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ALGORITHMIC SUBJECTIVITY AND AI IN SCIENCE FICTION: POSTHUMANIST AND PERFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON JAMES TIPTREE JR.'S "THE GIRL WHO WAS PLUGGED IN"

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ABSTRACT: The goal of the article is to analyse the representation of artificial intelligence as well as algorithmic forms of control in James Tiptree Jr.'s novella "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973) within the framework of posthumanist theory and the concept of gender performativity. The study examines technologically mediated forms of bodily and cognitive regulation as early models of AI-driven systems that create subjectivity, desire, and social perceptibility. Although there is no a real depiction of AI in the text in its current technological sense, the novella models a decentred media-corporate system that operates in accordance with the logic of automation, optimisation, and standardisation characteristic of algorithmic organisation. An emphasis is made on the analysis of female corporeality as a technological interface through which gender performativity is enacted within a capitalist media space. The theoretical framework is grounded in posthumanist concepts (Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti) and the theory of gender performativity (Judith Butler). It enables an understanding of subjectivity as a process constituted at the intersection of the corporeal, the technological, and the discursive. The paper argues that Tiptree's novella uncovers the ambivalent potential of artificial intelligence, as it can be viewed as both a mechanism of control and a site for the transgression of fixed conceptions of the body, gender, and the extent of the human.

KEYWORDS: feminist science fiction, gender studies, artificial intelligence, performativity, intersectionality, James Tiptree Jr.

Introduction

One of the main tasks addressed in modern humanities is the conceptualisation of artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems on the

background of posthumanist thinking. This question concerns not only the technical concept of AI's operation but, more significantly, its effect on predominant notions of human subjectivity, corporeality, autonomy, and authority. As a critical theoretical model, posthumanism challenges traditional differentiation between the human and the non-human, the organic and the cybernetic, as well as the physical and the virtual, thereby creating a fecund analytical background for investigating literary representations of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

The role of science fiction as a metagenre fosters critical reflection on and, at times, evaluates social transformations motivated by technological progress, along with the growth of algorithmic forms of control, automated decision-making systems, and media structure that operates according to logic analogous to those of AI, as well as their impacts on human subjectivity. As Sarah Lefanu states, "Its inspired eclecticism, with its merging of the rational discourse of science with the pre-rational language of the unconscious for SF adopt from horror, mythology and fairy tale gives a way of investigating the countless ways in which we are created as women" (Lefanu, 1988, p. 5). In this sense, science fiction offers a conceptual framework for analysing early and proto-forms of artificial intelligence, depicting them as diffuse systems of regulation and governance rather than as individualised agents.

In this context, the topic of corporeality assumes a peculiar role. In posthumanist paradigms, the body is not comprehended as a fixed biological unit but as a dynamical artefact shaped through social, technological, and economic mechanisms. This view resonates with Foucauldian idea of the body as a discursive concept that is neither independent nor autonomous, but subject to strategies of power. In his study concerned with power and biopolitics, Foucault emphasises that "the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use (...) the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 25-26). He argues that the disciplinary performances of modern society run not only through straight coercion but as well through the standardisation of specific pattern and forms of corporeality. Accordingly, in a posthumanist discourse, corporeality gets the status of a hybrid construct that appears from the fundamental interaction of social norms, economic relations, and technological mediations. From a technological position, these mechanisms may be reconceptualised as algorithmic, where the roles of control, surveillance, and regulation are delegated to systems based on or similar to AI.

Hence, within posthumanist and technocultural models, corporeality adopts the form of a hybrid construct made by the fundamental interaction of the human, the machine and the axiological. In this respect, gender turns into an especially salient category, as current scholarship shows that gender is not a fixed or changeless conception but is established through performative patterns, social establishments, and discursive strategies. Consequently, the acquisition of

posthumanism in science fiction is indivisible from a synthesis of gender performativity, particularly within contexts formed by technological intercession.

The concepts of performativity and posthumanism, together with insights from gender studies, have become central to contemporary literary and cultural theory. Across disciplines such as literary studies, psychology, and cultural studies, these approaches critically reconsider traditional notions of identity, subjectivity, and the boundaries of the human.

The concept of performativity emerged from ordinary language philosophy (OLP), most notably in the work of John Langshaw Austin, who, in *How to Do Things with Words*, demonstrated that language does not merely depict states of affairs but may also perform actions through utterances. As Austin notes, there are several senses in which "to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, or even by saying something we do something" (Austin, 1975, p. 108). Expanding this understanding of performative language, Jacques Derrida emphasised the iterable nature of linguistic signs, asking: "Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable statement?" (Derrida, 1971, p. 326). Such iterability enables signs to operate across multiple contexts and precludes any final stabilization of meaning. Building on these insights, Judith Butler extended the concept of performativity from the linguistic to the sociocultural sphere. In *Gender Trouble*, she argued that gender identity is not an innate fact but is constituted through repeated performative practices that reproduce or subvert social norms (Butler, 1990, p. 143).

In psychology, ideas of performativity resonate with the work of Erving Goffman, who in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* viewed everyday life as a theatre where people constantly "play" social roles in front of different audiences (Goffman, 1959, p. 83). In cultural studies, performativity is examined through the lens of rituals, embodied practices, and cultural scripts. Performative acts establish social norms and identities, a process that manifests across all spheres of cultural life.

