Technoculture and life technique: on the practice of hyperperception[1]

Wolfgang Schirmacher[2] and Daniel Theisen[3]

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Abstract

The present article provides grounds for ethical singularity in a world of technological culture. Against a backdrop of crises in the foundations of our established order, particularly with regard to our faith in a certain approach to objectivity, our refusal to acknowledge the Nietzschean death-of-god, and our disregard for Schopenhauer's insight that the only resolution to our suffering is by way of a voluntary extinguishing of our very will-to-life, Wolfgang Schirmacher proposes a phenomenological approach to our epoch of artificial life – a time of biotechnological creation, technoculture and virtual worlds – where we carry the full responsibility that follows from having created our world. Avoiding the double pitfalls of euphoria and distrust in the face of technoculture Schirmacher suggests a set of life techniques that can work towards the kind of equality and fulfilment made possible by an anthropomorphic, rather than an anthropocentric, perception of the world. In the place of a technoculture given to domination, goal-orientation and prefabricated norms this article proposes five specific barriers to our "progress towards inhumanity": an erasure of the self; refuse or trash art; indirectness (such as in mediated histories); silence and chaos; and a rereading of Heidegger's Fourfold (*Geviert*). It is in such a crux that Homo generator – the one who stands as originary to an entire life-world of technoculture – can begin a militant releasement of justice where we bear full responsibility and yet hold no privilege.

Keywords: ethics; phenomenology; technoculture; responsibility; Homo generator

Prefatory note on method

A phenomenologist in the tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre does not know in advance how the world should be, but allows the phenomena in their context to tell us how they show themselves for us. This always entails surprises, and doing philosophy turns out to be primarily an act of discovery. Concepts remain provisional in an emphatic sense; they seduce us and maintain an openness to new perceptions.

Thus, a piece of phenomenological evidence is never a definition, but a "path" (Heidegger), a well-considered interim report of a knowledge process that begins with the particular. It is always revolutionary. The unconventional perception of artists and philosophers, a contrarian way of thinking and

[1] This paper is reproduced without references, at the request of the author.
[2] European Graduate School.
[3] European Graduate School.

a going-against-the-grain, can be traced back to a phenomenological attitude. Its signature is a leap (which in retrospect may well have been but a step) to that "magical" place where asymptotically extreme proximity combines with irreconcilable distance. Authenticity is a continuous task of the self. Nevertheless, to the present-day *zeitgeist*, a phenomenological procedure that dialectically forces together ethical sensibility and aesthetic rigor in order to "elevate" (Hegel's *aufheben*) the two in a life technique based on justice appears as a dangerous hyperperception. But a way of thinking that takes Heidegger's fall as its beginning and recognizes in technoculture its phenomenal jumping-off place, has no fear of the plenitude of an artificial life and practices hyperperception unselfconsciously, as a matter of course.

I. Thought in the present-day crisis

A philosophy that overcomes our era must begin with a phenomenological abstention that is as necessary as it is trivial. What every reasonable person today recognizes as the basis of his or her perception of reality, the phenomenologist must not accept as a given: that problems can be recognized and can always be solved. If this principle of a survival-oriented world-behaviour, always already optimistic and oriented toward progress, is radically "bracketed" (Husserl's *eingeklammert*), then the everyday world is transformed "before our eyes" (Merleau-Ponty) into a nightmare world. The world-wide network of present-day problems, from the environment to social justice to unemployment, evokes a deep sense of helplessness and ultimately sheer resignation in anyone who ventures the slightest bit beyond his or her sphere of responsibility. Every solution, upon closer inspection, turns out to be the entrance into a problem labyrinth with no way out. The systematic blinders of scientific and technical solutions are every bit as disastrous as the promises of salvation held up by ideologies. Only very few philosophers still fulfil their task of taking up the perspective of the whole without anti-intuitive (*erkenntniswidrige*) considerations, and in the difference-thinking of postmodernity their diagnosis is visible far and wide: no meaning, no identity, no accord, no progress, no rescue. Nevertheless, one should not label this a merely negative philosophy, for it contains a plethora of cultural shards and games, fractures and surfaces, repetition and creative abandonment (*Verlassen*), postponement and the much-talked-of absence of hope. Nevertheless, in our nomadic renunciation of any meaning that would affect us all, it is difficult for us to detect the message of the whole, and yet it is there. The complication is the mood of the message itself. Seen from the perspective of the whole, which can only ever be presented concretely, all attempts at a solution up until now have failed, for all functionality on a small scale contributes to the great destruction. The amply lit lecture hall supports the current system of energy production, which represents an ecological catastrophe, a political time bomb, and with regard to the just distribution of goods, a crime against humanity.

Objectively, the political, economic, and ecological problems of the technological world seem insoluble. However, such a diagnosis can be made only by an observer who has no stake in the matter. Those representing certain interests would destroy the foundation of their own business if they were to admit to this insolubility. Resignation is inhumane, and yet it represents, if we follow Schopenhauer, solely the interest of universal truth, which passes judgment on the cosmos known to us: life is not worth living, for it produces suffering without end. The human being, according to Schopenhauer, is of all suffering creatures the only one that through insight can break the cycle of eat-and-be-eaten and thus become a paragon for all creation. The voluntary extinguishing of the will to life in ourselves would allow humaneness to triumph over nature. What at first appeared as resignation would then reveal itself to be a successful way out.

But can something that looks like collective suicide by the human species be called successful? Today, anthropofugal impulses are stronger than ever, and it doesn't take a prophet to predict our species' suicide within the next millennium. A humanity that simply continues as usual with its theory and practice, its conflict management and ideology of progress, is doomed. Admitting to ourselves that the conflicts are irresolvable, that with the theoretical and practical means we have at our disposal we are merely attempting to treat the symptoms: such an admission could well amount to a turning point. But lobbyists, whether they receive their mandate from the state, the economy, culture, or religion, reject any notion of admitting to their own bankruptcy. They see self-criticism merely as a strategy for entrenching their own influence. Thus, they represent the primary obstacle to change, and a failing of our life technique. Outsiders who expose the failures of the prevailing forces of society will always be vulnerable to

the accusation of representing interests of their own. New social movements became successful political groups and were thus domesticated. Terrorists of conscience were tried as criminals and judged to have been acting out of a psychotic craving for recognition. The philosophical clowns of postmodernity bring the initiated to laughter and tears at the grotesque spectacle of the present day, and for the rest are dismissed as "unreadable."

