Pelevin’s protagonists often speak of a colourful, foaming river, or flow – ‘радужный поток’ – which implies continuity and mobility. Bergson denied the rigid, mechanistic view of reality as movement to a particular goal or target. In Pelevin’s narrative we also find a recurring idea denying that the life of any organism is defined by a particular purpose: ‘мы просто зыбкий оптический эффект непонятно где и зачем’, ‘Ни одно из переживаний не имеет ценности и смысла, потому что его ценность и смысл исчезают вместе с ним’.²²⁰

Another quality of duration, according to Bergson, is that it is both a unity and multiplicity. This means that, first, there was an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species (‘élan vital’ as he calls it); but the creation must also be accompanied by divergence and diversity because it results in evolution, as he explains in *Creative Evolution*. Pelevin’s representation of life and continuity again resonates with Bergson in terms of unity and multiplicity: ‘все, о чем я только мог подумать или мечтать, было частью этого радужного потока, а еще точнее – этот радужный поток и был всем тем, что я только мог подумать или испытать, всем тем, что только могло быть или не быть, – и он, я это знал наверное, не был чем-то отличным от меня. Он был мною, а я был им’.²²¹ This textual evidence suggests that the evolution of any creature is defined by an urge of life, which can be interpreted as a will; and this power, this energy has no specific goal. That is why this creative force produces infinite varieties of forms. Such a vision puts human forms on a par with other matter whose birth and existence are defined by the force of life: ‘[D]uration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived. ... Duration therefore implies consciousness; and we place consciousness at the heart of things for the very reason that we credit them with a time

²²⁰ Ibid., pp.174, 186.

²²¹ Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, p.316.

that endures'.²²² The following extracts from Pelevin's *t* reiterate this idea in a more allegorical form:

[...] существование отдельной личности — это одна из фаз вечной жизни в постепенно возвышающихся формах. И эти формы так близки между собой, что смутное воспоминание о предыдущем состоянии не исчезает в человеке никогда. Может, поэтому и говорят о переселении.²²³

Pelevin's later works look deeper into the actual revelations that form part of the intuitive perception of reality by his protagonists. The author's 2018 novel, *Tainye vidy na goru Fudzi*, vividly and metaphorically describes the intuitive stage through an array of feelings and sensations that the main characters experience during the 4th *djana* of a Buddhist meditative practice: 'И все то, что я пытаюсь сейчас описать, понимаешь в джане за долю секунды, даже не думая – просто как бы получаешь доступ к этому ментальному чертежу'.²²⁴ This stage of serene contemplation unveils the true nature of reality through insights that form part of one's intuitive knowledge unhindered by human weaknesses and passions:

Шесть чувств тут смешаны во что-то такое, что не похоже ни на что из нашего мира. [...] Это как бы невидимые волны: докатившись до требуемой черты, они делаются нами. [...] Но, поскольку тебя самого в четвертой джане тоже нет, эти волны иногда становятся смутно и как бы интуитивно различимы (вопрос 'кому' здесь не имеет смысла).²²⁵

The next stage of this intuitive revelation lays the foundation for the main posthumanist argument, shattering human superiority and leading to the abovementioned affinity with all matter: 'Эти волны становятся миром и нами. А потом новым миром и нами, и опять, и опять. Мы все время возникаем из них, как Афродита из пены – кадр за кадром, вместе со всей нашей вселенной' (see note 225). And man in this process is reduced to nothing more than a 'transient narrative': 'мы живем не в "мире", не в "пространстве" и не во "времени", не среди ощущений и переживаний – мы живем в нарративе [...]'. "Фейк

²²² Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, trans. by Leon Jacobson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), p.48-49.

²²³ Pelevin, *t*, p.361.

²²⁴ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy*, p.183.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.181.