Inside literary works, the concept of performativity has stipulated a basis for analysing the text as an area of action, where narratives and characters do not only correspond to a pre-existing reality but actively create it through language, structure, and generic patterns. Developing the ideas of Austin and Derrida, Shoshana Felman argues that literary texts do not merely describe the world but also perform actions through language. As Felman observes, "speaking bodies (...) commit literary speech acts" (Felman, 2003, p. 9), thereby emphasising the inseparability of language and embodiment. This understanding paved the way for Butler's theory of gender performativity, according to which gender is constituted through repeated bodily acts and social practices. Alexa Alice Joubin argues that performativity is grounded in social practices and interpersonal relationships, noting that "gender as social practices – mannerism, comportment, sartorial choices, grooming habits, uses of voice – evolve over time and in different social spaces," while these practices are "constituted, and sometimes undermined, by

performative speech acts” (Joubin, 2024, p. 31). Shigeo Kikuchi argues that literary discourse consists of two dimensions: the performative level, which involves author-reader interaction, and the textual level. According to Kikuchi, “literary discourse can be regarded as having a double structure: one is the textual level and the other the performative level” (Kikuchi, 2007, p. 22). Cristina Chitanu thoroughly analyses textual performativity, investigating “how literature can 'perform' for the reader” through the related concepts of performance, drama, script, and intermediality (Chitanu, 2010, p. 73).

In the same way, posthumanist thought appeared as a critical paradigm that challenges anthropocentric models of the world. In terms of literary studies, posthumanism tries to dismantle the notion of the human as the central figure in the universe and the essential source of meaning. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti argues that the human should be apprehended as one agent among many within complex techno-biological systems. Rejecting the humanist notion of a unitary subject, Braidotti proposes “a more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). The author further analyses the implications of post-anthropocentric thought, which extend not only to interspecies relations but also to issues of planetary sustainability. Likewise, in *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles analyses how information technologies have transformed conceptions of the body, consciousness, and subjectivity. Hayles argues that in the digital era, classical ideas of human autonomy and bodily wholeness are destabilised, giving way to networked forms of being in which “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (Hayles, 1999, p. 3).

A foundational contribution to posthumanist critique is Donna Haraway's postfeminist manifesto *A Cyborg Manifesto,* in which the author introduces the figure of the cyborg. Defined as “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway, 2016, p. 5), the cyborg emerges from the interaction between human and technology and becomes a metaphor for a new, post-gender identity. As Haraway states, “the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (Haraway, 2016, p. 8). The cyborg disrupts traditional dichotomies such as human/machine, male/female, and nature/culture. Haraway conceptualises the cyborg as a figure of resistance that transcends fixed identities and offers models of collaborative, open-ended modes of being within a technologically mediated universe.

The representation and conceptualisation of artificial intelligence (AI) in science fiction have attracted sustained interest in contemporary scholarship, as the genre functions not only as a literary category but also as a cultural form that “thinks about future”. One of the dominant approaches in this field involves analysing fictional representations of AI as articulations of broader sociocultural and ethical imaginaries concerning technology. Santos-Mendéz et al., for instance, contrast utopian visions in which AI promotes “equity and justice” with dystopian

scenarios warning of "totalitarian control, mass surveillance, and dehumanization" (Santos-Mendéz et al., 2024, p. 42). Investigating the impact of negative stereotypes in science fiction and fantasy on public perceptions of artificial intelligence, Bo, Marof & Zaremohzzabieh demonstrate that "negative portrayals in these genres significantly increase fear and anxiety towards AI, leading to heightened skepticism and ethical concerns" (Bo et al., 2025, p. 180). Moreover, these negative stereotypes hinder the adoption of AI in various fields. Conversely, Ajeesh and Rukmini identify an increasingly positive perception of artificial intelligence and emphasise that there "seems to be much scope for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research" in this area (Ajeesh & Rukmini, 2022, p. 853). Based on interviews with science fiction writers and other experts, Hudson, Finn, and Wylie highlight a discrepancy between popular narratives surrounding artificial intelligence and "the realistic near-future implications of machine intelligence and automation for technology policy and society" (Hudson et al., 2023, p. 197). Shahwar, Imtiaz, and Azam explore the gender identity of the cyborg character Sancia in Robert Jackson Bennett's novel *Foundryside*. Sancia represents an emerging feminist subject as a new type of female cyborg figure. The authors argue that "Sancia's cyborg status erases the gender binary system" and that this "emerging identity offers fresh perspective on how female cyborgs are constructed as self-steering, non-binary gendered characters in speculative fiction" (Shahwar et al., 2024, p. 295). Erasing the binary between human and machine, this study extends the framework of feminist posthumanism and contributes to scholarly discussions of gender identity in science fiction. Ayyıldız provides a technofeminist reading of the novel, showing how bodies matter and become sites of power struggles in a patriarchal techno-world. As the author argues, "bodies and identities are interrelated and fluid constructs, which can be shaped through the influence of technology" (Ayyıldız, 2024, p. 51), often confining women within gender performativity.