But the death of God and disappearance of the subject have by no means dispensed with the philosophical promise of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, nor caused it to ossify into a mere declaration occurring in national constitutions. On the contrary: the notions of liberty, equality, and brotherhood can be used to demonstrate what is not the case today. Liberty as the core value of Western countries, equality as the primary accomplishment of the former Socialist states – those who represented no ideological interest never saw either of the two values sufficiently realized. And brotherhood is often a pious wish, quite literally; it is the emotional offering of the religions, and turns up as the love of nature in ecological discourse. In this post-Socialist age, the dichotomy between the first and third is erupting with utter vehemence, following the collapse of the second world and the welding together of the fourth and the impoverished third worlds. With an expenditure of the greatest effort, liberty, equality, and brotherhood might perhaps be realized in the more advanced industrial states, but only at the cost of servitude, inequality, and indifference toward most of the rest of the world.

II. Life technique: anthropomorphic, not anthropocentric

The subject, which comprehensively organizes and prevails over the human world – whether as individual, responsible citizen or as a product of social development – is an illusion, as dangerous for ourselves as it is for the world we all share. Nevertheless, anthropocentrism continues to function as the hidden paradigm for all of our political, economic, and ecological decisions. It is only the culture of postmodernity that has broken with anthropocentrism, because of the highly anarchic and individualistic character of this culture. For the abdication of the subject (long since dominated by its own works) and the discovery of the individual are mutually dependent; the death of the one is the birth of the other. The anthropocentric subject, caught up as it was in the categories of domination and centre, is overcome by the anthropomorphic individual that Hegel conceived of as the particular, which unites in itself singularity and generality.

Anthropomorphic means that the human being need not be ashamed to be a human being. We cannot do otherwise than to live as humans, and even our inhumanity bears this out. But nowhere do our existential conditions, upon whose description Heidegger had only just embarked in Being and Time, point to a necessary anthropocentrism. The human world is by no means the same thing as the one dominated by and centered around humans. Today, everything depends upon the difference between anthropocentric and anthropomorphic, for it is from this difference that we learn how death technique and life technique show themselves. Strictly speaking, the leap from anthropocentric to anthropomorphic is but one of a number of possibilities of realizing the turn, and all these paths share the same origin with Heidegger's Holzwege (off the beaten path): from human being (Mensch) to existence (Dasein), from language (Sprache) to saga or saying (Sage), from framework (Gestell) to event, "enownment" (Ereignis). In the technological world, the difference between anthropocentric and anthropomorphic may well describe the difference between the downfall and the continued survival of the human race, the impossibility or the possibility of a self-engendered artificial life in which we can exist humanely. As long as we remain anthropocentrically blinded (and there exist subtle forms of this blindness), our primary conflicts will remain objectively irreconcilable, and if we deny this we are merely lying to ourselves. But in the painful transition to an anthropomorphic world view (one that does not merely pay lip service), we realize that not even the terms "objective," "conflict," or "solvability" are neutral. While the growing destruction of the environment and the increasing ungovernability of states are very real issues, they are caused by the anthropocentric delusions of an "objective" science and technology, which provide ways and means of domination over nature and over humans. Whoever seeks not to dominate humans and nature, but to understand and acknowledge them as existing in a relationship to oneself, helps to bring about the disappearance of the conflict. The grave problems of world civilization, which give us ample cause for pessimism, are answers to our fundamental self-misunderstanding. We get the world we deserve -- there is no reason to speak of injustice here!

Liberty, equality, brotherhood have been anthropocentrically distorted by us. Yet in truth, the free individual does not have to learn brotherhood; he has it as his foundation. It is quite self-evident that the renunciation of domination extends to nature as well as one's own existence. Liberty too, which repudiates anthropocentrism, can no longer be understood as an attack on the multifariousness of living things. For the phenomena of the anthropomorphic world have their own set of laws, and disregarding these laws leads to destruction, as the example of mass tourism clearly illustrates. Vacation spots whose overdevelopment leads to the loss of their inner order and beauty become places of inhumanity in the end. Only an equality that contents itself to be anthropomorphic can protect its own quality. It is a historic fact that liberty has led to subjugation and independence has been traded for security, but this can be justified only from an anthropocentric perspective. Anyone who wants to rule must certainly fear his opponents, and needs allies, strategies, victories (and defeats). But freedom for singularity (*das Eigene*) has no need to subjugate anything, but is open and playful, and interested not in the attainment of a goal but in the fulfilment of a context. The poet, with his work, and his influence, embodies nearly uniquely the free individual, filled with equality, who laughs at domination. Poetic existence construed as something humane has nothing in common with misunderstood romanticism. Rather, it is something that shows itself in a phenomenological mood. But the philosopher too, this hermit sent by society into the desert, exhibits features of anthropomorphic freedom, and thus hardly makes a suitable educator or founder of a religion. Besides the metaphoric mode of speaking of art and poetry, philosophical thinking is the only remaining way to retain an unprejudiced insight into that which is. But contemporary philosophy is so afraid of this task that it would rather reconcile itself to its own abdication than dare to take on this grand project (*Entwurf*). No longer does it admit to the possibility of "great thinkers" (*Meisterdenker*), nor subscribe to the notion that philosophers know better than others, apart from what social norms allow for. Just clarification and analysis of day-to-day phenomena, criticism only as language pedagogy or political polemics; the question castrated of its answer as the centre, procrastination and refusal as verbose result -- the philosopher's flight from responsibility takes on many forms.

