

ANTI - VANITY IN THE TRANSHUMANISM ERA ? (BIO-IMPLICATED DESIGN)

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive article embarks on a nuanced exploration at the crossroads of transhumanist practices, historical narratives from 17th-century art, and contemporary aesthetic impulses. At its core is a pivotal question: Do these practices confront vanity, or do they delicately reconcile with it? The narrative unfolds with a deep dive into diverse perspectives on the modern concept of vanity in art, intricately interwoven with the latest advancements in biotechnology.

Numerous artworks are presented as significant markers, illustrating the evolving perspectives on aging and mortality. They depict the transhumanism era as a battleground where bio-implicated design not only challenges the pursuit of eternal life but also encourages a rejection of superficiality. This exploration is driven by a quest for a comprehensive understanding of vanity, weaving together philosophical reflections, contemporary expressions, and echoes from the annals of art history. The article further delves into the dynamic interplay between Vanity and bio-implicated design, unraveling their transformative and innovative essence within the spheres of fashion and technology. Vanity emerges as a cyclical force in various artistic creations, disrupting traditional narratives while embracing sustainability as a guiding principle.

However, the integration of biotechnology introduces a complex layer of ethical considerations, disrupting the natural circularity inherent in the cycles of life and death. The technological advancements challenge mortality, presenting a tantalizing prospect of potential immortality, ultimately leading to a redefined understanding of Vanity with its intricate ethical complexities. The exploration of transhumanism, bio-implicated design, and the profound desire for immortality raises a pivotal question that echoes through the article: Does this redefine our essence as humans? As the article draws to a close, it leaves readers with open-ended questions, inviting contemplation on the ethical dimensions and societal implications entwined with the relentless quest for perpetual existence. These reflections are positioned not merely as concluding remarks but as integral elements shaping the ongoing narrative of our collective future.

INTRODUCTION: VANITY AND TRANSHUMANISM

In the context of the history of art, vanity has been a recurring and appreciated theme, particularly during the 17th century. Paintings of vanity often took the form of still-life compositions, inviting viewers to reflect upon and meditate on the themes of death, time, and the ephemeral nature of life. These artworks presented symbolic objects and figures that conveyed multiple meanings, such as skulls representing mortality and flies or flowers representing

transience.

The historical concept of vanity, as depicted in 17th-century art, emphasized the fleeting and fragile aspects of human existence. It challenged the pursuit of worldly possessions, power, and superficial beauty, inviting viewers to contemplate the brevity of life and the inevitability of death. These paintings featured objects and symbols like extinguished candles, hourglasses, spilled glasses, fallen rose petals, books, coins, and jewelry, each carrying symbolic significance (Virassamynaiken 2022). In contrast to this historical notion of vanity, the transhumanism era introduces alternative perspectives and ideals, where the pursuit of immortality reigns supreme (Godde 2022), a compelling paradox emerges—a nuanced exploration of vanity's role within the tapestry of human enhancement. Step into an era where bio-implicated design serves as both a canvas for aesthetic expression and a battleground for the complex interplay between the desire for eternal life and the rejection of superficiality.

L'opinion s'impose de plus en plus selon laquelle la sénescence serait une pathologie dont on devrait bientôt guérir, la mort une simple maladie dont on viendra à bout grâce à des antioxydants et à une alimentation choisie. Rien de naturel dans la mort, laisse-t-on de plus en plus dire. **1** (Besnier 2013)

Beginning this exploration, a pivotal question surfaces: Do transhumanist practices inherently defy vanity, or do they navigate a delicate balance between the allure of perpetual existence and the aesthetic impulses that define our humanity? The runway of innovation unfolds as a stage where these opposing forces engage in a thought-provoking dialogue.

Visualize garments meticulously crafted, not merely as embellishments but as tangible expressions challenging established norms of beauty—a manifestation of a deeper, purpose-driven existence. Consider, for instance, the emergence of bio-implicated designs, providing not just a stylish and aesthetic facade but a functional layer related to nature and the environment. These garments redefine the conventional, transcending the superficial to become poignant statements in the ongoing discourse of human enhancement.

Thus, the fashion landscape becomes a testing ground for radical innovations, where the boundary between the biological and design blurs. By integrating living organisms into fabric composition, fashion becomes a revolutionary approach that blurs the lines between nature and design. This approach goes beyond the traditional constraints of aesthetics, transforming clothing into a dynamic medium that interacts with the wearer's environment and personal biology.