Among modern studies of James Tiptree's work, scholars have focused on gender, posthumanist, feminist, and poststructuralist understanding of her work. One example is Şen and Akaltun Akan, who examine the concept of freedom in cyberpunk literature through James Tiptree Jr.'s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, arguing that "the cyborg experience presents both a deconstruction and reaffirmation of humanistic values in a shifting context" (Şen & Akaltun Akan, 2024, p. 26). San Miguel examines *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* together with Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild* through the prism of posthumanism and biopower, combining Foucault's theory of power with an analysis of corporeality in corporate and technocultural contexts. The author argues that the central issue in both narratives is "the identification of biopower with the traumatic appropriation of the human body and the articulation of posthuman forms of resistance to it" (San Miguel, 2018, p. 27). Sulway refers to the biography of James Tiptree Jr., focusing on the author's decision to write under a male pseudonym and thereby create a new identity for herself. As Sulway argues, Tiptree "was not merely a nom de plume" but rather "a fully realised identity – Alice's alter ego, or 'Other I'"

(Sulway, 2018, p. 1). Furthermore, contemporary critics increasingly draw on archival approaches and documentary materials to examine Tiptree's work through the prism of the author's personal history. In this regard, cultural and archival studies, such as Fellman (2018), demonstrate how the correspondence between Tiptree and other women writers reveals complex and non-linear exchanges of feminist ideas within science fiction communities, thus highlighting the collaborative and dialogic dimensions of feminist thought in the genre. It is also worth noting Julie Phillips' biographical work *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* (2006), which became an important foundation for subsequent scholarship, as it combines literary analysis with biographical reconstruction, shedding light on the gendered and social dimensions of the author's work. Phillips pays particular attention to the creation of James Tiptree Jr. as more than a mere pseudonym, presenting it as a carefully constructed male authorial identity. As she memorably writes, “In 1970, a man who does not exist sits down at a typewriter” (Phillips, 2006, p. 2), underscoring the performative and self-fashioning aspects of Sheldon's authorship. Contemporary scholarship continues to expand the concepts of performativity and posthumanism, as these theoretical paradigms offer critical frameworks for analysing identity, embodiment, and subjectivity under conditions of rapid technological transformation and global crises. The concept of performativity, in particular, has shifted scholarly attention towards the ways in which social roles, gender identities, and even narrative structures are produced through repeated acts and discursive practices rather than understood as stable or essential entities[1].

In terms of psychology, posthumanism provides a reshaping of the notion of the “self” as an integrated centre of experience. In cultural studies, posthumanist approaches examine ethical questions and modes of interaction among humans, other forms of life, and technological systems. In *What Is Posthumanism?* Cary Wolfe suggests a radical reconsideration of humanism, whereby the concept of “the human” loses its privileged position and becomes integrated within multiple networks of coexistence. As Wolfe argues, posthumanism entails “the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks” (Wolfe, 2010, p. 15). More generally, performativity, posthumanism, and gender studies collectively represent a multidimensional critical model that modifies the human subject. Along with corporeality, identity and social relations are conceptualised as unstable and dynamic constructs. In terms of literary studies, psychology, and cultural theory, these formulations open pathways to subjectivity understanding as an operation of constant becoming, interaction, and redefinition in a world where technologies, bodies, and cultures are inextricably tangled.

[1] Among contemporary scholars working within these paradigms are Neil Badmington, Sharon Stockton, Scott Bukatman, Iain Chambers, Pramod K. Nayar, Giulia Maria Chesi, Francesca Spiegel, among others. Significant contributions within Slavic scholarship have been made by N. Krynytska, A. Kutovyi, S. Sushko, and N. Liubarets.

A comprehensive interdisciplinary methodology that integrates several analytical approaches is used in this study. Gender studies examine the means by which gendered and bodily boundaries are constructed, their intersections, imbalances, and the subversion of traditional binary oppositions such as male/female and natural/artificial. Intersectional analysis identifies markers of social hierarchy. It includes race, class, and sexuality. It allows the representation of characters and narrative structures within complex science fiction contexts. Intertextual analysis explores how the text absorbs the canon of science fiction, feminist literature, and philosophical discourses on the body and technology. Intermedial analysis focuses on points between contrastive media forms within the literary work. It includes the integration of cinematic techniques, visual imagery, digital aesthetics, as well as elements of gameplay, virtual reality, and biotechnology as aesthetic and narrative devices. Such a varied strategy allows for a nuanced investigation concerned with the representations of corporeality, identity, and technologisation in science fiction. It is particularly important within posthumanist conceptual models.

The relevance of this study arises from the increasing involvement within the humanities in artificial intelligence, digital media, and algorithmic systems as causes driving the shift of corporeality, subjectivity, and identity in terms of rapid technological alteration and the increase of digital culture. Within this theoretical account, the role of science fiction is not only that of a site of artistic experimentation but also that of an active participant in intellectual debates concerning the limits of the human, the prospects for human transformation, and the cultural, ethical, and social implications of automation and the delegation of agency to technological systems.

Especially illustrative in this respect is James Tiptree Jr.'s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, which places issues of bodily manipulation, posthuman identity, and gender performativity at the centre of its narrative. Although the novella does not explicitly represent artificial intelligence in its contemporary technological form, it presents a decentred technological system that performs functions of regulation, optimisation, and behavioural governance, thereby anticipating the logic of modern AI systems. An investigation of this work allows identifying literary mechanisms for representing posthumanist ideas as well as tracing ideas about how the narrative becomes a place of conflict amid the natural and the artificial, the corporeal and the virtual, and the real and the constructed.

The aim of the research is to analyse artistic strategies for representing artificial intelligence as a discursive system, as well as related forms of performativity of gender, corporeality, and posthumanist models of subjectivity in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*. The research focuses on revealing how Tiptree's text conceptualises the transformation of the body and subject under the influence of technological and social practices of control.