НЬЮЗ” – это [...] мы сами’, ‘вещь в себе’, - as the narrator puts it after his insightful experience.²²⁶

Pelevin borrows the concept of a ‘thing-in-itself’, or *noumenon*, from philosophy to refer to objects/events existing outside of human senses or perception, as opposed to *phenomena*, which are apprehended through human senses. In this novel Pelevin again turns to the familiar Plato’s cave allegory to illustrate this noumenal/phenomenal opposition. He places the allegory in the context of insights about the human transient nature and self-deceit: ‘братюшки-светы, да ведь он [Платон] именно про это и писал’ – ‘нам кажется, что мы есть. И это наше “кажется” все заслоняет. А все совсем наоборот. Мы же... мы просто зыбкий оптический эффект непонятно где и зачем, [...] вещь в себе’ (see note 226). This insight makes the human, in philosophical terms, a thing-in-itself that exists, like other objects and entities, outside of man’s direct perception through senses or intellect. A ‘thing-in-itself’ is unknowable (Kant’s ‘Ding an sich’, see Note 139), which allows me to suggest another reading of the above quotation from Pelevin: that the human is unknowable to the extent of absolute rational knowledge. This creates a need for an intuitive understanding that involves ‘separation of matter from the mind’ and the resulting ‘dissolution of the self’. Thus, after the insights in the 4th jhana the characters from *Tainye vidy* achieve a state where they can separate matter from the mind and intuitively know that ‘все многообразие жизненных впечатлений сводится к набору физических стимулов и ментальных проекций’. As a result of this realization “‘я есть” пропадает и гибнет’.²²⁷ The concept of no-self, applied to human and non-human forms, equates all matter, both sentient and non-sentient forms.

Pelevin’s novel *t* offers a broader scope for interpretation of the concept of ‘thing-in-itself’, placing it in the context of the inner path of revelatory self-contemplation. In his search for Optina Pustyn’, an allegorical promised land of happiness and salvation, Count T. receives advice from the legendary enlightened figure, Solov’ev: ‘Ищите внутри себя’.²²⁸ This sentence is a case of intertextuality, a cross-reference to Pelevin’s earlier novel that also focuses on the intuitive path: *Chapaev i Pustota*. Baron von Ungern explains how to find Inner Mongolia (which in that novel can be interpreted as an equivalent of Optina Pustyn’): ‘Увидьте самого себя’.²²⁹ It appears that man, in his intellectual search for the Truth, or

²²⁶ Ibid., pp.184, 190.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp.199, 203.

²²⁸ Pelevin, *t*, p.350.

²²⁹ Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, p.242.

meaning of life, should be targeting himself, studying his own nature, mind, feelings and sensations relative to the outside world; and at some point, if he succeeds in liberating himself from the grip of his passions and language-driven intellectual constructs, he might reach a moment of intuitive revelation about eternal existential questions: ‘Тут не изо рта надо отвечать. И не из головы’.²³⁰

It appears that *Chapaev i Pustota, t*, and *Tainye vidy* all have references to this revelatory moment when the protagonists intuitively realise the transience of being, non-duality (i.e. multiplicity) of the universe and all matter, and the absence of any individual unique self. In Pelevin’s novel these revelations of the protagonists are presented as some of the key insights of Buddhism.²³¹ What is more relevant to our analysis is that the above concepts represent an ability to intuitively conceive of inherent but previously unnoticed aspects of reality and thus view the world through different perspectives simultaneously. In other words, the above insights allow for a heterogeneous perspective of the world in one individual. Such a perspective corresponds to what some philosophers and critical theorists of posthumanism maintain about the emergent ontology of the posthuman being. For example, Donna Haraway emphasises the multiple heterogeneous perspectives of the posthuman being, as opposed to a singular identity of an individual in the humanist context.²³² It is important to remember that the multiple perspectives here are viewed not through the prism of intellect (as a contemporary ‘unenlightened’ individual is capable of understanding multiple views). They are seen as heterogeneous *states* experienced and intuited at the same time. As a result, drawing on the concepts mentioned above, such states might lead to empathy through realization of unity of all multiplicity of forms.

In Pelevin’s narrative, multiplicity is illustrated not only by the variety of forms in the ‘rainbow flow’ but also by the different transformative effects that protagonists’ revelations have, depending on an individual experiencing them. It means that multiplicity can also include the diversity of individual perceptions: ‘там, где мы только что были, все очень индивидуально. [...] Все зависит от того, кто на это смотрит’ (see note 229). Thus, the oligarchs from *Tainye vidy*, having intuited the multiplicity-unity of life, transience of being, and nonexistence of the self, plunge into a life of greater suffering after their transformative

²³⁰ Ibid., p.235.

²³¹ Harvey, 2000.