Embark on this exploration into uncharted territories, where inspiration is drawn from tangible examples of bio-implicated design. Through these innovations, we navigate the intricate relationship between transhumanist ideals and the intricate concept of Vanity. Picture a future where self-enhancement and aesthetic aspirations not only co-exist but intricately intertwine, shaping a narrative of human evolution that transcends conventional expectations. We will use three formulations of the word vanity within this article examining bio-implicated design :

i. vanity as its dictionary definition: In exploring the intersection of transhumanism and bio-implicated design, the concept of "vanity" takes on a multifaceted role. While the dictionary definition portrays it as the quality of being worthless or futile (Collins Dictionary n.d.), we examine how this perception intertwines with the broader discourse of human enhancement. Are the pursuits of transhumanism rendered futile in the face of the everlasting quest for immortality, or does vanity manifest in unexpected ways within the bio-implicated design?

ii. Vanity as a concept expounded in this article concerning the works implicated in bio-design: Within the context of this article, "Vanity" assumes a specialized meaning, particularly concerning bio-design. As we scrutinize the landscape of bio-implicated design, we unravel the intricate layers of vanity intertwined with the desire for eternal life. The exploration of tangible examples allows us to discern how Vanity takes on new dimensions.

iii. Vanitas as the seventeenth-century popular art movement: Drawing inspiration from the historical perspective, we harken back to the 17th-century art movement of "Vanitas." This movement, depicting symbols of life's transi-

ence and the inevitability of death, serves as a poignant backdrop for our contemporary exploration. How do the echoes of “Vanitas” from the past resonate with the current discourse on transhumanism and bio-implicated design? Do these historical symbols find new life in our quest for perpetual existence?

By navigating through these three distinct lenses of “vanity, Vanity, Vanitas” our exploration transcends traditional boundaries, offering a comprehensive understanding that encompasses philosophical reflections, contemporary manifestations, and echoes from art history.

1. VANITY AS MEMENTO MORI

MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA (9/4/1615)

Maison Martin Margiela’s transformative exhibition in 1997 at Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam (1997) stands as an exploration of the convergence of fashion, art, and the ceaseless ebb and flow of life. Under the enigmatic title “Maison Martin Margiela (9/4/1615),” the exhibition shattered traditional fashion norms, infusing garments with live bacteriological cultures, crafting a profound narrative that navigates the delicate balance between degradation and the allure of transformation. At the helm of this experiment was Dr. Egeraat, a visionary scientist whose meticulous orchestration transformed tailor’s dummies into living canvases. Drawing from a palette of bacteriological cultures—red bacteria, yellow bacteria, pink yeasts, and green fungi—the garments underwent a choreographed evolution through five distinct stages: preparing installations, readying substrata, applying cultures, incubating, and drying. This scientific ballet resulted in an astonishing metamorphosis, challenging the permanence typically associated with fashion. As the experiment unfolded, the garments underwent a captivating transformation. Neutral tones dissipated, replaced by a dynamic, multi-colored mold that rendered the original aesthetic unrecognizable (Maison Martin Margiela 2009).

In the MMM exhibition project, these bacteria indeed become interpreters of the vanity of life. The direct injection of bacteria into these garments and their incubation in a confined space, using methods proposed by a biologist, has accelerated the progression of time towards an announced end. These references to Vanitas, which MMM reinterprets in a different form through this artistic exhibition, constitute a prevalent and appreciated theme in the art history of the 17th century. Still-life paintings in this genre (Virassamynaiken 2022) offer a reflection and meditation on death, time, and its ephemeral nature. The objects and figures symbolically representing vanity, inconstancy, fragility, anxiety, and boredom are polysemic, conveying multiple meanings. The garments in the MMM exhibition undergoing accelerated decomposition due to the colonization by microorganisms distinctly embody the concept of Vanitas. The transformation of their appearance, induced by bacterial colonization, evokes feelings of repulsion and disgust, reminiscent of commonplace experiences such as the mold on food products, the gradual wear and tear of clothing, and other forms of decay. As highlighted by Louis Marin (Dautel, Rouillard, and al. 1990) in his article :

