

**UDC 791.4 + 004.9**

DOI: 10.30628/1994-9529-2024-20.3-57-126

EDN: FNYKKV

Received 14.02.2024, revised 29.09.2024, accepted 27.09.2024

**OLEG N. GUROV**

MGIMO University,

76, prospekt Vernadskogo,

Moscow 119454, Russia

**ResearcherID: AAS-9705-2021**

**ORCID: 0000-0002-8425-1338**

**e-mail: gurov@duck.com**

*For citation*

Gurov, O.N. (2024). Evolution or Degradation? Philosophical Underpinnings for Exploring the Future of Humanity in David Cronenberg's Crimes of the Future. *Nauka Televideniya—The Art and Science of Television*, 20 (3), 57–126. <https://doi.org/10.30628/1994-9529-2024-20.3-57-126>, <https://elibrary.ru/FNYKKV>

# Evolution or Degradation? Philosophical Underpinnings for Exploring the Future of Humanity in David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future*\*

**Abstract.** The paper presents an analysis of David Cronenberg's 2022 film *Crimes of the Future*, dedicated to the transformation of human nature amidst technological progress. Drawing inspiration from leading contemporary thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, and Timothy Morton, the research extends to Cronenberg's other films to provide a deeper comprehension of his creative vision. Central to the discussion are the humanitarian issues posed by these movies, namely the metamorphosis of human corporeality, the blurring boundaries between the natural and artificial, and the ethical dilemmas arising from biotechnological interventions in human physiology. The key themes in *Crimes of the Future* are contextualized within modern frameworks of dark ecology and posthumanism and interpreted through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's *body without organs*, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and Foucault's biopolitics.

*Crimes of the Future* offers a multifaceted reflection on humanity's future amidst *profound* transformations of both physiology and environment. Through an in-depth analysis of the film and Cronenberg's oeuvre at large, new topics emerge for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of philosophy, bioethics, sociology, and psychology, exploring how human nature and identity evolve in an era of dynamic technological advancement.

**Keywords:** dystopian fiction, bioethics, body horror, David Cronenberg, cultural crisis, mass culture, human nature, posthumanism, corporeality, technological progress, human enhancement, philosophy of technics, ethical and moral complexity, ethical dilemmas of the future

---

\* I would like to express my gratitude to the Editorial Board of *The Art and Science of Television* journal and its reviewers for their valuable recommendations during the preparation of this publication.

## INTRODUCTION

In an era of accelerating technological evolution, philosophy, art, and mass culture become key tools for conceptualizing the interaction between technology and society, exploring the ethical dilemmas arising from it, and envisioning possible images of the future (Gurov, 2022, p. 33). Cinema, being both an art through which we explore human experience in different dimensions, a means of mass communication, and a large-scale industry, is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It provides valuable material for the comprehension of being, self-discovery and interpreting the world around us. Each filmmaker develops their craft in a unique way, motivated by their own artistic vision and objectives. Therefore, we highlight Cronenberg as a distinctive filmmaker who often takes on the role of a researcher.

This analysis primarily focuses on *Crimes of the Future* (hereafter referred to as *Crimes*), a multifaceted film that offers a unique and complex perspective on its subject matter. The film's artistic excellence and provocative nature challenge viewers to contemplate existential questions, modern societal issues, and humanity's near future in the context of rapid technological advancement. *Crimes* is Cronenberg's latest movie to date, which he has been developing for almost a decade. The main characters of the movie are Saul Tenser and Caprice, a creative tandem pushing the boundaries of art beyond its contemporary understanding. The film depicts a future in which human bodies produce new, incomprehensible internal organs. Since such evolution occurs in real time in an accelerated mode, comprehension does not keep up with what is happening. In the first part of the movie, Saul witnesses the birth of a new organ in himself, which he calls "the new brain," while his partner studies its possible functions using invasive techniques. In her experiments, Caprice performs public amputations of the neoplasms, presenting to the audience both the surgical processes and the internal organs themselves as works of art (Campillos Morón, 2024, pp. 21–23).

Cronenberg's work aligns with and delves into several contemporary philosophical ideas. Many of his films, including *Crimes*, can be interpreted in the context of posthumanistic, biopolitical, and dark ecology ideas. In his exploration of human corporeal transformation, Cronenberg also touches upon themes consonant with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *body without organs* (*BwO*), Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and Foucault's biopolitical theories (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 1999; Foucault, 1996).

Environmental themes in Cronenberg's oeuvre align with Morton's ideas, while his reimagining of human nature reflects Haraway's posthumanist philosophy (Morton, 2019; Haraway, 2017). Cronenberg does not simply create and manage fantastical worlds, but also seeks to conceptualize in this way contemporary

issues surrounding the interaction between humans, technology, and the environment.

The movie is devoted to change in its broadest sense, typical for the modern era. These alterations affect many facets of social life. In *Crimes*, to the greatest extent they concern creativity and the very definition of art during times of turbulence, when crisis (here we understand crisis as a change, without evaluating it in a positive or negative way) influences the way meanings and interpretations of various phenomena transform. New opportunities emerge for human experience, creative reflection, and self-expression. In this process, not only does the role of art as a creative activity alter, but the very nature of creativity itself is transformed.

Let us focus on revealing how Cronenberg views such changes (driven largely, as shown in the film, by technogenic factors) in light of their impact on individuals, culture, and society—one of the central topics for the filmmaker. In *Crimes*, he continues or even summarizes his exploration through the metaphor of “crimes” committed against our future.