One of the more clandestine escape strategies is taking the bull by the horns: criticizing man's increasing domination over nature, fraught as it is with anthropocentrism and logocentrism. In extreme cases this can take the form of misanthropy; other possible forms are a love of nature and a hopeful new-age mind-set. In every case, this critique takes issue with the technological world, this Frankenstein creation that held out the promise of paradise and created a hell on earth. This dominion as it has existed until now should be renounced; anthropocentrism and logocentrism should be done away with. Their place should be taken by a new subservience, a willingness to serve, be a partner, and belong to the true centre: biocentrism, cosmocentrism, Nature or God in the centre of a new thinking, a new morality, or a new religiosity. Heidegger is cited, unjustifiably so, by such restorers of the old central power who deconstructed Heidegger as history of being and overcame him in enownment-thinking (*Ereignisdenken*). There is no centre, however one might specify it, that is not merely another anthropocentric mask.

The apparently selfless renunciation of the world into which we are historically thrown is only a labelling ruse: ungrasped and thus not essentially changeable, the technological world executes the spirit of its builders, indifferent to the chorus of cultural-critical dwarves, those know-it-alls devoid of power. Whoever wants to abolish the technological world with the stroke of a pen (and the help of a computer keyboard, of course) or ignores it as a superficial phenomenon, has only wriggled out of responsibility. Such behaviour is not atypical of capricious rulers who suddenly stop seeing the fun in a certain game.

The technological world, as anthropocentrically as it has been designed, has long since made a mockery of human plans. What once seemed tool and embellishment is present and future for us and now shapes even the most intimate stirrings of our lives. Who and what I am is decided in media whose technical composedness is so universal that it no longer strikes one as so. Technology's planetary domination, recognized as such by Heidegger, has long since changed from a form of domination in which some other is dominated into the mode of life shared by all. Viewed phenomenologically, and thus without evasion, the phenomenon "technological world" says to us that we human beings have taken over all responsibility for the world. Not God, not nature, neither fate nor accident have created the world of today. If one subtracts anthropocentrism from these findings – taking joy in domination, taking pleasure in success, the right to kill: in short, godlike omnipotence – then we start to get a sense of what is being demanded of us. The world is our mirror, not our crown! While we do create the world in our own image, the world

does not exist for our exclusive use and pleasure. Nowhere is this demonstrated more drastically than in the ecological crisis. Responsibility cannot mean domination – but what then does it mean? Can a responsibility be fathomed in an anthropomorphic sense, one that has escaped the schema of master and slave?

III. Homo generator and the origin of justice

While man may not be the measure of all things in the technological world, man is the beginning of all things there. Human life technology shapes the planet. National, moral, and intellectual borders have been transcended, and the once obligatory cultures in the supermarket of world civilizations have been marked down to mere closeouts. Anthropocentrically, this would be understood as evolution, and mourned or celebrated (depending on one's perspective) as the loss of "cultural nature." Biotechnology has finally realized for the living world something that has long since been credited to culture and technology: we create our own world and we alone bear the responsibility for it. But who are we? What is the human being like? The challenge of a biotechnology that sets out to create the "new human being" consists in our not knowing who we are. Pronouncements on human nature, whether it be God-given or biologically proven, are fraudulently attained and irreversibly marked by anthropocentrism. Even such definitions as "the non-determined animal" (Nietzsche) and "the errant creature of evolution" (Odo Marquard) express only what we are not. Paradoxically, Heidegger recommended in his critique of humanism that we disregard the human in order to know the human, and this procedure does indeed produce meaning.

Met by our gaze, the world was transformed into an artefact. This transformation process of nature into garden, of metabolism into society, of libido into relationship, of the given into meaning, is never interrupted for even a moment, for without this anthropomorphic activity the human world could not help but break down on the spot. It is when one disregards the human, as we strictly speaking always do in everyday life, that one is made aware that the constitution of the world is inconspicuously yet ineluctably anthropomorphic. Our society and our environment tell us in all clarity, without being asked, not what we are but how we are becoming. We once-bitten, twice-shy children of progress no longer want any part of models for the future, and we are justifiably suspicious of millenarian promises of salvation. But only the anthropocentric ear hears the deceptive strains of the harp of progress, future, and salvation. Devoting itself to its inescapable responsibility for justice in all that transpires, anthropomorphic thinking is quite capable of differentiating between the false pathos of the new and the correct diagnosis of open becoming.

The world says that the human being is the creature that can always begin anew, that goes surprising ways, transcends its givens, is ultimately unpredictable, and is capable of anything. The point here is not to judge as good or bad; what constitutes the existence of the human is its capacity at any moment for beginning anew, and its fine (perhaps excessive) disregard for facts. Man is the creature that surprises, for which no law is good enough, and which no purpose can compel. The existent creature transforms even death into a new beginning; in acknowledgment as well as in repression, and even in dying. "Natality" (Hannah Arendt) and mortality both have the quality of an endangered yet self-fulfilling creation of our artificial life. With our modern technologies we are so obviously Homo generator: originator of the human world and all of the life within it. This vocation is an intensification of our creativity, for Homo generator works with the most fundamental elements of existence: with genes as well as with ideologies and institutions. This original creation from the plenitude is mundane as regards such phenomena as love and trust. In art it becomes an opus, but only since we have reached technological maturity does it emerge as a fulfilling life technology.

So is Homo generator not a definition of the human after all, as one could contend? Does this label not limit us to but one of our potentials? But can one really understand the capacity for potential, the process of emergence, the vitality of the origin as a limitation? Homo generator, who doubts and engages in projects at the same time, lives in the in-between – how else could we relinquish our roles and nodal points without regret? We are not what we are. Neither are we what we will become. We are the unpredictable process, totalization without totality, as Sartre conceived of it.