²³² Donna J. Haraway, ‘*Situated Knowledges*’ in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

experience: ‘Плачу целыми днями... И ничего с этим не поделать. Все такое страшное...’²³³

By contrast, Count T. from novel *t*, who is a book character that materialises into a real individual, realises his unity with the human world as a result of his intuitive revelations: ‘он [Ариель, создатель] и вся его банда существуют на равных правах с вами, мной и лавкой, на которой вы сидите. [...] На самом деле, если разобраться, нет никакого меня, есть только он [создатель]. Но этот ‘он’ и есть я.’ The ending of the novel underlines the equanimity and empathy achieved by the protagonist - he is no longer surprised when his horse talks to him in his language. What is more, he marvels at the continuity of life by feeling an affinity with a tiny beetle: ‘Но странно вот что — это огромное солнце вместе со всем остальным в мире каким-то удивительным образом возникает и исчезает в крохотном существе, сидящем в потоке солнечного света’. As a result, he looks at all forms as equal agents in this duration of life: ‘А значит, невозможно сказать, что такое на самом деле эта букашка, это солнце, и этот бородатый человек в телеге [...] — потому что любые слова будут глупостью, сном и ошибкой’. And this unity with the world cannot be effectively put into words, it can only be attained through intuition: ‘И всё это было ясно из движений четырёх лапок, из тихого шелеста ветра в траве, и даже из тишины, наступившей, когда ветер стих’.²³⁴ It appears, therefore, that a truly posthuman vision in this context implies an empathy achieved through a heterogeneous perspective of the universe.

This perspective, resulting from an intuitive knowledge, redefines the nature of some underlying notions of human/posthuman existence that are addressed in Pelevin’s narrative and have striking parallels with the philosophies he engages with in his writing. A complex concept, most significantly affected by posthumanism, is that of ‘love’. In line with the disembodied condition of posthumanism as well as with the Buddhist spiritual understanding of love as universal empathy, the werewolf from *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* achieves an enlightened state through absolute love: ‘зародить в своей душе любовь, начиная с самых простых ее форм и постепенно поднимаясь к истинной любви, у которой нет ни субъекта, ни объекта’.²³⁵ In the context of no-self this kind of absolute love targets no one in particular and emanates from no one, therefore it is free from both personal subjectivity of an

²³³ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy*, p.203.

²³⁴ All quotes in the paragraph: *t*, pp.347, 371-386.

²³⁵ *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*, p.323.

individual and from the grip of mental constructs of the mind. Such an understanding of love can only be attained intuitively and is beyond comprehension at the previously discussed levels of sensual perception (instinct) or intellectual conception. In the context of posthumanist thought this interpretation corresponds to the platonic understanding of love as a feeling driven by compassion, empathy and equanimity. This kind of love exists as pre-condition of existence in the posthuman world as it embraces human and non-human forms and is, in fact, disembodied in nature.

A deeper analysis of Pelevin's text in *t* offers an additional perspective on love that becomes apparent through his indirect reference to Solov'ev's philosophy. One of the characters in the novel is called Vladimir Solov'ev and has a half-serious, half-comic role of a prophet and martyr guiding the protagonist. The allusion to Solov'ev's understanding of love is made indirectly, from a general reference to his philosophical pursuits:

А история Соловьёва, наоборот, должна была рассказать о духовной катастрофе, к которой тонкого философа и поэта привело увлечение восточным панмонголизмом и языческим неоплатонизмом, переросшее затем в неудержимую страсть к католичеству и завершившееся падением в тёмную бездну экуменизма.²³⁶

In Solov'ev's interpretation, love has an overarching role as it represents any inner unity – 'всякое внутреннее единство, всякое изнутри идущее соединение многих'. He goes on to draw a parallel between love and the universal good ('благо есть единство всего или всех, т.е. любовь как желаемое'); truth ('[и]стина есть та же любовь, т.е. единство всего, но уже как объективно представляемое: это есть единство идеальное') and beauty ('[н]аконец, красота есть та же любовь (т.е. единство всех), но как проявленная или осязаемая: это есть единство реальное').²³⁷ This kind of love – manifesting itself through a unity of the good, truth and beauty – is only possible as a rejection of egocentrism:

²³⁶ Pelevin, *t*, p.257.

²³⁷ Vladimir Solov'ev, 'Smysl l'ubvi', *Voprosy psikhologii i filosofii*, 14-21 (1892-1894).