La Vanité dit d’abord la métamorphose, l’instabilité des formes du monde, des articulations de l’être, la perte d’identité et d’unité, qui le livre au changement incessant ; elle dit le monde en état de chancellement, la réalité en état d’inconstance et de fuite, et du même coup, liée à ce statut, la relativité de toute connaissance et de toute morale.²

The exhibition evolved into a living spectacle, where colors and textures organically unfolded over five days, defying the conventional constraints of fashion’s temporal nature. The concept of Vanity in the Maison Martin Margiela exhibition extends beyond the transformative garments. The spatial arrangement enhances the narrative by presenting the outfits on the exterior of an empty glass pavilion. Facing inward, the clothes undergo real-time changes, reflecting their metamorphosis against the glass wall—an intricate dance reminiscent of 17th-century Vanitas art. Drawing inspiration from Nicolas Régnier’s 17th-century painting “Vanité or Jeune femme à la toilette,” the Maison Martin Margiela Exhibition reinterprets this classic in a contemporary manner. The garments, akin to Régnier’s subject, invite viewers to witness their transformation from the outside, creating a powerful double-Vanity effect. This

scenographic play between interior and exterior mirrors the symbolism of Vanitas, intertwining reality with illusion, and life with death (KIM 2019). The enigmatic title, "Maison Martin Margiela (9/4/1615)," adds layers of mystery, potentially associating the fictional Martin Margiela with 17th-century Vanitas. The numbers, suggestive of dates, create an intriguing connection between the timeless themes explored in the exhibition and historical symbolism. This enigmatic title, encapsulated in parentheses, leaves room for interpretation, inviting viewers to delve into the deeper meanings behind the Maison Martin Margiela showcase (KIM 2019). In essence, Maison Martin Margiela's 1997 exhibition transcended the confines of conventional fashion showcases, emerging as a profound exploration of life's transience. It invited viewers to ponder the delicate balance between decay and anticipated rebirth, questioning the boundaries between life and death, appearance and disappearance, and leaving an indelible mark at the intersection of art and fashion.

MUSHROOM BURIAL SUIT BY ARTIST JAE RHIM LEE

The artist Jae Rhim Lee's "Mushroom Burial Suit," (TED Global 2011) unfolds a narrative challenging conventional notions of death. Offering a fresh and innovative take on vanity, the suit transcends the preservation of individual beauty. Instead, it enters a symbiotic dance with nature, fostering a profound connection with the environment and reshaping traditional perspectives on mortality.

Traditionally, vanity has been associated with the fleeting nature of human beauty rather than a direct pursuit of immortality. Within the narrative of the "Mushroom Burial Suit," Vanity undergoes a significant transformation. Rather than centering on the conservation of mere physical appearances, the suit aligns with the perpetual cycles of the natural world, offering a unique perspective on the human journey and its interconnectedness with the broader narrative of nature's ongoing transformations.

The suit, embedded with mushroom spores and microorganisms, becomes a vessel for the body's decomposition and regeneration. Unlike traditional burial practices that seek to defy the natural decay process, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" aligns with a more organic and integrated approach. It encourages a harmonious relationship with nature, where the human body becomes a contributing element to the perpetual cycle of life. By emphasizing decomposition and degradation, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" questions the conventional boundaries between life and death. It becomes a poetic expression of vanity, intertwining the human journey with the broader narrative of nature's ongoing transformations.

In essence, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" offers a unique perspective on Vanity by redefining the significance of the human body beyond its physical form. It encourages contemplation on the interconnectedness of life, death, and the environment, inviting individuals to rethink the conventional approaches to mortality in favor of a more sustainable and nature-aligned existence.

ANALYSIS

The "Mushroom Burial Suit" aligns with the "Maison Martin Margiela (9/4/1615)" exhibition, shedding light on the timeless theme of vanity by exploring decay and transformation within garments and the human body itself. This creation thrusts the essence of Vanity into the contemporary spotlight, orchestrating a dance of decomposition and renewal facilitated by bacteria.

In parallel with the Maison Martin Margiela exhibition, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" challenges our perceptions of the ephemeral nature of life, using the medium of garments and the human body as a canvas. The organic materials employed in the suit, designed to facilitate the body's return to nature, introduce an element of unpredictability and unexpected beauty in the process of decay. The bacterial progression, both in the exhibition and the burial suit, serves as a testament to the inevitable cycle of life, transforming the familiar into the unforeseen. As spectators observe the ongoing bacterial evolution in the exhibition, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" takes the concept a step further

by involving the actual remains of the artist's body, such as hairs and fingernails. This laboratory experiment, while grounded in the scientific, becomes a poetic exploration of the human body's journey back to nature's elements. The artist invites us to confront the inevitability of our transformation, challenging our preconceived notions and prompting reflection on the cyclical nature of existence.

