

Chapter 12

Human Digital Immortality: Where Human Old Dreams and New Technologies Meet

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ABSTRACT

More or less primitive homo sapiens have always secretly dreamt about, or plainly believed in immortality. All cultures had and still have beliefs, traditions, rituals, legends, old stories, and fairy tales about immortality. Unfortunately, as science and technology progressed, human immortality is a remote ideal yet. In addition, as technology development speeds up, it challenges the social nature of humankind; a possible result is people alienation. It is the purpose of this paper to propose a new prospective: opposed to the common feeling that technology alienates people – in their most intimate nature – the authors believe that modern technologies and human nature (defined by its innermost dream of immortality) converge. The ancient human dream of eternal life can be achieved through technology: i.e. human digital immortality. A day will come when the entire technical capabilities will allow personalities to be copied into a computer. Thus immortality could be provided in a virtualized form, heaven being replaced with a super computer.

INTRODUCTION

More or less primitive *homo sapiens* have always secretly dreamt about, or plainly believed in immortality. All cultures had and still have beliefs, traditions, rituals, legends, old stories, and fairy tales about immortality. For most of the human history, the proverbs have played the role of humankind wisdom repository. Only over the last few centuries it was the role of technology – books by Gutenberg press, then new media by information technology – to extend the human capacity to store and process unimaginable amounts of data.

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Human Digital Immortality

Trends characterizing technological civilization of the 21st century are redefining the relationship between tradition and modernity. While industrial period was defined by a violent rupture in relation with the past, the new digital world is marked by a contrary process. Japanese artist Masamune Shirow, author of the *mangas*¹ of the animated films “Ghost in The Shell” (1995) - directed by Mamoru Oshii, and “Appleseed” (2004) - directed by Shinji Aramaki, state that the virtual world is a more accurate replica of reality and for developing advanced technologies people need to understand and integrate new paradigms in all aspects of the real world (Shirow, 1991).

Confronted with the downfall of a short life – mainly due to diseases and wars – people have always dreamed to live longer, sometimes tending to push this to extreme, towards eternal life. Many legends and writings testify human beings eager to learn about never ending life, about the elixir of youth, the secret of eternal life.

There are different standpoints to understand or to approach immortality (i.e. life vs. death) question:

1. Relative to extension of life:
 - a. extension as increase of life expectancy – as result of better quality of life (water and food; living and working conditions; medicines and healthcare services; eco-environment);
 - b. life extension as a result of technology direct intervention (either genetics or computer science and information technology) – for shorter or longer time horizons, one-time or repeated interventions;
 - c. immortality by progressive life extension;
 - d. life indefinitely extended (immortality).
2. Relative to individual life or humankind life (as average life statistically calculated or, more profound, as human species perpetuation).
3. Relative to material or spiritual aspects:
 - a. material life;
 - b. material heritage;
 - c. knowledge heritage;
 - d. spiritual heritage;
 - e. spiritual life (in religious sense).

All these issues are debateable and, each of them, subject to extended research, discussions, and (interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary) theories. Table 1 displays several possible combinations – as a matrix model for systematic approach.

Under the sign of this book (*human-technology interaction*), this chapter deals with the issue of individual life extension, mostly in that sense of technology-supported life extension. However, necessary elements of spiritual heritage and knowledge transfer are presented as well.

Table 1. Several issues related to “immortality” question

Immortality question	Individual life	Humankind life
Life extension	Issue: Individual life extension	Issue: Increase in average life expectancy Issue: Human species perpetuation
Immortality	Issue: Immortal individuals	Issue: Immortal humankind

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