Cronenberg explores boundaries throughout his career, approaching them from various angles. He confronts corporeality, technology, sexuality, anthropocentrism, self, and others, employing unconventional dramaturgy and cinematic techniques (Harman, 2015). In *Crimes*, the director pictures a peculiar and contradictory world in which advanced technology is juxtaposed with mundane existence. It seems that already in the very first frames, Cronenberg declares that the achievements of technological progress are not identical with and do not determine the improvement of social life and human existence. Rather, he shows that the uncontrollably expanding technosphere can give rise to erratic forces that could have a devastating impact on both our physical existence and what is quintessentially human—that is, biological, psychological and social aspects, traditionally considered characteristic of human nature. Noteworthy, the film emphasizes ethical issues related to altering human body with technological tools for aesthetic and artistic purposes.

A triangle of major themes can be identified in the plot: technology, corporeality, and future scenarios. The film highlights the profound impact of the changing comprehension and perception of human body, its functions and capabilities on artistic practices, cultural norms and, more broadly, on the very understanding of human nature and identity. The **hypothesis** of the article is that in *Crimes*, Cronenberg posits radical corporeal transformations as a major and inevitable consequence of technological progress and environmental crisis. The **aim** is to identify how this film depicts the impact of technology on human corporeality, as well as how the trajectory of human and social development is defined in the context of radical biotechnological and ecological shifts.

### **Objectives:**

1. To identify the film's main ideas and images related to corporeality, technological progress, and ecology.
2. To analyze the problematics concerning the transformation of human corporeality under the influence of technology.
3. To investigate the ethical problems, reflected in the movie, caused by the transformation of corporeality, and the possible shift of the boundaries of "human."
4. To clarify the ecological aspect in Cronenberg's image of the future based on how the environment is shown in *Crimes of the Future* and how the characters interact with it.
5. To problematize the use of the ecological motif to reflect on larger socio-philosophical ideas.

**Methodologically**, the research applies an interdisciplinary approach, including methods of philosophical and cultural analysis of cinematic work, in particular, narrative analysis and semiotic analysis of visual images. **The theoretical basis of the study** is formed by concepts related to the philosophy of technology, bioethics, environmental philosophy, and the theory of posthumanism.

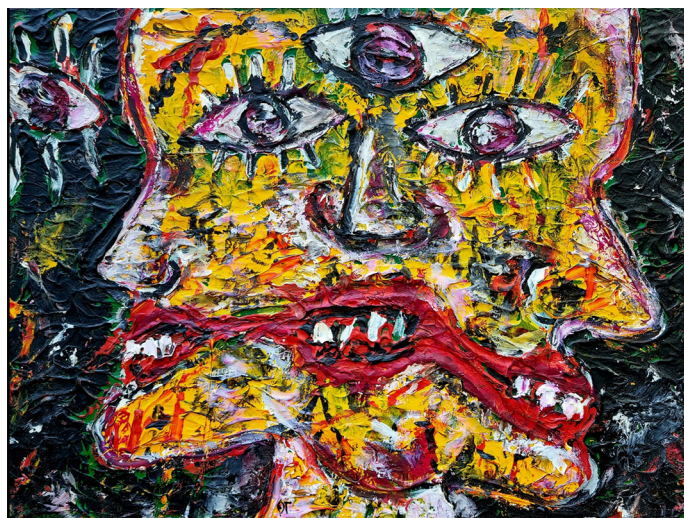
**The theoretical value** of the paper lies in the fact that it formulates a new concept of *plastic corporeality* related to the posthumanist discourse. This concept allows us to take a new look at the interaction between human, technology, and the environment, as it offers an integrative optic for studying the future of human nature in the era of radical biotechnological transformations.

## **THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE HUMAN IN CRONENBERG'S FUTURISTIC WORLD**

*Crimes of the Future* is a thorough elaboration of a potential scenario of the future, in which the possibilities of human bodily transformation are realized and, at the same time, a certain evolution of consciousness takes place. The filmmaker, who has gained fame as one of the key representatives of body horror in cinematography, carries out a unique creative experiment, diving into the depths of consciousness of the future humans (and perhaps even of the present). Cronenberg scrupulously explores the problems of human corporeality and sexuality, while revealing the fundamental contradictions between natural and cultural-anthropocentric perception of reality. The film's visuals paint a surreal

image of a world where the products of futuristic technologies are juxtaposed with images of degradation and destruction of the familiar structures of everyday life. This vivid contrast between advanced technology and mundane decay becomes the central visual leitmotif of the film, providing the audience with material for reflection on the relationship between the real and the virtual, the “carbon” and the digital (Hayles, 2013).

For modern people, the perception of the world around is largely mediated by visual images. There has been a significant shift from verbal to visual forms of representation, leading to the destabilization of the familiar structures of everyday life. In his film, however, Cronenberg takes a decisive step towards the development of another trend, focusing precisely on the corporeal aspect of human existence as the main one (Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 193–195). One of the key plot elements in the film is a fundamental change within human evolution: most people lose the ability to experience physical pain, retaining this “function” exclusively during sleep (Gurov, 2024, p. 31).