Познавая в любви истину другого не отвлеченно, а существенно, перенося на деле центр своей жизни за пределы своей эмпирической способности, мы тем самым проявляем и осуществляем свою собственную истину, свое безусловное значение, которое именно и состоит в способности переходить за границы своего фактического феноменального бытия, в способности жить не только в себе, но и в другом.²³⁸

This metaphysical understanding of love resonates with the idea of no-self in Pelevin's Buddhism-influenced narrative, which also correlates with the posthumanist philosophy of disembodiment and multiplicity of form (also see Bergson above):

Смысл как раз в том, что какая-то пылинка, прах — оживает, осознаёт себя и доходит до самого неба. Таков путь вещей... В этом и должна проявиться небесная любовь. Кого ещё любить всемогущему небу, как не крохотную пылинку?²³⁹

And further in the text:

И [она дает ответ] зачем любить другого человека, когда тот страдает — это ведь безграничная вечность забыла себя, отчаялась и плачет.²⁴⁰

The insights emerging from an intuitive perception of being and the world inextricably link the metaphysics of love (compassion, empathy and equanimity of all forms) with the notion of the 'Absolute', or 'source of life', or 'God' (the choice of terminology varies, and overlaps, in different philosophical and religious traditions). This multi-faceted notion is studied in our analysis as it is an integral part of Pelevin's posthumanist narrative and also appears to be a focal theme in the general posthumanist philosophy of the twenty-first century. The interpretation of the concept of God in Pelevin's works comes from his transhuman protagonists (werewolf A-Huli, vampire Rama), characters who transcended the human limitations of conventional mind (book character Count T., 'dynamic human God Levitan') as well as from allusions and implicit references in the text. It has to be said, however, that all the textual evidence referring to God, as the author admits himself, is only a subjective attempt, distorted by language, to explain the elusive concept at the intellectual level:

²³⁸ Ibid., Part III.

²³⁹ Pelevin, *t*, p.316.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p.357.

[...] объяснить человеку, что такое Бог, невозможно. Вернее, можно объяснить человеку концепцию Бога, и она станет частью его умственного багажа. Но это не значит, что человек познает Бога.²⁴¹

According to Pelevin's protagonist Sem'en Levitan, who happens to conceive of God through his substance-induced God-like states, 'Бога можно только непосредственно пережить'.²⁴² This view about conceiving of the nature of God resonates with the previously mentioned Bergson's model of understanding reality, whereby impassable elusive notions can be only intuited, not perceived through senses or intellect. That is why in Pelevin's works the use of the terms 'soul', 'God', 'consciousness' is merely a pragmatic need to convey the essence of God in terms accessible to the reader, i.e. at the intellectual, rather than intuitive level. Again, this is the limitation imposed by the subjectivity of human language use.

The first characteristic of what is referred to as God in Pelevin's works is creativity, or causality. God, or Absolute, appears to be the primary source of all conscious minds; therefore it exists and is actualised in the human mind that it, God/Absolute, created: 'Сознание, которое человек считает своим — на самом деле сознание Бога'.²⁴³ In philosophical terms, if God is represented in each individual consciousness, then the rule of multiplicity of representation makes this metaphysical entity a sum of all presences and all minds and, as such, explains the omnipresence and omniscience of God. Interestingly, this vision resonates with the concept of 'Brahman' in Advaita Vedanta, a classical school of Hindu philosophy that interacted with Buddhism and had some influence on it. In *t*, one of the controversial and elusive protagonists (who at first seems to have omnipotent power as the writer, i.e. the creator of all reality, and then is reduced to a cat in Count T's reality) is called Ariel Edmundovich Brahman. The concept of 'Brahman' is understood to represent Absolute Reality that is the 'primordial reality that creates, maintains and withdraws within it the universe'.²⁴⁴ Thus the concept of Brahman represents a 'creative principle which lies realised in the whole world'.

²⁴¹ Pelevin, 'Operatsiia "Burning Bush"', p.31.

²⁴² Ibid., p.32.

²⁴³ Pelevin, *t*, p.302.

²⁴⁴ Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upanishads of the Veda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1980), pp.243-363, 581, 91.

This non-theistic vision of God as a source of all heterogeneous unity resonates with the concept of qualitative multiplicity. A qualitative multiplicity is seen by Bergson as heterogeneous, continuous (or interpenetrating), and progressive (or temporal, an irreversible flow of different clusters of matter in time). Bergson believed that because qualitative multiplicity is heterogeneous and at the same time interpenetrating, it cannot be adequately represented by a symbol, so it is inexpressible (see note 72). This vision corresponds to the words in *Chapaev i Pustota* – ““Бог” указывает на то, на что указать нельзя”.²⁴⁵ So the idea of God is also inexpressible, which is one of the possible interpretations of Pelevin’s master trope of ‘emptiness’, ‘nothingness’, ‘abyss’, or ‘void’.