The posthumanist idea of embodiment as loss of identity in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

James Tiptree Jr. (1915–1987), the pen name of Alice Sheldon, was an American fantasy and science fiction writer who played an important role in the evolution of these genres. Her work is eminent for its profound psychological analysis of fictional characters and its consideration of compound issues related to embodiment, gender, and technology. The adoption of a male pseudonym was a crucial act in her literary vocation. It served not only as a strategical measure to manoeuvre predominant stereotypes in terms of the role of women in science fiction but also as part of her personal attempt in fighting against social and cultural restrictions. Tiptree felt that her work might not be taken seriously if published under her real name. The fact is that women in the science fiction genre at that time were more often exceptions. Taking a pseudonym thus became a way for her to gain the chance to be heard in a world controlled by male voices.

Sarah Lefanu observes, the early reception of James Tiptree Jr.'s work was deeply shaped by assumptions about gender: "James Tiptree Jr published her first science fiction short story in 1968. For the next eight years her identity remained secret, while critics held forth about her masculine writing style, her feminine sensitivity to the portrayal of women and, in general, used Tiptree as a weapon, on one side or the other, in the debate that could be loosely called 'women and science fiction': can women write it, images of women in it, can men write about women in it, etc" (Lefanu, 1988, p. 105).

This act of self-identification plays an important function in the context of Tiptree's work, especially in her novels that investigate the change and fluidity of subjectivity, as well as problems concerned with traditional gender roles and identities. She skilfully problematises both male and female concepts of the body and sexuality, breaking the boundaries between genders and investigating the role of technology in these transformations. The selection of a pseudonym thus becomes a metaphor for her individual battle against gender stereotypes. It exemplifies the flexibility and mutability of identities, which represent one of the central themes of her oeuvre.

The Girl Who Was Plugged In (1973) by James Tiptree Jr. comes out as one of the literary texts that totally reshapes concepts of embodiment, subjectivity, and control at the background of a technological society. In terms of genre, it is a science-fiction novella that is a mix social critique with technological speculation. Philadelphia Burke is at the centre of the plot. This is a young, seventeen-year-old girl whose physical condition and unique appearance make her socially "unwelcome". Her embodiment is at first characterised through categories of marginalisation and exclusion. The young girl's physical "deviation" relegates her to a position of social invisibility, excluding her from culturally prescribed ideals of beauty and social acceptability.

Inside a society where physical beauty has the role of a currency of success, P. Burke is eliminated from collective identity. Her body not only fails to meet the accepted norms but is refused to be visible. Furthermore, prior to her changes, P. Burke is entirely delineated through reductive structures such as "woman-body", "woman-as-disgust", "a horrible creature", "a project", and "a stump in a

waldo body" or even "She's the ugly of the world. A tall monument to pituitary dystrophy" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 45).

This physical deviation exemplifies the posthumanist notion of corporeality as a contingent category, shaped by social norms and technological potentials rather than by any "natural givenness". In this context, the text comes across to Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist frame, which conceptualises the body as a site of current dialogue between power, technology, and subjectivity, "propose to reinscribe posthuman bodies into radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 102). In the case of P. Burke, the boundaries of bodily experience begin to collapse when she is offered the Delphi Project, a technologically created body that she will control remotely.

The process of P. Burke's transformation into a Delphi avatar is described in detail as an act of total technological reconstruction. Her own body remains hidden, connected through implants and neural connectors to a new physical "carrier" that functions in the real world as an independent personality. The description of the newborn Delphi emphasises her artificial perfection: "Eighty-nine pounds of tender girl flesh and blood with a few metallic components, stepping out into the sunlight to be taken to her new life" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 55). So, Delphi does not appear as an embodiment of natural corporeality; her being is totally dependent on technology and corporate control.

This collapse of distinctions between body and machine corresponds to the posthumanist model of subjectivity described by N. Katherine Hayles (1999) in *How We Became Posthuman*. Within the posthuman assumption, information comes to predominate over material embodiment, and the organic body becomes only one of many achievable "interfaces" through which subjectivity may be instantiated. As Hayles argues, "The posthuman appears when computation rather than possessive individualism is taken as the ground of being, a move that allows the posthuman to be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines" (Hayles, 1999, p. 34).

Throughout the novella, the corporation's control over Delphi's body is always accented. She is created for the intent of product content (as direct advertising is prohibited by law), and every motion, emotion, and behavioural act is meticulously regulated by outer instructions. Delphi is not only an autonomous being but as well an absolutely orchestrated structure of a corporate strategy whose aim is to secure consumers' emotional conflict. Her body is changed into a carrier of meanings and desires made by an economic system where the influence of ideals of beauty and happiness becomes a primary instrument of control.

In this context, a central posthumanist question appears: is the existence of a subject achievable in a world where the embodiment progressively becomes an object of programming, medialisation, and economic usage? Philadelphia Burke step by step loses not only control over her body but as well over her own personal identity. This process of estrangement is farther marked from Delphi's side, as she begins to display signs of independent being even after she has been "fragmented"

from P. Burke: “Most of her sleepy-time Delphi’s just a gently ticking lush little vegetable waiting for P. Burke to get back on the controls. But now and again Delphi all by herself smiles a bit or stirs in her 'sleep'. Once she breathed a sound: 'Yes.'” (Tiptree, 1973, pp. 60-61). This moment raises an even deeper question: can a bodily shell created to serve external interests retain traces of subjectivity or acquire it independently of the initial program? Delphi as a character turns out to be more complex than just a puppet – her body begins to demonstrate rudimentary manifestations of life, while P. Burke no longer feels alive: “She's [Delphi] child-solemn, a beautiful baby to whom something so wonderful has happened you can feel the tingles. She doesn't smile, she... brims. That brimming joy is all that shows of P. Burke, the forgotten hulk in the sauna next door. But P. Burke doesn't know she's alive – it's Delphi who lives, every warm inch of her” (Tiptree, 1973, p. 51). This comes across with current anxieties encompassing “living” media images, algorithmic bodies, artificial intelligence, and automated systems, as they show unpredictable forms of behaviour. The condition is particularly outstanding in the context of contemporary culture. Here idealised bodily images that are carefully constructed, processed, and endlessly reproduced, have become essential to mass communication.