**Fig. 1.** Oleg Gurov. (2024). *Pain*. From *Screaming Flesh* series, No. 1. [Canvas, acrylic, painting]. 40×60 cm<sup>1</sup>

In this case, freedom from pain can hardly be perceived as a blessing, but rather as a metaphor for the person’s alienation from the basic categories of social life in a technologically mediated society. Consequently, traditional sensory

<sup>1</sup> See the image source: author’s own picture.

experiences are replaced by new, often extreme methods of self-discovery and interaction with reality. So, in the film, the extinction of pain serves not as liberation from suffering, but as a stimulus to seek radical forms of experiencing corporeality, which carries numerous consequences for humanity, the most obvious being the blurring of boundaries of what is ethically acceptable (Leder, 2016, p. 447).

The advent of a new age opens up unprecedented opportunities for the exploration of human corporeality. In the world of the film, individuals are given the opportunity to radically modify their physical bodies, exploring their potential and limits of endurance. In the process and as a result, the boundaries of human body and its functions are redefined. In this new frame of reference, some avant-garde representatives of the arts community transform their bodies, turning them into living works of art. For instance, as the story unfolds, artists give the public the opportunity to observe endogenous surgical manipulations, which becomes a new form of performative art. The film showcases the expansion of the boundaries of artistic self-expression and rethinking of the very concept of aesthetic perception in the context of radical bodily metamorphosis (Groys, 2003, p. 185).

This trend echoes the existing practices of body art within the framework of radical performance art, which challenges traditional notions of the possibilities of human body. As an example, one can cite the experience of the French artist ORLAN, who over the course of several years has gone through about a dozen plastic surgeries to “capture” masterpieces of world art. In particular, she had her forehead reshaped to resemble Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, her chin to resemble the chin of Botticelli’s Venus, and so on, in order to recreate herself or, in other words, to create herself anew in this way (Jeffries, 2009).

There are many such examples to be found nowadays, and Cronenberg’s focus is on the artistic bohemians who become the catalysts of events in the futuristic reality he has created. However, these artists find themselves paradoxically alienated from their own corporeality. Their alienation occurs not in virtual space or in a metaverse, like in *Ready Player One* (2018), but on a purely physiological level (Savchenko & Segal, 2022, pp. 3–4). Caprice’s public amputation sessions of Saul’s newly formed organs evoke a wide range of emotional reactions in the audience, from shock to admiration.

Through this film, Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical philosophy, with its emphasis on responsibility to the Other, acquires a new, paradoxical tone (Levinas, 1998). In a world where bodies become objects of artistic experiments and public performances, where the boundaries between inner and outer are blurred, the question of the evolution of ethical responsibility arises (Savchuk, 2012, pp. 184–188). Levinas spoke of the *face of the Other* as the source of the ethical imperative, but

what happens when this face (and body) is constantly transforming? Cronenberg makes us think about new forms of ethics in a world where human corporeality becomes malleable and changeable.

Foucault's ideas of biopower and control are also developed in the film quite noticeably. The movie features a state structure, a new government agency that is responsible for registering new organs (Fig. 2). This can be seen as a direct manifestation of Foucault's concept of biopolitics (Foucault, 1996).



**Fig. 2. Still from *Crimes of the Future* [01:05:45]. (2022). Directed by David Cronenberg<sup>2</sup>**

However, Cronenberg goes even further, demonstrating how the power over the body is transferred from the state to the individual and, in particular, to the artist. In this way, new forms of resistance are born and new ethical dilemmas arise. Here, the filmmaker does not focus on specific crimes that may become a social norm in the long run, but rather on theoretical and perhaps abstract threats that are of concern in contemporary society (Gurov, 2024, p. 32). Such threats are related to the potential radical transformation of the human, resulting in the risk of losing fundamental aspects of human nature in both spiritual and physical dimensions. The element of horror in the film stems not from the fact of bodily mutation itself, but from anxiety regarding the possible loss of the very essence of human corporeality (Brito-Alvarado, 2024, p. 76).

At the core of the narration lies a clash of worldviews and ideologies, manifested through the characters' interactions. Through the behavior of the characters, anxious and disoriented, the film creates an atmosphere of complete uncertainty, which hides the deconstruction of not only the physical, but also the semantic foundations of existence.

<sup>2</sup> See the image source: [https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm_referrer=yandex.ru) (28.08.2024).



This uncertainty is not a postmodern crisis caused by excessive consumption and fluid lifestyles, but rather the next stage—literally a crisis of what it means to be “human.” Quotation marks are used here in order to refer to a critical rethinking of this concept in the context of technological and biological transformations, a process that problematizes traditional definitions of human essence (Mankovskaya, 2009). At the same time, these aspects are caused not so much by the accelerated metamorphosis of human bodies as by the realization and intensive reflection on the possibilities of modifying one’s body in accordance with aesthetic or other subjective criteria—that is, certain taboos are removed, and “it’s the end of the world as we know it,” as the famous R.E.M. song is titled.

The provocativeness of the plot and thematic content is enhanced by the film’s aesthetics, primarily due to the visual component. The compositional solutions and color palette evoke associations with Renaissance painting and iconography. Some images appeal to the Passion of Christ iconography, giving the aesthetics a sacred dimension (Fig. 3). These uncommon artistic techniques add depth to the work and stimulate reflection on the fact that everything is ambiguous, and even the most serious crimes, such as murder and betrayal, can act as a concomitant or consequence of an intense and painful search for possible transcendence.