Understanding the idea of God, or original source of all being, is intertwined in Pelevin’s works with man’s free will. The author challenges the humanist understanding of man’s free will according to which man independently forms ideas and takes decisions. The author’s insights into the nature of ‘God’ at first might also be interpreted as an argument against man’s free will. If man’s mind was created by God then all man’s ideas also originate through God, and man’s mind becomes a mere container of ideas of the Other: ‘И вдруг я понял, что Бог — это единственная душа в мире, а все прочие создания есть лишь танцующие в ней механизмы, и Он лично наполняет Собой каждый из этих механизмов’.²⁴⁶ However, further analysis of these lines reveals a more complex perspective that can lead to an understanding of God, or Absolute, through empathetic love. The first step leading to this revelation is understanding unity with all matter through multiplicity of form. In other words, if God is the primordial creative impulse, then he is realised through its creations, therefore ‘Бог у каждого свой’²⁴⁷ and ‘личность у Абсолюта всё же есть’.²⁴⁸ Sem’en Levitan in ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’ realises:

Я понял, что Бог принял форму тысячи разных сил, которые столкнулись друг с другом и *сотворили* меня — и я, Семен Левитан, со своей лысиной и очками, весь создан из Бога, и кроме Бога во мне ничего нет [...] (see note 246)

This interpretation does not deny man’s will, it equates man and all living matter through this general original source: ‘Тот, кто пишет Книгу Жизни, и тот, кто читает её, и тот, о ком

²⁴⁵ Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, p.176.

²⁴⁶ Pelevin, ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’, p.42.

²⁴⁷ Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, p.175.

²⁴⁸ Pelevin, *t*, p.321.

эта Книга рассказывает. И этот луч — я сам, потому что я не могу быть ничем иным. Я был им всегда и вечно им буду. Вы считаете, мне нужна какая-то ещё сила?’²⁴⁹ And in ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’, the imagery of light conveys the same message: ‘Как будто я летел за вихрем искр, и был одной из искр и всем вихрем, и смеялся и пел на разные голоса...’²⁵⁰

It appears, therefore, that the rigid theistic conventions in which God was viewed by humanism are no longer relevant in the non-theistic posthumanist context that celebrates ultimate transcendence – liberation from all previous conventions: ‘[...] к Богу неприменима низменная человеческая категория господства. [...] Богу не присуща никакая власть. [...] Бог есть свобода’.²⁵¹ The liberation arises from the realization of this unity of multiplicities and results in empathy and acceptance of all form as the self becomes an integral part of it: ‘это, неопишное, превосходящее любую попытку даже связно думать — и есть Бог, и когда Он хочет, Он берет тебя на эту высоту из заколдованного мира, и ты видишь все ясно и без сомнений, и ты и Он — одно’ (see note 251). This understanding of unity with God and the world is reiterated more metaphorically in another novel, *t*, which contains references to Tolstoy’s philosophical ideas that seem to be remarkably in line with the above concept of multiple unity:

Перед ним возникла знакомая тьма, полная невидимого света, который давал о себе знать множеством неуловимых отблесков. [...] Т. подумал, что это и есть единственный образ Божий, действительно данный свыше, потому что каждый человек с младенчества носит его с собой. И там, если смотреть внимательно, есть все ответы на все вопросы.²⁵²

Thus, as the above analysis suggests, the ‘clear, undoubted truth’ which the protagonists intuit in Pelevin’s worlds through compassion and affinity represents universal absolute love without an object or subject, omnipotent and omnipresent, as A-Huli from *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* realises in her revelation. In ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’ this insight is extended to the notion of God, which is explicitly mentioned:

²⁴⁹ Pelevin, *t*, p.330.

²⁵⁰ Pelevin, ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’, p.43.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.34.

²⁵² Pelevin, *t*, p.386.