In contrast, the exhibition case and the "Burial Suit" diverge in their approaches to Vanity. The exhibition, revolving around the dynamic transformation of everyday life objects and garments, presents a narrative of change and evolution. It challenges the conventional notions of permanence in fashion, prompting viewers to contemplate the ephemerality of beauty. When the realms of garments and microorganisms converge, the ordinary transforms into the extraordinary. On the other hand, the "Mushroom Burial Suit" takes a more direct approach, delivering a poignant message on the vanity of life and the inevitable decay of the human body. Through the intricate dance of bacteria, it vividly illustrates the organic process of returning to nature. In both cases, the essence of Vanity is encapsulated in the very cycle of life and death, inviting contemplation on the impermanence of our physical existence as *memento mori*. Benjamin Delmotte (2010) underlines in his book *Esthétique de l'angoisse* :

Le rapprochement entre *Memento mori* et Vanité se comprend dans la mesure où les Vanités mettent souvent en scène le contraste entre la certitude de la mort et la recherche de plaisirs, de richesses, de pouvoirs, de travaux intellectuels illusoire : ce contraste correspond remarquablement à ce qui s'entend dans *memento mori*, où le rappel de la mort relativise toute autre préoccupation.³

This concurrent analysis, one embracing the fluidity of life through transformation and the other confronting the undeniable reality of mortality, provides a rich tapestry for viewers to navigate the profound intersections of art and the eternal dance of Vanity.

2. VANITY AS CREATION

VICTIMLESS LEATHER BY CATTS AND ZURR

This (2004) creative venture reimagines the traditional process of leather production, providing a glimpse into a future where cruelty-free alternatives take precedence. At its core, this artistic experiment revolves around cultivating living cells within a bioreactor. These carefully selected and immortalized cells serve as the foundation for a material that challenges established norms. As these cells, known as "semi-living sculptures," multiply and weave into a cohesive structure, the resulting material mimics the texture and appearance of conventional leather. However, the true innovation lies in its "victimless" nature — a material crafted without harm to animals (Rosell 2016). At the end of the project, these cells meet their inevitable fate as they are destined for termination, exposed to non-sterile conditions. (Zurr and Catts 2003)

The Killing Ritual also enhances the idea of the temporality of living art and the responsibility that lies on us (humans as creators) to decide and act upon their fate. It is important for us, as part of the broader issues regarding life that we raise through our work, to expose to the public what happens to living systems artistically created at the end of the exhibition.

"Victimless Leather" goes beyond being a mere scientific achievement; it transforms into a medium where art and science converge, pushing the boundaries of the fashion industry. This project not only revolutionizes material creation but also serves as a canvas for exploring ethical dimensions (Cogdell 2011). The artwork prompts contemplation on the environmental repercussions of conventional leather production. By offering a sustainable and cruelty-free alternative, it encourages viewers to reassess the choices made in the pursuit of fashion. In this evolution, "Victimless Leather" transforms into a poignant manifestation of Vanity, drawing our focus to the inventive creation of new materials through the implications of biotechnology from elemental sources.

GROW YOUR OWN CLOTHES BY SUZANNE LEE

Suzanne Lee's "Grow Your Own Clothes" (Andreotti 2015) is an innovative project that explores the intersection of biology, fashion, and sustainability. Using a fermentation process, Lee grows a material similar to leather but without the environmental impact associated with traditional leather production. The process commences as ordinary elements converge—a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast (SCOBY) nurtured within a sweetened green tea solution. In this alchemical union, the commonplace undergoes a mesmerizing metamorphosis, giving birth to the extraordinary. Here, the seamless intertwining of the natural and artificial defies the conventional, bringing forth a creation that transcends the boundaries of expectation. This process echoes the timeless narratives depicted in 17th-century still-life paintings, where the alchemy of transformation finds resonance. (Honig 1998)

Still, life constantly confounds our expectations of taxonomy. In them, the ordinary meets the extraordinary, the natural meets the artificial. Common foods are displayed alongside, or resting within, exotic porcelain containers; rare flowers blossom beside familiar fruits.