**Fig. 3. Still from *Crimes of the Future* [01:41:06]. (2022). Directed by David Cronenberg<sup>3</sup>**

The film’s climax, ending in death, offers no clear-cut answer. Instead, it prompts further reflection on the possibility of transcending limitations that define intellectual and physical existence within current bodily forms (Gurov, 2024, p. 33). In this sense, *Crimes* can be seen as a visual exploration of the concept of eternal

<sup>3</sup> See the image source: [https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm_referrer=yandex.ru) (28.08.2024).

return developed, in particular, by Nietzsche: cycles of rebirth and metaphorically bodily transformations become a new form of human existence (Nietzsche, 2007).

David Cronenberg raises the question of societal reactions to changes that occur not so much *to* human bodies as *in* them. This metamorphosis can be interpreted as normative and acceptable, or as threatening to the social order and therefore “undesirable.” The director encourages the audience to reflect on whether the evolution of human body in response to emerging challenges, particularly environmental ones, can be seen as a crime. At the same time, speaking of environmental issues, one can raise another difficult question about the ethical assessment of the ability of some part of society or some individuals to recycle plastic and artificial materials in the most radical form—as a nutrient, integrating plastic into human physiological processes in order to survive, develop, and thrive.

This film explores the interaction between the body and technology from the perspective of potential future scenarios. Cronenberg analyzes physical and emotional plasticity through the prism of sexual and intimate relationships, demonstrating new definitions of these interactions. This work can be interpreted as a kind of philosophical research project conceptualizing the prospects of technological impact on human nature and corporeality. At the same time, the filmmaker integrates an ecological perspective into the issues at hand, creating a multidimensional and provocative work about the future of humanity and the limits of the human, which echoes Peter Sloterdijk's ideas about the *spheres* of human existence and people's interaction with the technosphere (Sloterdijk, 2005).

In analyzing Cronenberg's work, it is important to trace the evolution of his approach to the transformation of corporeality. In his early films, such as *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977), the director explored themes of parasite-driven mutations that reflected society's fear of uncontrollable biological change.

In *Videodrome* (1983), Cronenberg further explored this issue, analyzing how media affect human physiology, thus foreshadowing contemporary discussions of the impact of digital technology on the human brain and body. *The Fly* (1986) marked a turning point for Cronenberg, as he delved into the hybridization of human and insect, immersing himself in themes of identity and alienation. *Naked Lunch* (1991) and *eXistenZ* (1999) deal with the merging of organics and inorganics, namely the blurring of boundaries between reality and hallucination, body and technology. In more recent works, such as *Cosmopolis* (2012) and *Maps to the Stars* (2014), Cronenberg shifts his focus to the psychological aspects of corporeality, exploring how the inner transformations of personality are reflected on a physical level.

It is noteworthy that in the aforementioned works, the explored issue is developed so profoundly that it leads us to consider *Crimes* as the climax of this

creative journey. In this film, all previous themes converge in a radical presentation of the future, where the body becomes both a canvas for self-expression and a site for evolutionary experimentation.

This evolution reflects not only the development of Cronenberg's artistic vision, but also the changing public discourse around corporeality, technology, and identity in recent decades. The approach that Cronenberg has taken in his work closely parallels the development of philosophical thought in posthumanism and bioethics, which evolved from an unconditional fear of biological mutations to the acceptance by some thinkers of the idea of the plasticity of human nature.



**Fig. 4. Oleg Gurov. (2024). *Plasticity*. From *Screaming Flesh* series, No. 1. [Canvas, acrylic, painting]. 30×40 cm<sup>4</sup>**

At the same time, a number of film directors within different periods of their careers have turned to body horror in order to use it as a tool to explore various complex problems. Such are David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* (2011), and Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989). All of these works, each in their own way, represent an attempt to rethink technological reality and its impact on human body. Other works outside the body horror genre, such as Andy (Lilly) and Lana (Larry) Wachowski's *Matrix* (1999) and the above mentioned Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999), focus on exploring the metaphysical aspects of reality emerging at the intersection of corporeality, technology, and human identity in our time (Gurov, 2024, p. 34).

<sup>4</sup> See the image source: author's own picture.

## **ECOLOGICAL APOCALYPSE AND THE EVOLUTION OF HOMO SAPIENS: CRONENBERG'S RETHINKING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE**

Modern philosophy and public agenda of the last decades often raises the problem of ecological crisis and its consequences for mankind. This theme also emerges in mass culture. Many science fiction works in various genres depict the future as a sterile space where humans struggle for survival among metal and glass high-tech structures. Against this background, Cronenberg's movie offers an unconventional and rather gloomy vision. From the very beginning of the film, the city of the future is presented not as a symbol of progress, but as ruins after a pandemic or man-made disaster.

The atmosphere is permeated with a sense of doom of habitual existence. Unlike cyberpunk visions of the future, where people survive, fighting for some ideas and values, the world of *Crimes* is a space where there is no room for positive changes. This feeling is largely due to the impression that nature within the frame is dead and probably perished as a result of some ecological catastrophe that remained off-screen.

The relationship between humans and nature is reflected in the works of many philosophers. Levinas and Haraway advocate for a respectful attitude towards nature, emphasizing the importance of not viewing it solely as a resource pool. To them, nature is an independent entity with inherent rights and intrinsic worth (Levinas, 1998; Haraway, 2017). And Morton, in his concept of *dark ecology*, emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual influence between human activities and the environment, highlighting that nature is not a separate entity isolated from humanity (Morton, 2019).