[...] и если это не высшая любовь, какая только может быть, то что же тогда любовь? [...] вся эта дикая кутерьма, на которую мы всю жизнь жалуемся себе и друг другу, существует только для того, чтобы могла воплотиться непостижимая, прекрасная, удивительная, ни на что не похожая любовь — про которую нельзя даже сказать, кто ее субъект и объект, потому что, если попытаешься проследить ее конец и начало, поймешь, что ничего кроме нее на самом деле нет, и сам ты и она — одно и то же. (see note 251)

t, a novel about Count T(olstoy), makes direct references to Russian nineteenth-century metaphysics, in particular the definitions of God and God-like qualities by Leo Tolstoy, whose views are artistically interpreted in the novel. As Tolstoy wrote in one of his letters in 1908: ‘Для меня метафизическая основа всего есть сознание отделенности каждого из нас: мы сознаем себя отдельными проявлениями Бога’.²⁵³ This view in early Tolstoy develops into a vision outlined in ‘Isповед’’: ‘Что такое я? Часть бесконечного. Ведь уже в этих двух словах лежит вся задача’.²⁵⁴ The understanding of the idea of God in *t* (outlined above) seems to echo Tolstoy’s lines from ‘Put’ Zhizni’: ‘Душа человеческая, будучи отделена телом от Бога и душ других существ, стремится к соединению с тем, от чего она отделена. Соединяется душа с Богом все большим и большим сознанием в себе Бога, с душами же других существ - все большим и большим проявлением любви’.²⁵⁵ Therefore love becomes an aspiration, a will, movement of the human soul to unite with the soul of God and souls of other beings: ‘Сказано: Бог есть любовь; надо же сказать: любовь есть Бог. Впрочем, и Бог есть любовь (т. е. Бога мы знаем только в виде любви), и любовь есть Бог (т. е. если мы любим, то становимся подобными Богу)’.²⁵⁶

It follows from the above analysis of the concepts of God and love in Pelevin’s narrative that love is an essential condition of, and at the same time a result of, knowing God. But more importantly for the posthumanist discourse that focuses on transcendence, absolute love – without the subject or object - is a God-like quality. In other words, it is a form of transcendence of human limitations that makes man similar to God. In Pelevin’s works: ‘и ты и Он [Бог] — одно’, ‘сам ты и она [любовь] — одно и то же’;²⁵⁷ According to Tolstoy:

253 *Neizvestnyi Tolstoy v arkhivakh Rossii* (Moscow: Tehna-2, 1994), p.160.

254 Leo Tolstoy, *Complete Works*, ed. by P.I.Bir’ukov, 24 vols (Moscow: Tipografia Sytina, 1913), XXIII, 34.

255 *Ibid.*, p.55.

256 V.G. Chertkov, ‘Notes on God, compiled from letters and diaries of L.N.Tolstoy’, *Ibid.*, XVIII, p.166.

257 Pelevin, ‘Operatsiia “Burning Bush”’, pp.43-44.

‘если мы любим, то становимся подобными Богу’.²⁵⁸ However, the traditional view of the concept of ‘богочеловек’ - God-like human (or being, in the posthumanist context) – would be alien to Pelevin’s philosophy as it implies supremacy of one specific individual over others. But the essence of the enlightened state, according to Pelevin’s characters, is the intuitive realization of unity with all there is through unity with God, or Absolute, as the source of continuous life. To a certain extent, such an understanding of God changes the semantics of the concept and, as a result, resonates with the twenty-first-century concept of ‘posthuman god’ that is also devoid of divine meaning.²⁵⁹ It implies the sophistication and unfathomable intelligence of the posthuman being in the future to such an extent that his behavior would possibly be incomprehensible to today’s human beings because of their artificially limited experience, knowledge and intelligence.

²⁵⁸ Chertkov, ‘Letter of 6 September 1900’, *Ibid.*, p.14.

²⁵⁹ Jeffrey P. Bishop, ‘Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God’, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 35 (2010), 700–720.

Conclusion

The above analysis attempted a reading of Pelevin's oeuvre as a heterogeneous multiplicity of dynamic literary form approached from the posthumanist perspective. This conclusion will address the main points of the author's posthumanist stance that follow from the analysis and look at them relative to a number of most resonant contemporary transhumanist visions. The purpose of such an approach is to identify the key areas in the imminent transhuman condition of mankind that need to be studied carefully to ensure a truly posthuman future and to avoid the threats of transhumanism that can lead to a doomsday scenario.