Over several weeks, this living material solidifies into a thin, flexible sheet that can be molded into various garment shapes. The resulting material is both biodegradable and can be composted at the end of its life cycle, offering a sustainable alternative to conventional textiles (CNN 2011). Lee's work challenges traditional notions of clothing production by harnessing biological processes to create garments, emphasizing a more environmentally conscious approach to fashion.

Fundamentally, Suzanne Lee's project not only propels us into the forefront of fabrication but also prompts a reevaluation of our connection to clothing. It serves as a canvas for exploring the convergence of biology and fashion, transcending the conventional boundaries of what we wear.

ANALYSIS

"Victimless Leather" by Catts and Zurr and "Grow Your Own Clothes" by Suzanne Lee present a captivating departure from the decay-centric narratives seen in previous examples like the "MMM exhibition" and "Mushroom Burial Suit". These artworks guide us into a realm of creation, marking an opposite trajectory from the processes examined in the first two cases. It's as if time takes a reverse course, presenting a contrasting narrative.

In "Victimless Leather," the artists orchestrate a symbiotic dance between semi-living cells and the crafting of a "leather" jacket. This deliberate creation from the elemental level challenges conventional leather production, becoming a metaphor for the intricate interplay between life and transformation. It's a genesis story rooted in the fundamental components of living organisms.

"Grow Your Own Clothes" shifts the paradigm by cultivating clothing from microbial cellulose, emphasizing sustainability and environmental consciousness. This unique creative process transforms biological elements into wearable materials, signaling a departure from the norms of traditional textile production. It symbolizes a harmonious coexistence with nature, highlighting the transformative power of organic processes within the realm of fashion.

This creative process not only adds depth to the exploration of art, transhumanism, and the eternal dance of Vanity but also beckons viewers to ponder not just the final product but the very genesis of the materials that drape our bodies.

In both cases, Vanity emerges as a creative force, giving birth to new materials while carrying a subtle message of death through the potential of degradation. Delmotte (2010) interprets Vanity in connection with the concept of time :

Le futur s'invite dans le présent, le creuse et l'abîme. Ce surgissement du futur se lit d'ailleurs en latin dans

le simple memento, puisqu'il s'agit d'un impératif futur intraduisible, qui a une valeur de présent d'éternité. Le verbe se souvenir est donc ici conjugué sur un mode futur et impératif pour renvoyer à un futur certain mais indéterminé.

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3. BEYOND VANITY

VESPERS COLLECTION BY NERI OXMAN

Neri Oxman and the Mediated Matter Group at MIT present the culmination of their "Vespers collection" with the third and final series, "Future, The Biological World." This creation delves into the profound concept of rebirth through a series of 3D-printed death masks that stand almost devoid of color, functioning as unique "biological urns." (Morris 2018)

These masks transcend mere aesthetics; they are inhabited by living microorganisms meticulously engineered by Oxman's team to produce pigments and beneficial substances, envisioning a future of human augmentation. What sets this series apart is its paradoxical vitality—the masks, while appearing lifeless, are the most 'alive'.

In this futuristic vision, wearables and architectural skins cease to be generic; they become highly customized to individual shapes, material preferences, and even genetic compositions. The intricate patterns adorning these masks, inspired by earlier series, guide living microorganisms through spatial features, offering a literal and metaphorical re-engineering of life within the artifacts of the deceased. Oxman underlines this point in her interview (Blauvelt, Fanning, and al. 2019) :

Designs that combine top-down form generation with the bottom-up growth of biological systems will open up real opportunities for designers working with digital fabrication and synthetic biology. They will enable the creation of systems that are truly dynamic products and building parts that can grow, heal, and adapt. In the end, cells are merely small, self-replicating machines. If we can engineer them to perform useful tasks, simply by adding sugar and growth media, we can dream up new design possibilities.

The "Vespers collection", originally inspired by ancient death masks, seamlessly integrates cutting-edge 3D printing technology with synthetic biology. Oxman's team not only envisions a new design space for biological augmentation but also hints at a future where wearables adapt dynamically to an individual's genetic makeup and environmental context.

This project, housed within the MIT Media Lab's realm of pioneering research, beautifully blurs the boundaries between life, death, and the vast possibilities that lie in a bio-enhanced future.