Further developing this idea, it is worth noting the ideas of James Lovelock, the creator of the Gaia hypothesis. Lovelock views the Earth as a single self-regulating system, in which the biosphere actively maintains and regulates the abiotic conditions on the planet, creating an optimal physical and chemical environment for life (Lovelock, 2000). This concept emphasizes the deep interconnectedness of all ecosystem components and points to the potentially catastrophic consequences of disrupting this balance through ill-conceived or irresponsible human activities.

Against the backdrop of *Crimes*, the Gaia hypothesis takes on a new meaning. The world depicted by Cronenberg can be seen as the result of a critical disruption of planetary homeostasis, when the Earth's self-regulating system is no longer able to compensate for anthropogenic impact. This leads to radical changes in the environment and, as a consequence, to mutations of the human

organism, forced to adapt to new conditions. One of the key scenes in the film shows a child eating a plastic garbage bin (Fig. 5), symbolizing the adaptation of the human organism to the polluted environment.



**Fig. 5. Still from *Crimes of the Future* [00:03:40]. (2022).  
Directed by David Cronenberg<sup>5</sup>**

Ideas directly related to dark ecology are also reflected in the film. Morton, proposing to abandon the romanticized notion of nature as something self-sufficient, calls for the recognition of the inextricable connection between all entities—organic and inorganic, natural and artificial (Morton, 2019). In *Crimes*, this idea is developed to an extreme: human bodies are adapted to consume plastic, thus the boundary between organic and synthetic is blurred completely. The world depicted by Cronenberg can be seen as the embodiment of dark ecology: traditional ideas about nature and human have already been completely destroyed, and their place is taken by a new, complex, and ambiguous reality.

Rosi Braidotti, developing posthumanist philosophy, proposes to reconsider the very notion of *human* in the context of contemporary environmental and technological challenges (Braidotti, 2021, pp. 18–19). She suggests the need to move beyond anthropocentrism and recognize the interdependence of all forms of life. In *Crimes*, we see the realization of this idea as well: humans cease to be the center of the universe and become part of a new ecosystem.

Comparing Cronenberg's film with these ideas, we can conclude that *Crimes*, in a way, acts as a posthumanism manifesto, with traditional understanding of human nature and its relationship with the surrounding world subjected to

---

<sup>5</sup> See the image source: [https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm_referrer=yandex.ru) (28.08.2024).

a radical revision (Haraway, 2017). The new generation capable of consuming plastic symbolizes not only adaptation to the changed environment, but also a kind of symbiosis with the technosphere created by previous generations. Here it is worth imagining how far our co-evolution with technology and the altered environment can go, and whether in this process there remains space for the traditional conception of what is human.

The contrast between the deteriorating world and advanced technology in the movie serves as a powerful call to rethink our attitude towards the environment. Cronenberg shows that technological progress without environmental consciousness can lead to catastrophic consequences. He emphasizes the need to integrate ecological thinking into our understanding of progress and development.

*Crimes* is not the only movie that explores these issues from such uneasy grounds. For example, Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain* (2006) raises questions about our irrepressible greed and desire to control nature. *Annihilation* (2018) by Alex Garland deals with the theme of human interaction with the changing environment and the blurring of boundaries between the human and non-human. These films, along with Cronenberg's work, form a new cinematic discourse on the future of humanity in an ecological crisis.

Returning to Lovelock's ideas, it is appropriate to ask oneself how far humans could go in adapting the biosphere to new conditions and what forms "the human" would take in the process and result of this evolution (Lovelock, 2000).

Braidotti calls for a new understanding of subjectivity that goes beyond traditional humanism and recognizes the deep connection between humans and nonhuman life forms and technologies (Braidotti, 2021, p. 94). In light of this, *Crimes* can be interpreted as a visualization of a posthumanist future where humans become part of a complex network of interactions between the organic and the inorganic, the natural and the artificial.

While seeing technology as a factor contributing to environmental catastrophe, Cronenberg's film also presents it as a means of human adaptation to new conditions of existence. This ambivalence reflects the current debate about the role of innovation in solving environmental problems and emphasizes the need to critically reflect on technological progress.

Like many other contemporary films, *Crimes* does not simply warn of the possible consequences of the ecological crisis, but quite explicitly calls for a rethinking of man's place in the world. The anthropocentric model of thinking has exhausted itself, and new ways of defining the relationship between human, nature, and technology are required. Not only should we take into account

human's interconnectedness with all forms of life and inanimate matter, but also take on responsibility for the future of our planet (Harman, 2015).

It appears particularly significant that Cronenberg portrays the perspective of integrating human corporeality not only with technological products but also with the evolving environment. This enables a discussion about further blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human. *Crimes* demonstrates a unique capability of the human body—to radically adapt to new environmental circumstances, encompassing the “non-human” capacity to assimilate synthetic materials. This leads to the emergence of a hybrid identity, taking into account both biological and technological aspects.

### **CRONENBERG'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE PLASTICITY OF HUMAN NATURE**

Paradoxically, in the world of *Crimes*, where technology is so advanced, the pivotal element of reality is indeed the human physical body. Furthermore, the director places a direct emphasis on the physical nature of human existence, contrasting it with the concepts of AR, VR, and MR. In the bleak and deteriorating world depicted in the film, reminiscent of a slowly unfolding apocalypse, people adapt to new conditions through radical bodily transformations.

