Challenging Organisations and Society

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Grasping the Multiple Facets of Intelligence

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Alexandra Rotter

Be Careful What You Wish For

Abstract

Man-machine-mixtures exist now, and more may exist in future. Presently, most use technology inside the body to compensate for physical shortcomings. Enhancing healthy people has already begun, but ethically, acceptance is distant.

Transhumanists believe humans should apply technology to improve themselves. Some Cyborgs already feel technology has become part of their bodies. The Cyborg Foundation says humans can now decide what organs and senses they want.

Will technology lead to further segregation of society because only some people can afford to become better versions of themselves? Some enhancements will help people or organisations have better lives, but even the strongest supporters of hybrids see considerable risks of losing all we hold valuable. Society should soon define rules and boundaries for Cyborgs and those who want to become one.

Introduction

No, it doesn't work. The hand doesn't do what its owner wants it to. Instead of fixing the T-shirt on the clothesline, the clothespin falls again. Together with more than four thousand other visitors at the Swiss Arena Kloten in Zurich, I hold my breath as I watch this unsuccessful attempt to accomplish something even a child could easily achieve.

However, here at the first Cybathlon in October 2016, the actor is not a child but an adult man who is performing this task with his arm prosthesis. The clothespin task is only one in a sequence of various little routine challenges, such as changing a lightbulb or opening a door while balancing a tray with tableware in the other hand. In this discipline of the Cybathlon, competitors are men and women with different kinds of arm prosthesis. In others – there are six of them altogether – the competitors have leg prostheses and use wheelchairs or participate in cycle races despite their inability to move their legs: advanced muscle stimulation technology allows them to navigate a bike-like vehicle around the arena by using their paralysed legs.

All of this is stunning. However, the two most exciting and nearly unbelievable disciplines on this day are the exoskeletons that help quadriplegic people move and the BCI (Brain Computer Interface) challenge in which almost fully paralysed people navigate a simple computer game using only the force of their thoughts. Both disciplines are thrilling even to their audience: some of the participants seem to manage the challenges with ease while others struggle throughout. Each participant with an exoskeleton is accompanied by two people to prevent him or her from falling down. Such a fall nearly happened once – the man was already half bent forward before the protective staff was able to catch him. Most exoskeletons are extremely heavy, and one can imagine it must be like wearing a knight's armour.

Are these people cybernetic organisms? Are they man-machine mixtures? Cyborgs?

Do Cyborgs already exist?

In a recent interview, the German computer scientist and publisher Enno Park – who looks like a perfectly average man – stated that he is a Cyborg¹. He has two cochlea implants which have returned hearing to him after a hearing loss as a consequence of a measles infection at the age of ten. If

¹ https://www.hr-inforadio.de/programm/das-interview/das-interview-mit-enno-park-informatiker-publizist-und-Cyborg,enno-park-102.html.

Cyborgs are defined as beings with both organic and biomechatronic body parts,² then Enno Park is in fact a Cyborg – in addition to so many other people who live with pacemakers or other implants and prostheses. Enno Park also has a little implanted chip that can theoretically be used as a payment device. It seems that once you regard yourself as a Cyborg, you can get addicted to technology and crave further biomechatronic body parts.

Enno Park makes a really interesting statement in the interview, when he says that his implants have a wider range of action than the ears of normal people: he has different programmes to regulate his implants by turning the volume up and down as well as turning off background sounds at a busy location. In a certain sense, he crosses the boundaries between what we consider natural and supernatural. Most people who regard themselves as Cyborgs – and there are already quite a few of them – wear different kinds of implants with the desire to become a better version of themselves. They may have a handicap, like Enno Park or the participants at the Cybathlon, but Cyborgs also include healthy people without handicaps. Yet for now, the use of technology, such as an arm prosthesis, as a way of compensating for a physical or even mental deficit remains far more socially accepted.

But what about those who think that everybody should be allowed to optimise even when they don't have any shortcomings, because they wish to run faster, learn more easily, sleep less, look better or experience things they normally cannot? For example, some people wear a little sensor in their fingertips which starts vibrating as soon as it detects electromagnetic radiation. Why wait for the significantly slower evolution to provide ways to navigate with more ease and precision or to have more fun in this world?

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyborg#cite_note-1.