What do responsibility and justice mean to Homo generator, who does not seek to dominate, who pursues no goals, and whose behaviour is unpredictable? Obviously, because man is a beginning, he cannot contribute to a responsibility that aims to teach reasons or a justice that aims to set and follow norms. The causality employed by the

sciences as well as the frames of reference employed by the field of ethics serve only to exercise domination over phenomena, to which category man also belongs. Such responsibility and justice prescribes and legitimates itself phenomenologically through an excess of domination, and is interested primarily in the consequences. The important discussions in bioethics about euthanasia, eugenics, abortion, and animal experimentation, or the debates over artificial intelligence, atomic power plants, the poisoning of our waters and the destruction of the forests are almost exclusively consequence-oriented. When definitions are employed (that prescribe what is humane, natural, ethically acceptable), then they function as legal norms that are jurisprudentially applied to the individual case. The anthropocentric certainty with which the court of reason or the higher wisdom of natural law is appropriated has still not sprung a crack. But a responsibility or a justice that represents the interests of humankind (or one of its masks, such as God, nature, state) is utterly unsuited to facilitating a way out of the current crisis. We have to find our way back from the "responsibility principle" (Jonas) to the origin of responsibility, to justice, and staring fixedly at the consequences will invariably lead us astray. The consequences merely pass judgment upon us; they are useless as guiding principles, since they are hopelessly entangled in the networks of an anthropocentric world. Should the most severely handicapped have to continue living under all circumstances, should drug dealers and murderers be condemned to death, should the starving in Africa be saved with another round of aid, should animal experimentation be allowed when it contributes to the saving of human lives? Whoever frames the questions in such a way already knows the answers! Such responsibility that emanates from anthropocentric justice does not address the phenomenon in its complete form and has no interest in the situation with its background and history. That is why such justice is as empty as it is blind, and why this arrogated responsibility is a mere ritual of dogmatism.

Anthropomorphic justice comes about in the creative act itself and seeks out the phenomenon (of which the responsible one is always a part) in its primordial mode of being. For it is unjust to have to assume responsibility for a botched phenomenon, and thus irresponsible as well. Are we supposed to let those who cause such misery dictate to us what we should take up a position on? Should we not instead ask ourselves, when we are presented in the courtroom with the result of a criminal career, whether the murderers and drug dealers were not born as murderers and drug dealers? Did fate produce quadriplegics, or is the blame not to be sought in the inhuman system of automotive transportation? Was no one capable of foreseeing that the people in the Third World have to starve because the industrialized nations have raised injustice to a principle and in so doing are copied by the ruling classes throughout the world? Homo generator knows itself to be the beginning of all phenomena, and it is this very knowledge that allows it to perceive its responsibility in the origin of justice, in the simultaneity of events, in the attentive listening to the obstinacy of occurrence.

IV. Justice as practice in artificial life

From Heidegger and his fall we learned that the turning point demanded by us today breaks with the history of being and in so doing, catapults us out of the everyday world. Nevertheless, the metaphysics of presence, time and centre determines our praxis (and has also functionalized its criticism) as it always has. Yet seen phenomenologically, the technological world with it conflicts is merely the negative of a world-enownment (*Weltereignis*) that already has "existence" **""**without us ever even having come close to understanding it. All serious philosophical thinking after Heidegger works at exhibiting this fundamental turnaround, which knocks the bottom out of our contemporary view of the world and our accustomed mode of feeling. Chained to a language that has degenerated to a metaphysical messenger, we take great pains to parrot poets like Hölderlin and Celan, in order to learn from them a different relationship to language. There is no doubt that "the word" or "a principle" do not exist, neither the trenchant explanation nor the elegant theory that would bring an end to the masquerade of false problems and slapdash solutions. Such hopes are inescapably indebted to the idea of the center. Heidegger's exclamation "only a god can save us" echoes Hölderlin's words and is by no means a summoning of an authority, the saviour, the new centre. Instead, "a god" points forward to the poetic Quadrate (*Geviert*) of divine and mortal, earth and heaven. One would have to be anthropocentrically blinded, and lack any sense for the interconnections that would thereby be opened up, to seize upon Hölderlin's quadrate as a philosophical concept and to read a "centre" into the "fourfold multiplicity" that is as comprehensive as it is decentralized.

Nevertheless, we are not speechless. With philosophical postmodernism from Lyotard to Derrida to Baudrillard, a negative speaking-out has begun that is surprisingly powerful and creative. That one cannot speak of it is a language game with many variations, and how original is it to say that there are no longer any originals. Language has nothing to do with the world – how true this is in the moment before the change, and yet: how hasty this judgment turns out to be as we morph into our enownment (*Ereignis*) itself. It is actually very little that Heidegger wanted to convey with his term "Ereignis," since each new term is greedily snatched up by the cultural industry as a new guiding concept and thus rendered impotent (Herbert Marcuse described this well). Yet things have turned out even worse than that, now that at the anniversary of Heidegger's birth the long-awaited *Contributions to Philosophy* (*Beiträge zur Philosophie*) have appeared, whose subtitle is *On Enownment* (*Vom Ereignis*). Nothing is sacred anymore in postmodernity, not even one's opponent, and everything serves the fashions as mere accessory. In the midst of the current debate, the historian Ott lost no time in using Heidegger's aphorisms to catch Heidegger the Nazi red-handed, in *Ereignis* of all places ("Is that Hitler or what?"). The Heidegger apologists, equally touching in their boundless ignorance and stubborn tenacity, cite a "second main work," which is actually nothing more than a collection of notes. But the writings in which Heidegger, who saw himself only as a forerunner, came the furthest, have yet to be published. Their tone is more earnestly questioning than knowing.

Let us nevertheless risk an attempt to decipher the signature of the world after the turning point: artificial life as an enownment of technology shows itself to us when we have completed the turn from anthropocentric to anthropomorphic. In this radical reversal of the familiar world, a life technology informed by justice takes on the meaning of a responsibility for our own creation, which we alone encounter. Such a responsibility of Homo generator does *not* begin only when the consequences begin to appear; rather, it represents justice at its origin. It is in the act of creativity itself that humanity decides, humanity that we bring into every phenomenon but do not force onto the phenomenon.