Cronenberg continues to explore the technology-induced human body transformations, which he began to develop in the earlier works mentioned earlier, especially in *The Fly*. In *Crimes*, this theme reaches its climax: bodily modifications become the norm, and surgical operations take on the nature of art and erotic experience (Bomnin Hernández, 2024, p. 130). Cronenberg explores not only physical metamorphosis of the body, but also its impact on psychology, social relations, values and norms: another artist, Klinek, covered in multiple ears (Fig. 6), is a prime example of radical body modification as a form of self-expression. The artwork of the central characters, Saul and Caprice, intersects illegal surgery, transgressive practices, and experimental science.



**Fig. 6. Still from *Crimes of the Future* [00:36:30]. (2022).  
Directed by David Cronenberg<sup>6</sup>**

While this frontier seems fantastical, we must not overlook the rapid pace of transformation: contemplating the significance of his art in a world where the artificial has already begun to overshadow the natural, Saul realizes that his art, once considered revolutionary not so long ago, is rapidly becoming a relic of the past (Gurov, 2024, p. 36).

Deleuze and Guattari's BwO in Cronenberg's interpretation appears nearly figuratively: the body not only frees itself from the habitual functions with which it was endowed by nature, but also gives birth to new organs, the purpose of which is unclear or absent (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010). This image can be seen as a metaphor for the fact that a human being, or rather the human body, is an open system with the ability to modify and reconfigure itself in accordance with the demands of a shifting world. Just as the BwO resists the attempts to be arranged and opposes any hierarchy, the film characters, through surgical modifications of their bodies, redefine the boundaries of their own corporeality by taking control of their bodily structure and functioning. This radical rethinking of corporeality actualizes the age-old question of the essence of human nature, and how far we are willing to go today in transforming our own biology in search of new forms of experience (Shaviro, 2018). Cronenberg answers these questions in a radical way. He shows a world in which the boundaries of human identity are far more malleable and fluid than we usually assume.

The ambivalent attitude to corporeality in the film can be considered in the context of Julia Kristeva's concept of *abjection* (Kristeva, 2003, p. 37). An abjection is something that causes both disgust and attraction, breaking the boundaries

<sup>6</sup> See the image source: [https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/4440349/?utm_referrer=yandex.ru) (28.08.2024).



between subject and object, inner and outer. In *Crimes*, surgical performances and new organs become just such an abject, simultaneously disgusting the viewer and yet triggering attention and fascination. These techniques allow Cronenberg to productively explore the underlying psychological and cultural mechanisms that shape the human relationship towards corporeality and its transformations in the age of expanding technosphere. Rethinking corporeality in this way, the director showcases that human body can become the object of radical modifications, while at the same time predicts that such procedures can become a kind of art form. At the same time, changes in corporeality can lead to new forms of sexuality, sensual and erotic experience, and a redefinition of pain and pleasure. As the filmmaker shows, such changes, in their turn, could significantly impact social relations and norms of behavior.



**Fig. 7. Oleg Gurov. (2024). *Ambivalence of Processes*.  
From *Screaming Flesh* series, No. 3. [Canvas, acrylic, painting]. 30×40 cm<sup>7</sup>**

It is worth noting that Maurice Merleau-Ponty considered corporeality as a fundamental aspect of being in the world, emphasizing the inextricable connection between the physical body, experience, and perception of the reality (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 16). *Crimes* world is aligned with this concept, showing viewers a reality where bodily modifications become an acceptable practice and even part of everyday life, leading to a rethinking of the concept of human identity,

---

<sup>7</sup> See the image source: author's own picture.

which begins to include more and more technological components and artifacts. It is important to note once again that one of the consequences of bodily transformations is a change in ethical norms, and what was previously taboo or simply not practiced, such as the public display of internal organs, becomes an acceptable practice of self-expression.

In this way, Cronenberg, by constructing an ambivalent interpretation of corporeality, seeks to encompass all horizons of perception of human experience. In this sense, *Crimes* can be seen as the culmination of Cronenberg's exploration of the interplay between the body, technology, and society. Unlike previous works such as *eXistenZ*, *Crash*, *Eastern Promises*, and *M. Butterfly*, where these themes were examined point by point, through the prism of individual experience or individual phenomena, a holistic picture of the future in *Crimes* presents bodily transformation as the main factor influencing all aspects of social life. With this work, Cronenberg summarizes his previous research, but also opens new horizons for the discussion of our future in an era of radical biotechnological change, anticipating the ethical and social challenges that humanity might face.

## CONCLUSION

Analyzing Cronenberg's film enables a deeper exploration of complex and pressing issues of the future of human nature, corporeality, and ethics in a world facing radical biotechnological transformations. Cronenberg creates a provocative image of a future where the boundaries between natural and artificial, human and non-human are blurred beyond recognition. Not only does the film director explore the possibilities of human evolution, but also questions the very concept of the human, showing that technological modifications and ecological changes can lead to a profound shift in the perception of reality, in social relations, and in the overall understanding of human experience.