The first Cyborg

Neil Harbisson looks as if he has just arrived from the future or from another planet. He was born colour-blind, but since 2004 he can "hear colors." Harbisson wears what he calls an "electronic eye," a sensor on an antenna on his head that translates the colours in front of him into audible frequencies. These are sent to a chip that is installed at the back of his head. Following a period of adaptation to this new kind of perception, "this perception became a feeling," Harbisson stated at the TEDGlobal 2012.³ Now he even dreams in colours, which is a very important aspect that relates to Cyborgism: "So, when I started to dream in color is when I felt that the software and my brain had united, because in my dreams, it was my brain creating electronic sounds. It wasn't the software, so that's when I started to feel like a Cyborg." He felt that the cybernetic device "was no longer a device," he says. "It had become a part of my body, an extension of my senses, and after some time, it even became a part of my official image." Harbisson's antenna allows him to hear infrared and ultraviolet spectra as well as to have an internet connection so that people can send colours, pictures or videos directly to his head. He even takes phone calls with his antenna.

In 2010, the Cyborg Foundation was founded by Neil Harbisson and Moon Ribas, who carries the implant of an online seismic sensor that vibrates in sync with seismographic activity all over the world and allegedly even on the moon. Both Harbisson and Ribas are Cyborg artists and activists. With the Cyborg Foundation, an "online platform for the research, development and promotion of projects related to the creation of new senses and perceptions by applying technology to the human body," they aim to "help people become Cyborgs, promote Cyborg art and defend Cyborg rights."⁴ Their

³ https://www.ted.com/talks/neil_harbisson_i_listen_to_color/transcript.

⁴ https://www.Cyborgfoundation.com.

website features the following quote in large letters: "We are the first generation able to decide what organs and senses we want to have."

Cyborg freakshow

Other Cyborgs, such as those interviewed by the Irish journalist Mark O'Connell for his book "To Be a Machine," have more ordinary problems.⁵ O'Connell pays a visit to the biohackers of Grindhouse Wetware, based in Pittsburgh, who are positioned at the intersections of money and biology: funding is an important issue since they are researching and developing various kinds of implants, and then there are some real practical questions concerning our biology. For example, what if the battery of an implanted device leaks, and the battery filling agent runs into the body of the new-born Cyborg? Tim Cannon, the CIO of Grindhouse Wetware, once carried an implant called Circadia that they had developed - but only for three months. The sensor device was the size of a deck of playing cards and able to record all different kinds of biometrical data from Cannon's body, which at regular intervals would be transmitted to his phone via Bluetooth - in addition to communicating with the thermostat of the heating in his house in response to his body temperature. After three months, however, Cannon decided to remove the Circadia device: although it had worked well, he was afraid of physical harm caused by a potential battery leak. Furthermore, the team of Grindhouse Wetware started to work on a smaller version of Circadia.

O'Connell has spent a lot of time with Tim Cannon. In his book, he paints a very interesting picture of the biohacker, who is one of the founders of Grindhouse Wetware. For example, Cannon would be ready to amputate an arm in exchange for an arm prosthesis – as soon as a better and technically

⁵ Mark O'Connell, "To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists solving the Modest Problem of Death", Granta Books 2018; especially the chapter "Biology and its discontents", p. 134 ff.

superior version of a human arm becomes available. Cannon says that he believes we humans will have to change our "hardware" because our current hardware – and he is speaking about the human body – will no longer be sufficient for the world we are living in. Cannon thinks that evolutionary processes are far too slow, and we will have to design technologies for our bodies in order to keep up with evolution. From his point of view, even certain human behavioural patterns that are no longer useful should be eradicated – and he suggests doing so by going directly to their neural correlates.

But are such attempts to improve the human condition above and beyond its natural definition not a perversion of the technical development? And is it ethically correct? This is a large philosophical question – and one of the most important questions of our times.

The next step of enhancement

Armin Grunwald is Head of the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and Head of the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB). In his book, "Der unterlegene Mensch,"⁶ he points to the fact that enhancement is part of modern technology and that – from a technological point of view – the transition from rehabilitation to improving interventions is an expectable and gradual process.⁷ As an example, he mentions retina implants that already exist and that help blind or visually handicapped people to see again – albeit not in the same ways as with an intact and healthy eye. As soon as something works, Grunwald writes, engineers start reflecting upon how they can further improve it. In the future, they will achieve further improvements

⁶ Armin Grunwald, "Der unterlegene Mensch: Die Zukunft der Menschheit im Angesicht von Algorithmen, künstlicher Intelligenz und Robotern", Riva Verlag, München 2019, p. 133 ff.