Yet numerous objections raise themselves immediately: is it not the "postmodern Prometheus" that will one day be manufactured by the biotech industry that is being aimed at here? But would it not be the pinnacle of anthropocentrism to want to shoulder the burden of the earth like Atlas? How can we be so presumptuous as to assume that we, with our so terribly limited knowledge, can ever hope to take on the care of the universe?

These objections falsely imply that we have a choice and that we know, contrary to all appearances, that we bear no responsibility for a just world. Such purported knowledge, however, would be anthropocentric presumptuousness, while the anthropomorphic constitution of the technological world reveals itself to anyone who is prepared to apprehend reality as it is in and of itself for us. Artificial life is no utopia and no aspired-to goal; it is the simple description of a phenomenon: this is the way we live. We just don't want to admit it – to the detriment of everyone. What would change after the turning point? How would we live if we were to live as we really live, as the "artificial ones of nature," as life-artists in Nietzsche's project?

Let us take two examples, which despite their disparity share an underground interconnection, to illustrate this crucial question. What mass tourism and euthanasia have in common is that both are artificial phenomena that would not be possible in such an acute form without the development of modern technology (hardware and software). The fact that good things are destroyed by overuse has certainly been observed for quite some time now by the technological world, and euthanasia is a part of most cultures. But modern technology has drastically broadened the scope of these phenomena. What was once an extremely private situation became state-sanctioned murder (in the case of euthanasia in the Third Reich), and the destruction of entire landscapes (in the case of modern mass tourism). They are certainly not the same thing, but both were conceived and carried out in the same mania of anthropocentric despotism. Today, the question of euthanasia for the mentally ill or severely disabled no longer arises, for no serious challenge may be made to their right to life. The problem arises when modern medical technology makes possible the survival of severely disabled persons – either new-borns or accident victims – who previously would never have had a chance of short-term or long-term survival. What was formerly interpreted and accepted as the will of God or fate or the natural course of things, is now entirely our responsibility. In the destruction of landscapes and in the emergence of the severely disabled, we are the source of the suffering, and not simply the ones affected. Such responsibility that flows from justice can be misinterpreted as the power over life and

death, over good and evil, or else justice can be construed as the mission to do justice to a phenomenon in all its diversity.

Creative responsibility that respects its own anthropomorphic constitution begins with a refusal, which is not an attempt to escape responsibility for justice, but quite the opposite: a necessary precondition for it. We must refuse to recognize problems as they are posed to us: objective necessities, justified interests, societal goals, assessment of consequences, codified or unwritten rights – all these conspire to relieve us of responsibility at the source. What is demanded of us instead is that we share the burdens and share in the solutions to problems whose emergence we had nothing to do with. "Guilt by association" is hardly a sufficient legitimation of the call for commitment and support. The miscarried and generally botched present-day world must face its problems on its own. The oft-maligned postmodern escapism is the justified refusal to reward, even by acknowledgement, the perpetrators for their deeds. But this does not mean that we are going to put up with the poisoning of our waters or the impoverishment of the Third World. On the contrary, our refusal to acknowledge prefabricated problems and help implement their supposedly realistic solutions is the very thing that enables us to generate our own world and to stake our entire existence on its emergence. Homo generator will not allow himself to lose, through compromise, his right of origin. He insists upon the fulfilment of the world, when others have long since opted for the lesser evil.

External yardsticks are as unnecessary to the art of life as they are to any other art. Every new fulfilment sets its own benchmark; it shows itself to us and convinces us on its own merits as soon as it meets with an aesthetic experience. This aesthetic experience is a decisive moment in the praxis of justice in artificial life, and much depends on our gaining practice in such a sensitivity, on our incorporating it, as a path, into our education. As proof that we are capable of the highest degree of sensitivity, we need only look to the people who every day are psychologically destroyed by contemporary reality, or who defy it with creative action; to eco-saboteurs as well as to the new modes of living. Ethics as the beauty of the fulfilment of a phenomenon is just as striking and palpable as is non-fulfilment, disruption, and destruction, the waywardness and obstruction of the present.

The concrete meaning of this in the case of euthanasia is that only necessary suffering has a place in artificial life, only unavoidable pain, only anxiety and loss, whereas self-inflicted suffering possesses no rights and cannot represent a problem. If a doctor is confronted with a new-born with an "open defect in the vicinity of the cervical and thoracic vertebrae, with a discharge of cerebrospinal fluid", then one can no longer even speak of responsibility, but can only feel pity. No rule can be derived from such cases. Instead, anthropomorphic justice demands that doctors (and the rest of us as well) do all they can to prevent severe disabilities in the first place, and forbids them to knowingly condemn to martyrdom any creature capable of feeling pain. Prevention, early diagnostics, accident prevention, radical changes to the transportation system – there are many unattempted ways of attacking at its origin the problem of having to decide for others what a life worth living is, many ways of preventing this problem from arising at all. Mass tourism, too, is also a kind of cancer that can be healed when one returns to the origins and does not become entangled in the web of conflicting interests. We know quite well what a "therapeutic" landscape is supposed to look like, just as we are quite aware that the mass tourist by virtue of his existence destroys the very thing for which he has paid. Thus, the vacation landscape should be treated as a scarce commodity that in post-capitalist society is distributed neither in exchange for money nor on the basis of nationality or privilege. Richard Wagner's *Bayreuth*, to choose an unusual example, has already demonstrated how equality and justice can be preserved: by computer-generated random selection, whereby the winner must agree to being excluded from future lotteries for several years hence.