The film encourages the audience to reflect on how far the transformation of human nature can go and what ethical dilemmas arise along the way. To a greater extent, Cronenberg explores corporeality as a sociocultural construct subject to radical change in the face of technological progress. Representing the body as a malleable material for a variety of experiments, including creativity and reflection on the boundaries of human experience, the film director explores deep aspects of human identity, sexuality, and the perception of pain (the fact of losing the ability to feel it by the people from the *Crimes* universe was only mentioned, and this

condition itself is a promising vector for further research), pushing the boundaries of comprehending bodily experience (Epstein, 2004).

Environmental issues are also central to the film. Cronenberg depicts a bleak post-apocalyptic world, where humanity is forced to adapt to radically changed conditions. This draws attention to the theme of long-term consequences of anthropogenic impact on the environment and possible ways of human survival in the conditions of ecological catastrophe (Agamben, 2011).

We have mentioned that *Crimes* can be considered as a kind of philosophical experiment on the plasticity of human nature within the framework of technological and environmental challenges; but probably this film is Cronenberg's manifesto proclaiming that reality is our body, as opposed to the idea of numerous contemporary philosophers proclaiming the triumph of the virtual (Virilio, 2004, p. 107).

The movie does not so much predict a specific scenario of development as inspire reflection on the essence of human and our place in an ever-changing world, on the future of mankind beyond the traditional dichotomies of natural and artificial, human and non-human.

The film does not provide simple answers to complex questions, but rather encourages critical comprehension of these topics. The analysis leads us to a number of conclusions about the evolution of human nature in the context of technological progress and ecological crisis.

First, the film demonstrates that human evolution can take unpredictable forms beyond the traditional understanding of adaptation. The ability of human body to digest plastic in the movie can be interpreted as a metaphor for the radical plasticity of human nature, which is able to integrate even the most alien elements of the man-made environment (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 116). As already noted, this proves the need to problematize the permanence of traditional dichotomies for the human being.

Secondly, Cronenberg proposes to rethink the concept of pain and pleasure for a technologically modified body. The inability to feel physical pain leads the characters to search for new forms of sensual experience, which can be seen as an allegory of contemporary society, where technology increasingly mediates our perception of reality (Virilio, 2004, p. 109).

Thirdly, this film addresses the topic of how much our ethics and morality are conditioned by biology, and how they may change in the face of the radical transformation of human body. This opens up new perspectives for research in bioethics and moral philosophy (Groys, 2003).

Finally, the ecological aspect of the film proposes interpreting the interaction between humans and the environment not as a confrontation, but rather as

an unfathomable process of co-evolution, where the distinctions between the natural and the anthropogenic are presently fading. As illustrated, this resonates with modern eco-philosophical concepts, opening new horizons for contemplating humanity's position within the planetary ecosystem.

So, we have demonstrated how artistic contemplation of potential future scenarios enriches the interdisciplinary discourse concerning the prospects of the human in terms of ethical, social and ontological aspects of human interaction with technology and the environment. The hypothesis of the study was partially affirmed. The analysis of *Crimes* revealed that Cronenberg indeed portrays the transformation of human corporeality as a consequence of technological advancement and environmental crisis. However, the director not only acknowledges the inevitability of such changes, but, more importantly, problematizes them by delving into the ethical dimensions of these alterations and their repercussions on society and individual identity. This insight indicates a more intricate perspective by Cronenberg on contemporary issues than initially presumed in this study.

The analysis opens up prospects for further interdisciplinary research at the intersection of philosophy, bioethics, sociology and psychology. The most relevant areas include the formulation of new ethical and legal standards to regulate biotechnology, exploration of social and psychological consequences of widespread of bodily modifications, the analysis of how technological alterations to the body influence the perception of pain, pleasure, and sexuality, examination of the ecological consequences of biotechnological progress, as well as a reevaluation of concepts related to identity and subjectivity through the lens of posthumanism.

## REFERENCES

1. Agamben, G. (2011). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Moscow: Europe Publishing House.
2. Baudrillard, J. (2000). *Simvolicheskiy obmen i smert'* [Symbolic exchange and death] (S.N. Zenkin, Trans.). Moscow: Dobrosvet. (In Russ.)
3. Bomnin Hernández, A. (2024). Cuerpo, bioerotismo y ciberespacio en las performatividades ecocríticas de David Cronenberg, Julio Huayamave y David Jara. *Index, Revista De Arte contemporáneo*, 10 (17), 129–144. <https://doi.org/10.26807/cav.v10i17.571>
4. Braidotti, R. (2021). *Postchelovek* [The posthuman] (D. Khamis, Trans.). Moscow: Gaidar Institute. (In Russ.)
5. Brito-Alvarado, X. (2024). Del horror a la trasmutación corporal en el cine de David Cronenberg. *Ética y Cine Journal*, 14 (2), 73–83. <https://doi.org/10.31056/2250.5415.v14.n2.45761>