In the digital era, bodies depicted in media (on Instagram, in advertising, and in video content) are often the product of multi-layered industry processes involving filters, photo-editing software, algorithmic enhancements, and strategic staging. Such “ideal bodies” are part of objects of desire and consumption. They reproduce and magnify standards of beauty, youth, and success. Similar to Delphi in the novella, modern media images make an illusion of naturalness and authenticity, while their manufacture is underpinned by compound systems of cultural programming and economic interest. Bodies thus become “brand carriers,” where individuation is decreased to surface markers aligned with the needs of consumer society. Accordingly, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* appears not only as an apocalyptic text envisioning a posthumanist future but as well as a strikingly applicable comment on modern culture’s fixation on idealised bodies and the commercialisation of corporeality.

Artificial intelligence as a decentralised model of power in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

Even if James Tiptree Jr.’s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* was written long before the issue of contemporary forms of artificial intelligence, the novella demonstrates an exemplary of technological control that in many contents expect the logic implicit algorithmic and AI-driven systems. What is at interest here is not a self-directed machine intelligence in the “traditional” science-fiction awareness, but a sort of a decentred, nonpersonal infrastructure that modulates bodies, behaviours, and desires through media, corporate mechanisms, and technological code of behaviour. Such an instrumentation runs according to rules now ordinarily associated with AI. It includes the automation of decision-making,

the optimisation of efficiency, and the reduction of the subject to a set of controllable parameters.

In this meaning, AI in Tiptree's novella does not seem as a character but as the constructive logic of the existence itself, deciding the conditions of action and being accessible to the characters. The corporate system that regulates Delphi's body and image roles in a manner correspondent to algorithmic platforms. It has the ability to collect data, analyse audience responses, adjust behavioural scripts, and to continuously self-optimise. The human factor does not vanish totally within this system; nevertheless, it loses its position as an autonomous agent and alternatively becomes an interface between corporeal and technological materiality.

A shaping characteristic of this system is the lack of a localised centre. Choices are not made by a single individual but are spread among engineers, managers, media experts, and other agents. This decentralisation responds to modern scholarly depictions of AI as a gathering of algorithms, institutional practices, and technical infrastructures that function without an incorporate subject of will. As a consequence, power becomes unseeable and control normalised.

Inside this system, Philadelphia Burke's body is a part as a managed asset subject to continuous standardisation: "Delphi's 'name' appears as a tiny analysable nonredundancy in the flux, and she'd be very proud if she knew about it. It would strike P. Burke as magic; P. Burke never even understood robot-cars. But Delphi is in no sense a robot. Call her a waldo if you must. The fact is she's just a girl, a real-live girl with her brain in an unusual place. A simple real-time on-line system with plenty of bit-rate – even as you and you" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 55). Her physical characteristics, facial expressions, gestures, voice, and even emotional reactions are regulated according to audience expectations and commercial gain:

> It's out into the world for Delphi now, and at this point the up-channels get used. On the administrative side account schedules are opened, subprojects activated. On the technical side the reserved bandwidth is cleared. (That carrier field, remember?) A new name is waiting for Delphi, a name she'll never hear. It's a long string of binaries which have been quietly cycling in a GTX tank ever since a certain Beautiful Person didn't wake up (Tiptree, 1973, p. 54).

Here, excessively, we remark a logic of content improvement, in which human corporeality is decreased to a set of shifting that can be focused to accomplish maximum efficiency. From this position, AI does not replace the human; sooner, it intercommunicates with the conditions of human being by determining which forms of embodiment are hold standard, desirable, or profitable.

Evenly important is the function of media as the environment where this algorithmic logic becomes perceptible. In the novella, the media space's role is a feedback system. It means that the consumer reactions directly influence the

consequent “calibration” of Delphi’s body and appearance. This makes a closed loop in which feeling does not emerge spontaneously but is manufactured through visual standardisation and affective programming. That is, the foundation of systems able to recognise, interpret, and respond to human feelings in order to modify more “natural” and responsive human–computer interaction, in which the computer becomes “emotionally literate”: “And they’ve all got something else to think about now, because the cold-fire dress sells half a million copies, and not only in Texas. The GTX computers already know it. When they correlate a minor demand for macaws in Alaska the problem comes to human attention: Delphi is something special” (Tiptree, 1973, p. 61). The quote is a vivid example of posthumanist concerns: the blurring of boundaries between human agency and technological mediation, where identity, emotion, and social influence are co-constructed by human and machine. Delphi is a symbol of how emotional labour and human interaction can be outsourced to technological systems, highlighting ethical questions about control, autonomy, and embodiment in a mediated world.