The first point about Pelevin's posthumanist position that transpires from his literary work is that he is not a proponent of transhumanism as a mere tool of human enhancement. His books expose human weakness, vanity and greed, against the background of his protagonists' journeys of self-exploration. Such a society can only use transhumanist possibilities in the same way as all previous innovations – to serve the political and economic needs of the elite or to pamper the vanity of the consumer. Here is a possible dystopian scenario described in *S.N.U.F.F.*:

Первоначально офшары были свободной от налогов экстерриториальной зоной, где не действовало наземное право. [...] Постепенно туда переместилась киноиндустрия, наука и финансы — сбылась наконец давняя мечта банкиров всей Земли об офшорном эмиссионном банке. Офшары стали превращаться в огромные летающие города, где жила элита человечества, не боясь, что туда ворвется толпа “оккупантов” со своими палатками, громкоговорителями и революционными плакатами.²⁶⁰

Similarly, in *iPhuck10*, Porfirii's antagonist Mara uses him (an AI) and other state-of-the-art gadgetry for her illegal, mercenary goals – hacking digital information about pieces of art to ‘deep fake’ them in pornfilms. In *Tainye vidy* Russian oligarchs use ‘эмо-пантограф’, a special head-set operated through the meditative states of Buddhist monks, to extract the information from their insights in the jhanas for material gain:

²⁶⁰ Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.*, p.57.

Помните, он говорил, что в четвертой джане можно так аккуратно заглядывать во всякие вопросы. В общем, он не только говорил, но и делал, причем с самого начала. Помните, биток шесть тысяч стоил? Юрий Соломонович тогда серьезно так вложился. А когда он до восемнадцати поднялся, Юрий Соломонович постиг из четвертой джаны, что дальше он вниз пойдет. И все продал.²⁶¹

The object of criticism in Pelevin's books, therefore, is not transhumanism per se, nor is it human nature, it is contemporary society in general. This view can be inferred from the versatile settings in his books that bitterly mock the shallow societal conventions and values. The setting can change: from a suburban Moscow forest of the 90s ('Problema vervolka') to a mind-boggling advanced media and AI-controlled global state (*S.N.U.F.F.*); from contemporary glamorous image-obsessed capital city (*Ampir V*) to the digital vacuum of an artificial mind (*iPhuck10*). But humans remain the same – vain, scared, confused, and submissive – because of the workings of the mind and the physical needs and desires.

Human vices versus human nature is a crucial point in this argument. Pelevin is often accused of being too ironic and even offensive in his sweeping criticism. Basinskii's review of *Chapaev i Pustota* can be a common formula for such negative comments: 'произведение, насыщенное неумными, а главное совершенно не мотивированными гадостями' (see note 69). Such an approach to his writing apparently stems from misunderstanding the thrust of Pelevin's message. For example, what Basinskii infers from *Generation II* is, on the contrary, the object of targeted criticism of prevalent values and contemporary stock types:

Пелевин излагает целую программу для поколения "новых людей". Быть нормальным циником. Не доверять миру, который обманчив во всех своих проявлениях. Доверять только собственным ощущениям. Но если тебе от них кайфово, то и ладно. Эдакий агностицизм, переходящий в эмпиризм, и своего рода разумный эгоизм. Все ложь и обман. Но именно поэтому в жизни можно устроиться весьма недурно.²⁶²

For some reason, the critic understood it as 'guidelines' from the author, but in fact *Generation II* is a satirical portrayal of the generation, with the protagonist Tatarskii, sadly, succumbing to the temptations despite an opportunity to rise above them. Even though the ending of the novel (quoted in Chapter 2) allows for a variety of interpretations, a later novel,

²⁶¹ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy*, p.170.

²⁶² Pavel Basinskii, 'Sindrom Pelevina', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 45, 12 May 1999, p.11.

Ampir V, dispels any remaining hope for Tatarskii. It turns out that his privileged position of the ‘mortal husband of the goddess’ involves working for the elite (the vampires who rule the world). And besides, even this position was a result of a mistake:

Результат гадания как раз всегда ясный, - перебил Мардук Семенович. - Это в головах туман. Выпало, что новым мужем богини должен быть человек с именем города. А у Татарского редкое имя - Вавилен. Ну и решили, что это он, потому что на "Вавилон" похоже... Может и похоже. Но ведь, строго говоря, такого города нет. В результате очень серьезного человека оставили в пролете. Который по всем параметрам подходил.²⁶³

This example illustrates the author’s position on the generation ruled by ‘креативщики’, ‘дискурсмонгеры’, ‘олигархи’ who, in his view, are all ‘халдеи’. He uses the name of Chaldeans, an ancient tribe that briefly ruled Babylon, because in Russian it developed a derogatory meaning of ‘человек, вызывающий возмущение своей подобострастностью, угодливостью.’²⁶⁴ It is this kind of society that presents a risk to true posthumanism.