In the sphere (*Horizont*) of artificial life, justice, which legitimized itself as responsibility toward others and was a mask for anthropocentric dominion, becomes a "released" (*gelassen*) praxis of creative interaction with the world. This releasement is not resignatory, but militant to the point of communication break-off. For the goal is not mutual understanding among people. Rather, what must fulfil itself is the phenomenon and the situation where we, as those responsible for justice, are in no way privileged. Thinking after Heidegger's fall denies itself by turning away from and distorting the prevailing world view and thus it is in the very act of negation that it corresponds to the end of metaphysics. This is also the meaning of authentic postmodernity and the actual reason for its surprising persistence. But philosophical thinking cannot remain negative in the long run, for it is magically attracted by the already existing other world, which our problems of today have only obstructed: artificial life. Homo generator exists, if we only dare

to live it. Prize-winning pedigree pigs in London recently refused to drink the local water, despite a severe heat wave. They insisted on clean water and were apparently prepared to die for it. In the quality of our resistance, we should not let these London pigs surpass us in life technology.

V. Technoculture: the praxis of hyperperception

Technoculture reveals itself as the symbiosis of modern technology and postmodernity. This amalgamation of human activity and *zeitgeist* is a well-known phenomenon. It only becomes surprising when one takes a closer look at it. According to traditional conceptions, culture is whatever is not nature, but Arnold Gehlen pointed out that the human being is "by nature a cultural entity," culture here being understood as the ordering of life and the interpretation of existence. With the help of culture, the human being determines her place in the world. The cultural identity thus attained is ethically not neutral and must be supplemented by cultural criticism, which has been fulminating against the "curse of technology" since the beginning of the 20th century. The eminent cultural critic Günther Anders associates modern technology with the apocalypse; Auschwitz and Hiroshima are his "negative muses." What has technology made of us? We live in a "world of apparatus" and treat nature as a "mine to be exploited." According to Anders, the failure to think of and keep in mind the consequences of technical activity is irrational. Working from the tradition of a phenomenological criticism of technology, Anders diagnosed in his primary work the irreversible "antiquatedness of the human being." But how could this cultural criticism, which still admits of norms, as cryptic as they may be, fail to take notice of Adorno's dictum which in *Negative Dialectics* asserted the "failure of culture" (*Mißlingen der Kultur*)? "All culture after Auschwitz, including its urgent critique, is rubbish." For Adorno, meaning and values, all that is lofty and progressive, have been unmasked as ideology. As is generally known, postmodernity concludes from this fundamental criticism that norms, identity, and universality are to be dispensed with and that the free play of the world must not be burdened with anthropocentric objections. What is capable of embodying culture (*kulturfähig*) is a kind of minimal ethics and trash art that views its "weakness" (Vattimo) as its actual virtue, and thus neither in Adorno's nor Anders's sense.

But freed from the tasks of moulding humans and equipping the world, another culture has developed, which neither practices arrogant exclusion nor views everyday life with condescension. Modern technology is no longer derided as an opponent, but rather recognized as our present way of life, all aspects of which are subject to technology's influence. Technology and culture have entered into a symbiosis that demonstrates its vitality every day. The culture bound up with technology has become as multinational and transcultural as the latter's planetary proliferation. This is a technoculture, both technology and culture present Janus faces, which Heidegger has postulated as framework (*Gestell*) and event (*Ereignis*), and which recur in my book *Technik und Gelassenheit* in the differentiation between death technology and life technology. Whether premature death or a life of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) – it is the same technology that contains these possibilities. The decision as to whether cyborgs, those future amalgamations of machine and human being, are to become "technofascists" or Homo generator, will not be made outside the realm of technoculture. An active technoculture is a "wish machine," such as Deleuze and Guattari have postulated in *Anti-Oedipus*, and expresses in its technological fantasies unquestionably legitimate wishes. The erstwhile compartmentalization of pop culture and serious art, which threatened the freedom of imagination and interaction, has become a differentiation between styles. Mainstream culture no longer bears a derogatory connotation; technical reproducibility is seen as an opportunity, and that which my neighbor possesses can also have an "aura."

Yet the status of art in technoculture is by no means unthreatened; it's just that the dangers have become intrinsic. Reduced to a form of information society and without access to the sublime, to irony or experimentation, art would lose its culture if it could no longer be "humanized nature" (Kojima) and celebrate a "life technology of extravagance". But in light of a reality that no longer differentiates between nature and culture, that realizes its dreams in the computer and that is becoming increasingly virtual, art is challenged to strengthen perception and intensify its individuality.

VI. On the difference between artistic and philosophical perception

Perception in its excessive form of hyperperception originates (*originäre*) changes in the life-world. Artistic hyperperception is the actual opening of the artistic eye; in it, the events become visible and reveal themselves to the senses of the artist. Philosophical hyperperception describes how the originary change announces itself in language, image, and institution, and formulates in concept, context, and question the meaning of the change. Such a concept of hyperperception should not determine, but rather render visible, how hyperperception initially and usually occurs. The implied division of labour between artistic and philosophical hyperperception, between the "*Es gibt welt*" of art on the one hand and systematic understanding on the other, also remains open for border crossings. Both modes of perception need each other and occur, in the artist as well as in the philosopher, often side by side, and sometimes as an amalgamation of the two.