A central aspect of this system is that it does not necessitate empathy or ethical principles. It operates according to a to the logic of ratio and conformity with limited parameters, which correspond to the Foucauldian understanding of biopolitical power. In the posthumanist conception, AI in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* undermines the idea of a united subject. The protagonist’s awareness is divided between the body-as-carrier and the body-as-image, between consciousness and media content. This operation responds to the posthumanist critique in which the human subject is revealed not as an autonomous entity, but as a node within a network of technological, economic, and affective processes.

From this view, AI in the novella executes not only a dominant but as well an ontological function, transforming the real mode of existence of the subject. Identity is not established through internal contemplation but through external algorithms that ascertain what the body should be, how it should behave, and how it should relate to this world. Hence, one can speak of a transition from a humanist model of subjectivity to a posthumanist one, in which the human being emerges as the product of continuous interaction with techno-systems. Hayles states that becoming posthuman means much more than having prosthetic devices grafted onto one's body. It entails envisioning humans as information-processing systems with fundamental similarities to other intelligent machines. As she observes, “in the posthuman view, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (Hayles, 1999, p. 3).

Finally, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* shows a critical modality of a technological future in which AI does not look as a sinister self-directed antagonist but rather as an average, almost unseeable system that step by step displaces human fear. Despite the predominance of critical narratives emphasising technological control over the body and consciousness, the novella does not portray AI as an exclusively destructive or repressive force. On the contrary, Tiptree’s text foregrounds the ambivalent potential of technology, which both

enables and constrains while holding out the promise of transcending bodily, social, and gender boundaries. It is precisely this duality that allows the novella to be interpreted not only as a dystopian critique but also as an exploratory inquiry into alternative forms of subjectivity within a technocratic world. Most notably, the constructive potential of AI in the text manifests itself in the prospect of exceeding biological determinism. The system created by the GTX corporation adapts Philadelphia Burke to exist beyond the limits of her own body, which had been marginalised and excluded within the social sphere. This view comes across with posthumanist notions, especially the ideas that "technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Haraway, 2016, p. 67).

Importantly, the optimistic potential of AI in the text is presented as contingent rather than inherent or morally neutral, dependent upon the moral, social, and economic structures that shape technological practice. In this context, James Tiptree Jr. neither advances a naïve techno-utopian vision nor reduces the future to a wholly dystopian scenario. Instead, the narrative situates technological possibilities within complex frameworks of power, affect, and social mediation, emphasising that the benefits or risks of AI are inseparable from the human and institutional contexts in which it operates.

In Tiptree's novella, technology creates a space in which the subject can participate in society beyond the constraints of gender, appearance, and normative corporeal conformity. Furthermore, AI demonstrates its potential to mitigate embodied vulnerability: technological systems equilibrate physical limitations, modify forms of remote presence, and enable participation in social and cultural life without direct bodily engagement. By doing so, the novella anticipates contemporary debates surrounding assistive technologies, neural interfaces, and AI-driven systems, which are increasingly conceptualised as tools for inclusion and empowerment. At the same time, Tiptree's work underscores that such technological interventions are not neutral; their ethical, social, and economic conditions critically shape their outcomes, illustrating the dual potential of AI to both empower and constrain human subjectivity.

The performativity of gender and corporeality in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

In the novella *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, gendered embodiment is demonstrated as a deeply performative phenomenon. There the female body is not a natural given but is created in agreement with social anticipations of beauty, youth, submissiveness, and commercial appeal. Delphi, technologically engineered, embodies an idealised form of femininity. Her body is not only "admirable to the eye" but also a direct source of consumer attraction, functioning as a commodified instrument within the narrative's technocultural economy. Tiptree systematically emphasises this contrast through brief descriptive passages and by juxtaposing Delphi's body with that of P. Burke. Delphi's lucent, socially

validated, and admired form is set against P. Burke's marginalised and humiliated existence, particularly regarding sexual and corporeal experiences:

> Look. P. Burke is about as far as you can get from the concept girl. She's a female, yes – but for her, sex is a four-letter word spelled P-A-I-N. She isn't quite a virgin. You don't want the details; she'd been about twelve and the freak lovers were bombed blind. When they came down, they threw her out with a small hole in her anatomy and a mortal one elsewhere. She dragged off to buy her first and last shot, and she can still hear the clerk's incredulous guffaws (Tiptree, 1973, p. 56).

While this comparison underscores the social and technological construction of Delphi's desirability, her manufactured relationship with the Infanta of the ancient Spanish dynasty remains emotionally unfulfilling and socially unsustainable, exposing the limitations of technologically engineered perfection in the realm of intimacy (Tiptree, 1973, p. 58).

Thus, Delphi exists as a performance of idealised femininity – a figure who continuously reproduces and reinforces social scripts of attractiveness, accessibility, and sophistication. However, the key point is that this body is not an authentic manifestation of personality. According to Judith Butler's concept, gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time (Butler, 1990, p. 22). This is literally presented in the novella: P. Burke controls Delphi distantly, playing the "role" of feminine beauty through the avatar body. Her personal body remains invisible and hidden, closed within a special capsule and her own consciousness.

This double performativity becomes peculiarly acute in her relation with Paul Isham. Paul falls in love with Delphi, with her role of the "ideal girl" without suspecting that another individual, another being, lies behind this body. To him, Delphi is the personification of a fantasy, a construction of his own idea of femininity. Observing these actions, P. Burke experiences a deep split between herself and her avatar. Her corporeal invisibility becomes a root of pain:

> That it's really P. Burke five thousand miles away who loves Paul. P. Burke the monster down in a dungeon smelling of electrode paste. A caricature of a woman burning, melting, obsessed with true love. Trying over twenty-double-thousand miles of hard vacuum to reach her beloved through girl-flesh numbed by an invisible film. Feeling his arms around the body he thinks is hers, fighting through shadows to give herself to him. Trying to taste and smell him through beautiful dead nostrils, to love him back with a body that goes dead in the heart of the fire" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 67).