HUMANOUS HEELS BY NANCY TILBURY

In the dynamic realm of fashion, Studio Nancy Tilbury stands as a beacon of innovation, where the fusion of science and couture reshapes conventional paradigms. Rooted in London, UK, this Fashion Laboratory, led by the visionary Nancy Tilbury, seamlessly integrates digital and physical intimacy to reimagine the very essence of wearables. With a multifaceted background spanning fashion design, textile technology, and computer science, Tilbury's trans-practice approach heralds the future of dressing. At the core of the studio's pioneering endeavors lies the exploration of biojewelry, a revolutionary concept that challenges traditional accessory norms. This fusion of genetic manipulation techniques with fashion envisions a future where the wearer's bacteria actively participate in crafting unique garments directly on their body.

A stellar manifestation of this vision is the "Humanous Heels" project (Tilbury 2010), a testament to Tilbury's inno-

vative prowess. This biojewelry initiative cultivates accessories from the body itself, utilizing genetic manipulation techniques to create personalized wearables. The transformative potential to translate the wearer's bacteria into a bespoke garment not only challenges conventional fashion boundaries but also opens doors to a more intimate and customized design approach.

In essence, Nancy Tilbury's biojewellery initiatives redefine the symbiotic relationship between the human body and fashion. Through the integration of genetic manipulation techniques and active membranes, Studio Nancy Tilbury pioneers a future where garments transcend mere fabrics, evolving into living, breathing extensions of the wearer.

ANALYSIS

In the dynamic realm of bio-implicated design, where art, science, and technology converge, two projects emerge as transformative manifestations challenging traditional norms—Neri Oxman's "Vespers collection" and Nancy Tilbury's "Humanous Heels."

Neri Oxman's "Vespers collection" harmoniously blends 3D-printed masks with meticulously engineered microorganisms, giving rise to living entities that dynamically respond to unique individual conditions. This endeavor extends beyond conventional fashion norms, delving into the intricate tapestry of the biological realm. Oxman envisions a future where wearables not only adapt but actively engage with diverse individual conditions. The seamless integration of technology and biology blurs the distinctions between creation and the inevitable process of change, showcasing wearables that flourish and evolve in ever-changing environments (G Hays, G Patrick and al. 2015).

Tilbury's "Humanous Heels" redefines the symbiotic relationship between the human body and fashion by fusing genetic manipulation techniques with wearables (Quinn 2011). This biojewelry initiative challenges accessory norms, allowing the wearer's bacteria to contribute actively to crafting unique and bespoke garments. The transformative potential of translating the wearer's bacteria into bespoke garments blurs the lines between creation and the inevitable decay process. While "Vespers" explores the potential of biological systems beyond the confines of our vanity, pushing the boundaries of speculative design, "Humanous Heels" delves into the transformative potential of translating the wearer's bacteria into bespoke garments. Together, these projects create living extensions that challenge the norms of fashion and question the conventional boundaries between creation and the natural decay process.

In essence, the comparison of "Vespers" and "Humanous Heels" underscores the evolution of wearables into active participants in the broader narratives of life, both in the ongoing creation process and beyond. These projects collectively push the boundaries of bio-implicated design, offering a unique perspective on the symbiotic relationship between the human body, garments, and the ever-expanding environment.

CONCLUSION

In the intricate exploration of Vanity and bio-implicated design, a nuanced narrative unfolds, weaving together historical reflections, decay, creation, and the transformative essence embedded within the realms of fashion and technology.

Vanity, captured in the intricate interplay of decomposition and transformation in pieces like the "Mushroom Burial Suit" and the "MMM exhibition," manifests as a dynamic and cyclical force. Conversely, "Victimless Leather" and "Grow Your Clothes" defy traditional narratives, portraying Vanity as a creative energy centered on creation and sustainability rather than inevitable decay. Breaking conventional bounds, Neri Oxman's "Vespers Collection" and Nancy Tilbury's "Humanous Heels" redefine Vanity, envisioning a future where wearables dynamically adapt to individual conditions. This forward-looking fusion of technology and biology offers a captivating glimpse into the ever-evolving essence of Vanity. Within this dynamic interplay, Vanity becomes a catalyst for innovation, challenging norms, and inspiring contemplation on the intricate dance between life, death, and the unfolding universe. The fusion of

technology, biological processes, and artistic endeavors paints a vivid landscape where Vanity takes center stage, propelling the ongoing narratives of human existence (Stairs 1997).