⁷ Ibid, p. 137f.

to the retina implant, so that eventually people will be able to see again perfectly; and even further improvements to the implant are probable in the more distant future, which may for example give the eye a wider range of wavelengths, making it possible to see in the dark or zoom in.

At the moment, ideas like these still seem bizarre and futuristic, at least to the mainstream. However, there are also certain people who think that every kind of biological enhancement that is technically possible should be implemented and that all of us should become the best possible versions of ourselves. They are called transhumanists, which means that they regard the human body as a machine with parts that can be replaced and updated through technology, not only by equivalent spares but also through better versions of those parts. In their perspective, even death is a problem to be "solved."⁸ Peter Thiel, one of the most influential investors in Silicon Valley, believes that one day death will be a solvable problem instead of a mystery. Therefore, he has invested large amounts of money in companies, start-ups and projects that work on the prolongation of life. In his view, computational power will be increasingly applied in biology, which will allow the reversal of all kinds of human suffering, just as bugs in computer programs can be debugged.

Substrate-independent minds

This boundless belief in immortality achieved through technology already demonstrates very real efforts. A group of scientists has already been working on mind uploading, which means that they are trying to keep our minds alive even if our bodies are dead. These are called "substrate-independent minds", which should be achieved by a process known as whole brain emulation. The neuroscientist and neuro-engineer Randal Koene is one of the main

⁸ Mark O'Connell, "To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists Solving the Modest Problem of Death", Granta Books 2018, chapter 'Please Solve Death', p. 179 ff.

experts in this field and the co-founder of Carboncopies in the San Francisco Bay Area. Their homepage states the following vision: "Your brain is the orchestra that plays the symphony of your mental experience and your awareness, and that experience is your window on existence and on the universe. Our aim is to preserve, restore, and even improve your mental experience beyond the limits of biology. With dedication, scientific advances within our lifetimes may allow us to record the unique arrangement and responses of neurons and synapses that encode your memories, their active behavior, and ultimately to restore all of that in a neural prosthesis that seamlessly repairs a brain function, or a complete artificial brain. Some of this is still reminiscent of science fiction, but each challenge is well on its way to being a tractable technology problem supported by scientific evidence and understanding."9

Humans have always struggled with death. These days, we may place our hopes in the achievements of whole brain emulation, even if the issue of a life with a brain without a body or with an artificial body remains highly complex. Some people pay large sums of money to cryopreserve their bodies – or their heads only, which is cheaper – so that they don't deteriorate after death. Their hope is that one day mind uploading will be a real possibility, and then their brains will be ready for the procedure of whole brain emulation.

Are we all Cyborgs?

You may say that all of this is just science fiction and those who believe in it are no more than a handful of freaky nerds. Maybe that's true. Or maybe not. In either case, humanity is definitely moving towards one or the other kind of fusion with technology. Other scientists, for example, are dedicated to working on nanorobotics, so that one day we might take a pill with thousands of extremely small sensors that wander through our bloodstream in

⁹ https://carboncopies.org.

order to measure biometric data and destroy or cure diseased cells. Alternatively, consider recent research in the field of contact lenses that can detect the glucose level of a diabetes patient. Not only the pharmaceutical industry but also global technological companies such as Google, IBM, Facebook and Microsoft are investing a lot of time, money and effort in research on medical health and especially artificial intelligence. As soon as the possibilities of different kinds of human technological enhancements are realised, we will become accustomed to these new developments and utilise them if we believe that they will improve our condition – and if we can afford them.

Certainly, all of this comes with great challenges. Will this lead to the further segregation of society? Will there be the super-healthy, super-intelligent and deathless wealthy people at one end of the spectrum and the sick, stupid and mortal people at the other end? In fact, is it not already like this – except for the fact that at the moment we remain mortal? Then again, the more sophisticated technology is developed, the more likely it is to break down, fail and be hacked. And above all, there is of course a major ethical issue: should we play God? And in this case, too, are we not already doing this through medicine, birth control, and genetic engineering as well as railroads, heating, refrigerators, airplanes and smartphones – even if we know very well that all these developments come with sometimes terrible consequences for nature? It seems only consistent that we take the next step very soon by integrating technology into our bodies and becoming Cyborgs. And I want to raise another question: what might life be worth, if we knew that it would never end?