P. Burke gets sorely aware that Paul's love is oriented not towards her, but towards the precisely created shell, telling the tragedy built-in in performative embodiment. While the performance of a gendered role may be socially successful and culturally legible, it simultaneously entails the erasure of the authentic "self."

Finally, Paul begins to suspect that a secret lies behind Delphi's being. Misinterpreting the condition, he anticipates that Delphi is an average girl who has fallen victim to technological "captivity." In a time of crucial action, he storms

the laboratory where the real operator P. Burke is situated. What he observes shocks him. Before him is not the attractive, flawless Delphi, but the weak, distorted body of a woman attached to multiple machines. Incapable to accept this reality, Paul, in desperation and rage, rakes the wires linking P. Burke to her avatar, effectively killing her. While Delphi remains biologically alive, she loses connection with her primary operator and, as an object absent of agency, falls under the power of another individual. In this act, the novella reaches its tragic apex. The embodied reality, debased and discarded, is decisively erased in favour of the artificial image preserved within an exploitative system.

Hence, the relation among Delphi, Paul, and P. Burke demonstrates how social scripts of gendered performativity changes individual corporeality and identity. Paul's love is oriented to the body and its public performance, not at P. Burke's interior subjectivity, which remains on the far side of the visible and reachable. In this struggle, corporeality becomes simultaneously a medium of intimacy and a source of radical estrangement. Through with this narrative arc, Tiptree shows that in a world where the body is an artificial, performative construct, genuine subjectivity is necessarily muted and omitted. The novella's key tragedy is the invisibleness of the true "self" behind the façade of an idealised shell that appears as one of its most dramatic posthumanist and feminist statements.

The intersectional aspect in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

The character of Philadelphia Burke in the novella *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* embodies not only gender, but as well class and bodily marginalisation. It opens up space for intersectional analysis. From the first pages of the text, P. Burke appears as the bearer of an "unacceptable" body that makes it impossible for her to be included in the dominant social order. Her description is filled with brutal details: "The adoration's fading from her face. That's good, because now you can see she's the ugly of the world. A tall monument to pituitary dystrophy. No surgeon would touch her. When she smiles, her jaw-it's half purple-almost bites her left eye out. She's also quite young, but who could care?" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 45). Nevertheless, the marginalisation of P. Burke is not constricted to corporeality. Her marginal position is rooted in her place within a subordinated social stratum. She possesses neither wealth, opportunity, nor reputable origins. She belongs to the "invisible," living in a social and economic space where her existence holds little value to the corporate world – unless it can be exploited instrumentally. This position allows P. Burke to be analysed through an intersectional lens, which investigates the occurrence of multiple systems of oppression (gender, class, race, disability) and more.

P. Burke's corporeal "inadequacy" becomes not only an origin of her social invisibility but as well the condition for her "reprogramming." The corporate projection that produces Delphi is founded on the technological reconstruction of corporeality. However, this reconstruction is not intended to emancipation or the restoration of dignity. On the reverse, P. Burke's body is changed into a resource

for corporate control. She becomes just a plug, an electrical conduit through which life is transmitted to the perfect body. Technological involvement renders her a "device" for marketing and consumer influence, telling the class dimension of use: those disadvantaged of social power and aesthetic legitimacy are used as "technical operators" to serve economic interests.

It is worthy noting that even after the conception of the "perfect" Delphi avatar, P. Burke herself remains unseeable, both corporeally and socially. Her real body is invisible, her voice suppressed, her desires rendered empty. This revolutionary form of rejection reflects a broader dynamic of oppression in societies where marginalised subjects are deprived not only of political voice but also of bodily presence in the public sphere.

Therefore, the figure of P. Burke in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* exemplifies the compound interplay of gendered, classed, and corporeal marginalisation. The "lack" becomes the ground for transformation and control, while technological "restoration" does not free the subject but rather increases her exploitation within the mechanisms of corporate capitalism. Tiptree's novella offers an intense intersectional assessment of social structures that govern access to corporeality, subjectivity, and the right to visibility.

Intertextual and intermedial strategies in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

James Tiptree Jr.'s novella *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* actively uses intertextual and intermedial schemes in order to construct a posthumanist world where the body, identity, and communicative capacities are mediated through media structures, popular culture, and commercial technologies.

One of the key characteristics of the text is the embedding of the narrative within the logic of mass culture. The corporation uses Delphi's body as a living media platform for product promotion, given that straight advertising is legally forbidden. In this manner, commercial content occurs indirectly. It means through the creation of an aura of desirability around Delphi and the production of a cultural cult surrounding her persona "But here come the tests of Delphi's button-nose twinkling in the torrent of news and entertainment. And she's noticed. The feedback shows a flock of viewers turning up the amps when this country baby gets tangled in her new colloidal body-jewels. She registers at a couple of major scenes, too, and when the Infante gives her a sun car, little Delphi trying out sun cars is a tiger" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 58). Delphi transforms in a performance of a media persona. Her life is orchestrated as an endless reality show. Pop-cultural codes – clothing, behaviour, and overall image – merge with the commercial deployment of desire. This mirrors contemporary trends, in which idealised media images of actors, models, and influencers function as primary channels for conveying both goods and ideologies. The media-saturated world depicted in the novella totalises every aspect of Delphi's existence: each of her gestures is retransmitted as a cultural sign for the user, embedding the individual within a system of continuous emotional and economic conflict.