It might seem at first that Pelevin’s skeptical portrayal of contemporary beliefs and values represents a strong rejection of transhumanism. After all, it would be in line with a wide range of negative messages accompanying contemporary transhumanist discourse. The political scientist Fukuyama, for example, warns that unforeseen threats of biotechnological advances can undermine the ‘natural standards for right and wrong’.²⁶⁵ According to him, human enhancement, in particular genetic engineering, can change human nature and thus shift the existing balance of the ‘inviolability of human dignity’, which will wreak havoc on humanity. This position makes him a staunch supporter of preserving human nature: humaneness is ‘the very grounding of the human moral sense, which has been a constant ever since we were human beings.’²⁶⁶

However, there is an apparent difference between the approaches of Fukuyama and Pelevin. Fukuyama treats human nature as a cradle of humaneness, as a measure of right and wrong, a benchmark for justice in a democracy. Pelevin, on the contrary, shows throughout his works that in reality these boundaries have blurred today, hollowing out the essence of this

²⁶³ Pelevin, *Ampir V*, p.180.

²⁶⁴ *Bolshoi tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 1st ed. by Sergei A. Kuznetsov, (St.Petersburg: Norint, 1998).

²⁶⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biological Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2002), p.102.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

classical humanist vision. This is why I can argue that he does not target transhumanism as a concept in his criticism but rather thinks it premature in contemporary society. To him transhumanism can only be meaningful and lead to a truly posthumanist all-inclusive society after humanity transcends its limiting anthropocentric conventions and weaknesses. Achieving this will lead to an emergence of a new vision that will allow to use biotechnology and science for the benefit of all forms of life.

Pelevin, therefore, does not rule out the possibility of a transformation for an individual; he tries to show this path of liberation, embarking on which one can rise above his or her weaknesses. A-Huli and Count T. are examples of this possibility. And intuition is the way to grasp the truth of life: ‘И все то, что я пытаюсь сейчас описать, понимаешь [...] за долю секунды, даже не думая – просто как бы получаешь доступ к этому ментальному чертежу’.²⁶⁷ Bogdanova gives a similar interpretation of Pelevin’s vision:

[...] Пелевин не приемлет отрицания некой позитивной сущности человека, внутренней психологической осмысленности субъекта (будь то человек, животное, насекомое, растение, солнечный луч или пылинка).²⁶⁸

Bogdanova’s interpretation treats this ‘positive essence’ of a human being in Pelevin’s works as a feature common to all other living matter, as seen in the above quotation. Such a view appears to stem from Pelevin’s vision of life as a flux in duration that was discussed above relative to the corresponding image of ‘*élan vital*’ in Bergson. This reading of Pelevin’s posthumanism resonates with the views of critical posthumanists, such as Braidotti who believes in the benefits of a changed position of the human species brought about by the techno-scientific advance. She maintains it will lead to an evolution in our thinking and a truly posthuman society will be ‘built not on fear, anxiety, and shared vulnerability but rather on discovering new empowering relations and activities’.²⁶⁹ Similarly, Haraway’s ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ celebrates ‘social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint

²⁶⁷ Pelevin, *Tainye vidy*, p.173.

²⁶⁸ Olga V. Bogdanova, ‘Sovremennyi literaturnyi protsess (K voprosu o postmodernizme v russkoi literature 70-90-kh godov XX veka): materialy k kursu ‘Istoria literatury XX veka (chast’ III)’ (St.Petersburg, 2001), pp.99-100.

²⁶⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.195.

kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.²⁷⁰

Of course, mankind is yet to achieve the level of scientific advance that would make the above doomsday or optimistic scenarios possible. But Pelevin's books - with their deliberately unconventional style, unabashed criticism, and recurring Buddhist-informed messages - offer humanity ample material for an introspective analysis that might elucidate a vision that could make a truly posthumanist future possible.

²⁷⁰ Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by Barbara M.Kennedy and David Bell (London: Routledge, 2007), p.295.

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