Nevertheless, the integration of biotechnology into these processes introduces ethical considerations, challenging conventional notions of vanity. This shift disrupts the natural circularity (Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2020) of life and death, prompting a need for a redefined understanding of Vanity that encompasses the ethical complexities arising from the interruption of these inherent cycles. In the absence of death, life loses its essence, and without life, death ceases to exist, rendering the body undead, a mere instrument.

Si les outils scientifiques permettent de mieux cerner la notion biologique du vivant, la question du vivant reste cependant toujours posée. Elle ne peut en effet se réduire au simple discours biologique : la connaissance sur le vivant n'est pas synonyme de « vie ». La double réduction – biologie = nature et génétique = vivant – est d'ailleurs source d'ambiguïté dans les projets scientifiques puisqu'elle tend à assimiler la connaissance du vivant aux techniques de manipulation génétique, transformant ainsi la relation qu'entretiennent les scientifiques avec diverses formes de vie. Le vivant reste non seulement mystérieux, mais il devient aussi problématique, requérant une solution technologique. (Abergel 2011) **5**

Advancements in biotechnology open the door to potential immortality, challenging traditional notions of mortality and embracing an anti-vanity narrative by disrupting the inevitability of death.

The natural and biological can now be altered without altering their essential properties (growth, replication, biochemistry, cellular metabolism, and so on). The capacity of these technologies, and their aforementioned invisibility, enables researchers to conceive of a body that is not a body - a kind of lateral transcendence. (Thacker 2003)

Artists like Eduardo Kac and Stelarc serve as examples of this paradigm shift (Flaman 2019). Kac's "GFP Bunny" project in 2000 (Gessert 2010), featuring a genetically modified fluorescent rabbit, not only challenges bioethics in art but also prompts reflections on the ethical dimensions of genetic manipulation. Similarly, Stelarc's performances, such as the "Third Ear" in 2007 (Fernandez 2018), explore the integration of technology with the human body, pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable. These artists stimulate contemplation on the evolving relationship between technology, biology, and ethical implications, making significant contributions to the ongoing discourse about the intricate interplay between life, death, and transformative possibilities in the realms of art and technology.

As we delve into the intricate intersection of transhumanism (Latour 1997), bio-implicated design, and the evolving concept of Vanity, a question emerges: In the pursuit of immortality, are we navigating uncharted territories that redefine not only our relationship with life and death but also the very essence of what it means to be human? This exploration beckons us to ponder the ethical dimensions and societal implications that accompany the desire for perpetual existence. What lies beyond the horizon of anti-vanity, and how does our evolving relationship with technology shape the narrative of our collective future?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDICES

1. Translation in English: The prevailing opinion suggests more and more that aging is a pathology we should soon cure, and death is merely an illness we will overcome with the help of antioxidants and a carefully chosen diet. The notion that there is nothing natural about death is becoming increasingly prevalent.

2. Translation in English: Vanitas initially conveys the concept of metamorphosis—the instability of the world’s forms, the articulations of being, the loss of identity and unity, laying it bare to perpetual change. It speaks of the world teetering on the edge, reality in a state of flux and escape, and concurrently, bound to this condition, the relativity of all knowledge and morality.

3. Translation in English: The link between Memento mori and Vanity becomes apparent as Vanitas artworks frequently portray the juxtaposition between the certainty of death and the pursuit of pleasures, wealth, power, and illusory intellectual endeavors. This stark contrast resonates remarkably with the concept of memento mori, where the acknowledgment of death serves to contextualize and temper all other preoccupations.

4. Translation in English: The future intrudes into the present, carving and plunging it into an abyss. This eruption of the future is expressed in Latin through the simple “memento,” as it embodies an untranslatable future imperative, carrying the essence of a present eternity. The verb “to remember” is thus conjugated in a future and imperative mode, pointing towards a certain yet undefined future.

5. Translation in English: While scientific tools allow for a better understanding of the biological notion of life, the question of life remains ever-present. It cannot be reduced to a simple biological discourse; knowledge about life is not synonymous with “living.” The dual reduction—biology = nature and genetics = living—is a source of ambiguity

in scientific projects as it tends to equate knowledge of life with genetic manipulation techniques, thereby transforming the relationship scientists have with various forms of life. Life remains not only mysterious but also problematic, requiring a technological solution.