This provisional definition of the praxis of hyperperception has learned from the phenomenology of perception how it is performed by the great teachers of phenomenology, and does not refer to traditional conceptions of perception by thinkers from Aristotle to Kant. For Aristotle conceived of perception (*aisthesis*) as fundamentally passive, a prejudice with a long chain of consequences. Kant was the first to acknowledge perception as a product of our activity, as Schopenhauer pointed out, but for Kant this only applied to the senses. The decisive role for intuition (*Anschauung*), this active perception, is laid out in Kant's well-known principle: concepts without intuitions are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind. Nietzsche understood perceptual activity as selection, but immediately added that it is "easier to replicate than to perceive." Yet post-Kantian philosophy on the whole is looking for a perception capable of doing more than merely providing rationality with eyes. Hegel, for all his conceptual acrobatics, is of course an eminent phenomenologist as well, and with dialectical limberness shows himself capable of discerning widely overlooked details and perspectives. Schopenhauer and the Romantics bring the body and feelings into the centre of self-perception, while Feuerbach and Marx pull forth the sensual and economically-entangled human being from the darkness of history. Nietzsche's Dionysius is made symbol and paradigm of a playful perception of the overabundance of life, and ever since, hyperperception has been the signature of the artist-philosopher. For a phenomenology of perception that points back to hyperperception, the world is not what we think up or manufacture, but, according to Merleau-Ponty, what we live through, the life process before all interpretation, Husserl's "primordial streaming" (*Urströmen*). The world forms itself before our eyes, but we still need to look actively and, as Marcel Proust puts it, to "sympathize masterfully." Being needs the human being in order to be able to "present" (*anwesen*), as Heidegger emphasized with a verb he coined himself. Artistic hyperperception, by virtue of its often extreme subjectivity, is of all forms of apprehension of phenomena the one most open to the world. There is (Heidegger's *es gibt*, "it gives") world in the work of art, truth is set in motion (*ins Werk gesetzt*, "set into work") the life-world becomes visible as convocation of human beings and things. Schopenhauer compared this artistic perception to a "disinterested mirror," yet without taking away from the artist the samurai's ability to carry out, from a state of "ingenious calm" (Jean Paul), his stroke of genius. In Nietzsche, the will to art becomes decisively visible: in the anthropocentric will to lie, the meaning of perception is initially obscured, only to shine forth once again anthropomorphically, in the hyperperception of active nihilism, more brightly in Schopenhauer's sense than ever before.

Artistic hyperperception presents us with "primordial images" (Bachelard) and allows insights "affectively" without censoring them. In this context, "primordial" does not refer to the quality of revealing a recognizable basis, as Heidegger uses the term in "The Origin of the Work of Art", but is used here in quite the opposite sense: to learn from the "crack in Being" (Sartre) the freedom to begin. A basis is an abyss, and origin means self-responsibility. What characterizes artistic hyperperception is transgressing, redetermining, and bringing together that which seemed separated. The artist is revealed as an unwilling prognosticator, an unintentional seismograph who is satisfied neither by "aesthetic experience" nor "sensual reflection" that engenders mere pleasure. Habermas vaunts the "sensitization potential of contemporary art", Welsch vaunts its character as model for postmodernity, and according to Danto, art "celebrates" random world events and "redeems" things, as with Proust, from their everyday use. Even Adorno expressed the belief that art is capable of keeping alive (at least indirectly) the memory of the "completely other" in a totally miscarried world. Whether this is as a reflection (*Widerschein*) or an initial glimmer (*Vorschein*) would require further discussion.

This self-critique of the philosophical approach, however, by no means resolves the tensions inherent in the relationship between artistic and philosophical perception, which only fulfils itself when it becomes hyperperception. On the contrary, the "voyage of discovery with the inner eye" is accompanied by the philosophical art of questioning: a questioning that "reanimates World and Things and repeats their crystallization before our eyes" (Merleau-Ponty). Philosophy of culture is not the same as philosophy of art and the study of perception cannot be reduced to aesthetics. Philosophy of culture deals with the events of a particular time, its conflicts and leaps, its hopes and plans, whereas art is one cultural phenomenon among many. The study of perception encompasses the entire life-world, including the realm of art. Philosophy of culture has become global and is now a philosophy of cultures that turns its ethnological gaze both to the Self and the Other. Everything that is met by this gaze and apprehended, the traces of change and the remnants of tradition, is capable of stimulating and influencing artistic hyperperception. This relationship between philosophy and art could be characterized as a mutual midwifery, if one keeps in mind that no one can foresee just what it is that will be born. For the sudden intrusion of monstrosity is characteristic not only for art; it is equally true in philosophy that each new thought represents an incalculable risk. While interdependency between artistic and philosophical hyperperception does not exist, one can certainly speak of reciprocal inspiration, even if the emergence of such inspiration at a given time can never be planned in advance. This potential interplay of the two modes of perception will be touched upon in the discussion of virtual worlds.

VII. On the perception of virtual worlds

Virtual worlds, these digitally transmitted syntheses of "almost-world" and "alternative world" create the illusion of an artificial life and turn science fiction into an experience. Virtual worlds claim to have broken with convention and control, and desire to "go where no consciousness has gone before." These computer-generated worlds, in which we exist in real time and in three-dimensional environments, create a "plane of pure possibility on which appear unheard-of configurations of ideas." Virtual worlds with their global image scenario are "more real than reality," an observation that Merleau-Ponty admittedly made over 50 years ago about film. "Cyberspace," conceived for the first time by William Gibson in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984), is a "place where everything becomes thinkable, a place of the imagination." Science and technology have expanded the human in a very real sense, as McLuhan predicted, and now belong irrevocably to our body. The question of whether reality itself is something virtual no longer seems absurd.

Virtual worlds have brought about two opposing reactions: a technology euphoria that has taken hold of apologists for the "new media," and an increased mistrust of technology that sometimes grows to hatred. Both reactions perceive something characteristic in these virtual worlds. The aesthetic fascination with technology leads to the eroticizing of it and can easily bring about addictive behaviour. Vilém Flusser not only described the "replacement of the natural world with a highly technologically supported super-reality of virtual realities" in coolly phenomenological terms, but expressed enthusiasm for a development he predicted will lead "from postmodernity to pure computer intelligence and the omnipresence of screens." Flusser declared that "the human being is an animal that feeds upon the improbable," and went on to predict for us a life "in pure imagination, in leisure." Imagination has since turned into hallucination, but Flusser would not have regarded this observation as a reproach. Günther Anders, on the other hand, would see these "digital dream worlds" (*Waffender*) as the misuse of technology taken to the extreme, and even the father of the "wish machine," Gilles Deleuze, shuddered at the prospect of "automatic surveillance," – standard equipment in virtual worlds. The technological euphoria engendered by the encounter with virtual worlds follows the progress paradigm, as the postmodern philosopher Lyotard warns, and thus exacerbates inhumanity.