Ethical debates are just beginning

One thing seems to be very clear: Cyborgism will influence the lives of many people – be it because they try to enhance their own bodies and minds through technology or because others do so. That's why we should be careful

about what we create and set some rules and limits. When a journalist asks Nick Bostrom whether the ethical debates about technological change keep pace with the development of new technologies, he states that the ethical debates about some of these possibilities are just beginning.¹⁰ He says that he introduced the concept of existential risk only in 2001, whereas technological progress has been around for thousands of years. He continues that he hopes we will catch up at a rapid pace and ends his answer with the statement: "We have to think ethically about what we are doing as a species."¹¹ On his website he also warns: "When headed the wrong way, the last thing needed is progress."¹² This doesn't mean, as he explains in the above-mentioned interview, stopping progress.¹³ But the concrete steps we are taking "must be small and careful to give us more insight into where we should be going." And: "We need to figure out what concerns are based on irrational bias and which ones are not, while weighing those concerns against potential benefits."¹⁴

Also, the Transhumanist Declaration of the group Humanity+ mentions potential risks and gives – besides all enthusiasm – an ethical point of view: "There are possible realistic scenarios that lead to the loss of most, or even all, of what we hold valuable."¹⁵ So, for example, the authors give some guidance to policy makers to set the frame for the transhumanist development: "Policy making ought to be guided by responsible and inclusive moral vision, taking seriously both opportunities and risks, respecting autonomy

¹⁰ https://www.theeuropean-magazine.com/ nick-bostrom--2/6028-genetic-enhancement-and-the-future-of-humanity.

¹¹ https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/.

¹² https://nickbostrom.com/papers.

¹³ https://www.theeuropean-magazine.com/

nick-bostrom--2/6028-genetic-enhancement-and-the-future-of-humanity.

¹⁴ https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/.

¹⁵ https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/.

and individual rights, and showing solidarity with and concern for the interests and dignity of all people around the globe. We must also consider our moral responsibilities towards generations that will exist in the future." But on the other hand, they seem to wish for freedom for those people who want to enhance their physical and mental fitness – even without being ill: "We favour allowing individuals wide personal choice over how they enable their lives. This includes use of techniques that may be developed to assist memory, concentration, and mental energy; life extension therapies; reproductive choice technologies; cryonics procedures; and many other possible human modification and enhancement technologies."¹⁶

At the moment the main part of the population has a critical point of view. The example of the Chinese scientist He Jiankui shows this clearly. He declared in November 2018 via YouTube that he had manipulated the DNA of new-born twins by using the CRISPR technology. He did so to make it unlikely that they can become infected with HIV. The reactions were numerous and dominated by indignation. Even Jennifer Doudna, one of the inventors of the CRISPR/Cas9 technology, criticised what He Jiankui did. She states that she was horrified and stunned when he described the process he used at a gene-editing summit in Hong Kong some days after his video release: "It was so inappropriate on so many levels." One scientist asked He Jiankui why he proceeded with the experiments despite the consensus among scientists worldwide that such research shouldn't be done, but He declined to answer. The biologist and Nobel-prize winner David Baltimore, chair of the summit's organising committee, called He's experiment "irresponsible" and criticised him for a lack of transparency. In addition, he accused scientists: "There has been a failure of self regulation by the scientific community."¹⁷

¹⁶ https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/

¹⁷ https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07573-w

A matter of perspective

The example shows that once there is a ground-breaking technology people will use it, although there might be moral concern. Also, it's usual that such technology gets rejected at first. Nick Bostrom explains: "We accept inventions and innovations of the past, but we tend to be more critical towards new developments." Further he states: "When we introduce new biomedical ways of manipulating our bodies, there is often an initial, gut-level repugnance. Usually, that repugnance dissipates once people become familiar with new technologies."¹⁸ He mentions heart transplants, anaesthesia during childbirth and in-vitro fertilisation as examples. It might be the same with bio-enhancements even when they are not only meant to heal illnesses but to improve the lives of healthy people. One could say it's just a matter of perspective where health ends and illness begins. Bostrom : "Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress: a half-baked beginning that can be remolded in desirable ways through intelligent use of enhancement technologies."19 We just don't know which problems might come with all this - and if we will be able to solve them. But who knows? Maybe at that time our bodies and brains will be enhanced enough to take this as an easy task.

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- Conference fee discount of 25 %
- COS-Creations: Special discount of 20% for one seminar of your choice during the membership period.