On the intertextual level, the novella arouses the classical Pygmalion myth. This is the story of an artist who creates the perfect woman and falls in love with her. Likewise, the GTX corporation "animates" Delphi. Thus, society falls in love with the created, lifeless body. Nevertheless, Tiptree radically reconfigures this motif. In her adaptation, the "female" body is not an act of the artist's fictive love but the product of corporate exercise and the manipulation of desire. This break between the original myth and its modern technological adaptation marks how deep-seated cultural narratives are under the logic of capital and technological control.

The Girl Who Was Plugged In also contains a direct intertextual reference to William Hudson's *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (1904). Hudson's novel centres on an idyllic, almost fairy-tale relationship between the protagonist and Rima, a woman who embodies the natural world. Living in the jungle, Rima is portrayed as innocent, silent, and almost otherworldly – a pure being existing beyond the confines of civilisation. Although the protagonist initially seeks to understand and protect her, he ultimately fails to accept her difference, which leads to her death.

In Tiptree's novella, this reference performs several critical functions. Initially, it stipulates an ironic contrast between the natural and the artificial. In *Green Mansions*, Rima's body and nature are "real," organic, uninfluenced by technology, whereas Delphi's body is the embodiment of artificial beauty, made according to technological and marketing models. This creates a deeply ironic effect. Readers familiar with Green Mansions may expect to encounter a figure embodying innocence and authenticity; however, Tiptree offers only a technologically produced semblance of such qualities. Moreover, whereas Hudson romanticises the "pure" woman as an object of male desire, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* deconstructs this idealised image by exposing its technological and commercial foundations. Paul falls in love with Delphi precisely such as an idealised figure, unaware that behind her there is no "natural" being upon which the romantic hero projects his expectations. Here, Tiptree reveals the mechanisms of patriarchal desire, which in the twentieth century is burning no longer by nature but by technology. Thirdly, the intertextual mention serves as a prefiguration of tragedy. The mention of *Green Mansions* shapes a tragic trajectory, as Rima dies as the man cannot understand her otherness, and likewise, P. Burke dies as Paul cannot take over her real corporeality behind the technological image.

Intermedial focalisation in the novella simulates the visual and auditory effects of media products. The narrator directly addresses the reader, positioning them as a witness or participant in the story, which creates an immersive experience. This strategy actively engages the reader in the consumption of media images. By repeatedly breaking the "fourth wall," the narrator emphasises that the audience is not merely a passive observer but an active part of the cultural machinery that produces, perpetuates, and amplifies systems of control. Notably, the narrator addresses the reader as a zombie: "Listen, zombie. Believe me. What I could tell you-you with your silly hands leaking sweat on your growth-stocks

portfolio (...) Believe it, zombie. When I say growth, I mean growth. Capital appreciation. You can stop sweating. There's a great future there" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 44, 79). This engagement of the reader works as an exposure. The text forces us to become aware of our own participation in processes of consumption and the normalisation of bodily ideals. In this respect, Tiptree manages to combine literary form with a critical analysis of culture, where the line between contemplation and participation becomes extremely thin. In *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, intertextuality, intermediality, and the reader's implicit participation are inseparable from the novella's posthumanist project: Tiptree shows how, in a world shaped by technology and body capital, narratives, social histories, and even readers themselves become embedded within global networks of power and desire.

Conclusion

James Tiptree's novella *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* emerges as a literary text that addresses questions of artificial intelligence, anticipating its modern manifestations. In the narrative, AI does not come out as an autonomous technical agent but as a decentralised algorithmic system incorporated into media and social compositions that regulate corporeality, behaviour, and desire. This opinion extends the conceptualisation of AI representation in science fiction, while avoiding a subtractive picture of technology wholly as an exploitive tool. The analysis shows that technological mediation opens prospects for transgressing bodily and social extents, allowing temporary departures from biological determinism. Tiptree consistently models a posthuman subjectivity that emerges at the ideas of technology, gender performativity, and social power mechanisms. Through the characters of P. Burke and Delphi, the novella radically challenges classical notions of a unified "self," autonomous body, and authentic identity, telling how corporeality becomes a production of programming and consumption.

The use of an intersectional model illuminates the complexness of multilayered marginalisation, which in the text reveals the meeting of bodily "imperfection", class-based exclusion, and gendered objectification. Tiptree demonstrates how social hierarchies grounded in ideals of physical perfection, beauty, and privileged social status not only generate inequality but also technologically entrench it within emerging posthuman regimes of control.

The Girl Who Was Plugged In evaluates many of the critical issues that dominate contemporary humanistic discussions. It is about the instability of identity, the blurring of boundaries between the organic and the artificial, and the moral problems connected with controlling corporeality amid the evolution of biotechnologies and digital systems. The novella raises urgent questions about the future of subjectivity in a world where bodies are created and managed according to economic, social, and cultural scenarios, and where the human becomes an entire component of technological networks.

Hence, Tiptree's work not only shows the transition to a subjectivity but as well precisely articulates its internal opposition, ambivalences, and risks. The

assemblage of performative and gendered perspectives allows *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* to be considered as a paradigmatic literary model thus becoming a relevant resource for understanding AI in cultural and humanistic contexts.

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