6. Campillos Morón, L.Á. (2024). La potencia subversiva del Cuerpo-sin-Órganos. Eraserhead de David Lynch como secuela de Crímenes del futuro de David Cronenberg. *Ética y Cine Journal*, 14 (2), 21–25. <https://doi.org/10.31056/2250.5415.v14.n2.45753>
7. Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2010). *Tsytyacha plato: Kapitalizm i shizofreniya* [A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia] (Ya.I. Svirskiy, Trans.). Yekaterinburg: U-Factoria. (In Russ.)
8. Epstein, M. (2004). *Znak probela: O budushchem gumanitarnykh nauk* [Mapping blank spaces: On the future of the humanities]. Moscow: NLO. (In Russ.)
9. Foucault, M. (1996). *Volya k istine: Po tu storonu znaniya, vlasti i seksual'nosti* [The will to truth: Beyond knowledge, power, and sexuality] (S. Tabachnikova, Trans.). Moscow: Magisterium: Kastal'. (In Russ.)
10. Groys, B.E. (2003). *Komentarii k iskusstvu* [Commentaries on art] (A. Fomenko, Trans.). Moscow: Khudozhestvennyy Zhurnal. (In Russ.)
11. Gurov, O.N. (2022). Metavselennaya—iz sumerek vo t'mu pereletaya? [Meta-verse—flight from dusk to darkness?]. *The Art and Science of Television*, 18 (1), 11–46. (In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.30628/1994-9529-2022-18.1-11-46>, <https://www.elibrary.ru/abljei>
12. Gurov, O.N. (2024). Tekhnologii, telesnost', budushchee: Refleksiya D. Kronenberga v kinofil'me "Prestupleniya budushchego" [Technologies, corporeality, future: Reflections of D. Cronenberg in the movie "Crimes of the future"]. *Vestnik Ivanovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya: Gumanitarnye Nauki*, (1), 28–39. (In Russ.)
13. Haraway, D. (2017). *Manifest kiborgov: nauka, tekhnologiya i sotsialisticheskiy feminizm 1980-kh* [A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s] (A. Garadzha, Trans.). Moscow: Ad Marginem. (In Russ.)
14. Harman, G. (2015). *Chetveroyakiy ob'ekt* [The quadruple object] (A. Morozov & O. Myshkin, Trans.). Perm: Hyle Press. (In Russ.)
15. Hayles, K. (2013). *Kak my stali postchelovechestvom* [How we became post-human]. Moscow: Logos. (In Russ.)
16. Jeffries, S. (2009, July 1). Orlan's art of sex and surgery. *The Guardian*. Retrieved August 11, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jul/01/orlan-performance-artist-carnal-art>
17. Kristeva, J. (2003). *Sily uzhasa: Esse ob otrashchenii* [Powers of horror: An essay on abjection] (A. Kostikov, Trans.). Saint Petersburg: Aletheia. (In Russ.)
18. Leder, D. (2016). The experiential paradoxes of pain. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 41 (5), 444–460. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhw020>
19. Levinas, E. (1998). *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other* (M.B. Smith & B. Harshav, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
20. Lovelock, J. (2000). *Geya: Novyy vzglyad na zhizn' na Zemle* [Gaia: A new look at life on Earth] (Trans??). Moscow: RIPOL Classic. (In Russ.)

21. Mankovskaya, N.B. (2009). *Fenomen postmodernizma: Khudozhestvenno-esteticheskiy rakurs* [The phenomenon of postmodernism: Artistic-aesthetic perspective]. Saint Petersburg: Moscow: Center for Humanitarian Initiatives. (In Russ.)
22. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1999). *Fenomenologiya vospriyatiya* [Phenomenology of Perception] (I.S. Vdovina & S.L. Fokin, Trans.). Saint Petersburg: Yuventa. (In Russ.)
23. Morton, T. (2019). *Stat' ekologichnym* [Being ecological] (D. Kralechkin, Trans.). Moscow: Ad Marginem. (In Russ.)
24. Nietzsche, F. (2007). Tak govoril Zaratustra [Thus spoke Zarathustra] (Yu.M. Antonovskiy, Trans.). In F. Nietzsche & A.A. Guseynov (Ed.), *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* [Complete works] (Vol. 4). Moscow: Kul'turnaya Revolyutsiya. (In Russ.)
25. Savchenko, A.V., & Segal, A.P. (2022). Metavers—kak eto po-russki? O postroenii russkogo sektora metavselennoy [Metaverse—how is it in Russian? About the construction of the Russian sector of the metaverse]. *Iskusstvennye Obshchestva*, 16 (4), 8. (In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.18254/S207751800017910-0>, <https://www.library.ru/aycagx>
26. Savchuk, V.V. (2012). *Topologicheskaya refleksiya* [Topological reflection]. Moscow: Kanon+.
27. Shaviro, S. (2018). *Vne kriteriev: Kant, Uaytkhed, Delez i estetika* [Without criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and aesthetics] (O. Myshkin, Trans.). Perm: Hyle Press. (In Russ.)
28. Sloterdijk, P. (2005). *Sfery. Mikrosferologiya. Tom I: Puzyri* [Spheres. Microsphereology. Volume I: Bubbles]. Saint Petersburg: Nauka. (In Russ.)
29. Virilio, P. (2004). *Mashina zreniya* [The vision machine] (A.V. Shestakov, Trans.). Saint Petersburg: Nauka. (In Russ.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**OLEG N. GUROV**

Cand. Sci. (Philosophy), MBA,

Research Fellow at the Center for Artificial Intelligence,

MGIMO University,

76, prospekt Vernadskogo, Moscow 119454, Russia;

Associate Professor at the Department of Marketing,

Faculty of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University,

1, str. 46, Leninskiye Gory, Moscow 119991, Russia;

Associate Professor at the Academic Center for Online Education,

Faculty of Philosophy, State Academic University for the Humanities,

26, Maronovskiy pereulok, Moscow 119049, Russia

**ResearcherID: AAS-9705-2021**

**ORCID: 0000-0002-8425-1338**

**e-mail: gurov@duck.com**