Please send your application for membership to office@cos-collective.com

Join COS, a Home for Reflective Hybrids

The future is an unknown garment that invites us to weave our lives into it. How these garments will fit, cover, colour, connect and suit us lies in our (collective) hands. Many garments from the past have become too tight, too grey, too something...and the call for new shapes and textures is acknowledged by many. Yet changing clothes leaves one naked, half dressed in between. Let's connect in this creative, vulnerable space and cut, weave and stitch together.

Our target group is reflective hybrids – leaders, scientists, consultants, and researchers from all over the world who dare to be and act complex. Multilayered topics require multidimensional approaches that are, on the one hand, interdisciplinary and, on the other hand, linked to theory and practice, making the various truths and perspectives mutually useful.

If you feel you are a reflective hybrid you are very welcome to join our COS movement, for instance by:

- Visiting our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Getting in touch with COS-Creations. A space for personal & collective development, transformation and learning. Visit our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Following our COS-Conference online: www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to our newsletter: see www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to the COS Journal: see www.cos-collective.com
- Ordering single articles from the COS Journal: www.cos-collective.com
- Becoming a member of our LinkedIn group: go to www.linkedin.com and type in "Challenging Organisations and Society.reflective hybrids" or contact Tonnie van der Zouwen: office@cos-collective.com

SAVE THE DATE: 9. – 13. November 2020, Venedig

Fokussierte Teamintelligenz erleben Selbstorganisationstraining, 5-tägig

Auf dieser Lernreise zur Quelle der Selbstorganisation schärfen Sie Ihren Kompass für wirksames, co-kreatives Handeln im Team. Sie verfeinern ihr Sensorium für innere und äußere Prozesse und lernen, wie Sie durch fokussierte Aufmerksamkeit Steuerungsimpulse aus der Tiefe ihres Organismus generieren.

Als Teil eines werdenden Teams auf Zeit steigern Sie Ihre Fähigkeiten für kreative high performance und tanken Impulse, wie Sie Teamintelligenz für Wandel und Innovation in Organisationen und größeren Feldern nutzen.

Inhalte

- Bausteine erfolgreicher Teamentwicklung: Intention und Zielfindung in Komplexität und Ungewissheit – common ground und individuelle Freiheit balancieren – Fähigkeiten erkennen & nutzen – aneinander wachsen – Schwellen überwinden – Geschichte schreiben & immer wieder Neuland betreten ...
- Selbstsicher und berührbar im Kontakt die eigene Wirkung erfahren & entfalten
- Konstruktiver, achtsamer Umgang mit Unterschieden und Konflikt
- Geteilte Führung und Einfluss auf Augenhöhe; Vertrauen
- Flow generieren und halten: Engagement, Energiehaushalt und Begeisterung
- Freiraum schaffen wenn sich alles im Kreis dreht: Eigendynamik auflösen oder nutzen? Negative Teamtrancen erkennen und verändern – positive Verstärkung initiieren
- Das Eigene im Ganzen leben
- ...

Zielgruppe

GestalterInnen, Führungskräfte, Kreative aller Felder & Branchen; Menschen, mit Bezug und Interesse für Teams und Selbstorganisation, individuell und kollektiv. Alle, die ihr Repertoire jenseits von und in Ergänzung zu digitaler Fremdsteuerung, Hierarchie, (agiler) Programme ausweiten wollen und notwendigen Wandel, neue Arbeitsformen, Innovation in Organisationen und Gesellschaft – digital und analog – vorantreiben.

Motto: Mehr Maschine braucht mehr Mensch! ... die COS Conference 2019 und dieses COS Journal lassen grüßen! :-)

Termin & Ort

9. – 13. November 2020, Palazzo Contarini della Porta di Ferro, Venedig

Die Geografie von Stadt, Lagune und der Palazzo aus dem 14. Jahrhundert bieten die ideale Lernumgebung: endloser Formenreichtum zwischen fest und flüssig, Verbindung von Tradition und Zukunft und Balance von Verfall, einfachem Leben und Superlativ.

Methodik:

Gruppendynamische Trainingsgruppe; generative Teamdynamik; Reflexions- und Resonanzprozesse; multisensorisches Erfahrungslernen durch Verbindung von Denken, Intuition, Emotion und Körperintelligenz; outdoor & indoor; kreative Medien; 3 D- Modellierung

Arbeitssprache: deutsch (english on request)

Investition:

Early Bird: 1.500,00 + 20% Ust Regulärer Preis: 1.600,00 + 20% Ust (Spezialkonditionen für Teams auf Anfrage)

Leitung, Kontakt & Anmeldung:

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Mehr Info: www.cos-collective.com/cos-creations/