So it seems that not everything goes in postmodernity, at least not when digital play threatens to take over and virtual worlds seek to monopolize our imagination and our praxis. So that we do not equate technoculture with virtual worlds, we need to make use of philosophical perception to remind us of the source of virtuality. Indications of this origin are revealed in the phenomenon of virtual worlds, when imagination, illusion, and fascination become the objects of inquiry. The dream character of virtual worlds points to their origins in the imagination, their proximity to unfettered creativity (*zum freien Entwurf*) and thus to artistic life technique. Postmodern art as art in the age of media, simulation and hyperreality has long since established itself in a virtual world in which the other virtual

worlds are reflected. It will surprise neither the painter nor the photographer that as with the case of computer images, phenomena represent nothing more than a collection of pixels. But the freedom with which artistic and philosophical perception deal with the virtualities of human existence is quite different from a slavish acceptance or rejection. These modes of perception experiment in play and in irony with our anthropological limitations, and with our prospects of an artificial life.

The philosophers of culture are attracted by opportunities for thinking, and artists are pursued by images of thought. This poses a challenge to both groups to respond with active perceptions. In the leap to philosophical and artistic projects of virtual worlds, let me offer here a first impression of how technoculture shapes humanity.

VIII. Five barriers to our progress to inhumanity

Philosophical and artistic projects are linked together, in the sense of "nomadic reason" (Deleuze) by the coordinating conjunction: "and, and, and…" A modern cultural philosophy that is not satisfied with a triumphant description of surfaces a la Baudrillard, and at the same time is unable to show layers of depth, is paying attention to that which resists categorization. Such refusals, breaches, resistances, and delays need not be spectacular and are usually disregarded as marginal by the theory. But in the praxis of technoculture, their effect is frequently ground-breaking, an example of the application of chaos theory, and they testify to the "human factor," which acts as sand in the gears to impede the progress toward inhumanity. I would like to take five such barriers and subsume them phenomenologically under a single preliminary concept (*Vorbegriff*) that will reveal to us how technoculture, with whose external aspect we believe ourselves to be familiar, is capable of abruptly altering its appearance. This philosophical description will be accompanied by works of art whose inspiration and subject matter can be credited to the same (if not the identical) phenomena. It is not my intention merely to illustrate philosophical theses, nor to maintain that works of art are directly dependent on philosophical insights. Instead, I would like to demonstrate what I imagine the cooperation between artist and philosopher to be. Spinoza's model of mind and body is characterized by synchronic interplay and not by dominance. When the artist has originary (*originär*) hyperperceptions and when new worlds reveal themselves to her, then her obsession inspires the philosopher as well, stimulates his hyperperception, and steels his courage to speak the outrageous. Since we share this global life-world in all its difference, synchrony (which, as with Levinas, incorporates recognition of the asynchronic) does not need to be produced separately. Being-in-the-world can be transcended but not undone. Mutual encouragement, the intense motivation that a successful work of thought or art provides, and the responsible translation of others' insights into one's own language characterize the creative interaction between art and philosophy that I am attempting here.

There are five impediments, each of which currently manifests itself virulently in threefold form, to the smooth functioning of technoculture, this enownment (*Ereignis*) of virtual humanity. At this point I will merely present them as a sketch:

First enownment (Ereignis): self-signature – autobiography

Who would ever have thought that the subject, this motor in the West of progress and dominance over nature, would become mere ballast and would only through its disappearance open up the possibility of an anthropology? The subject is dead. Long live the self, which in its being attends only to this possibility of being (*Seinkönnen*). The care of the self as a living of a humane ethics: this is Foucault's legacy. Lyotard refers to the signature with which this non-determined self inscribes itself into enownments (*Ereignisse*), a signature that can be erased at any time. The media are our auto-biography, even if at present all too many of them are guiding our hand. The constantly self-eluding self is the genuine educator that guides the way to artificial life. It practices self-education. My multi-media sculpture, which will be activated next spring during a conference and exhibition about "Artificial Life" at the DIA Center for the Arts, expresses the inferiority complex of the person vis-à-vis technology, *and* seeks to overcome it. For the post-humanism that characterizes the self explores the virtuality of the person in technoculture and does not limit us: we do not know what we are like; we are the process itself, in ritual and structuring we are autobiographical in the strict sense, we are self-interpreters.

Ellen Carey's Polaroids reveal a virtuality that is no longer merely utopian. They provide a "vista over opening horizons." Ellen Brooks's photo reflects the beauty of technoculture, which allows our materiality to dissolve and

our clearly defined outline to disappear. What then appears as self is the signature in the form of a logo, as with W. C. Morgan. "The non-colour becomes our alter ego," jokes Haim Steinbach in his multi-media installation, and Paul Laster pointillates his signature. This kind of play with our self-conception is serious play and by no means escapist reverie that tries to evade the problems of the day. This becomes tangible in Hazen Reed's interactive installation, which I helped create, about people with AIDS. In this virtual world, we encounter ourselves in the act itself; our re-actions become a part of us!

Second enownment (*Ereignis*): refuse – resistance – return

Consumer culture and society fill our living space, which is increasingly the city, with trash. Garbage becomes the raw material of the imagination, sought out for recycling, and at the same time an alternative aesthetic. Trash is resistance in a literal and figurative sense, a demand for the return of all materials, Nietzsche's eternal return as an urbanity lived daily. The incinerated children of trash resist the temptation of the valuable, whose price has become too high.

"A national monument to freedom of expression" was the title of this trash installation, an oversized megaphone with which anyone who wanted to could give the Wall Street bosses a piece of his or her mind. Dan Devine has reclaimed rich visual potential from the much-maligned medium of concrete, so that the hope remains that concrete-entombed cities might return to their beginnings, to a poetic landscape. Jessica Diamond believes that even money is capable of such "natality" (Hannah Arendt)! And Jeff Koons, of course, transforms such refuse material as promotional giveaway tchotchkes into real treasures (and porn stars into princesses). The resistance of this magical transformation of kitsch and everyday life, such as Marc Adams demonstrates with his hot water boiler, consists in its absurdly exaggerating that which with a sudden twist is transformed into the phenomenon of the return. Life in the city and shopping in the supermarket would come to a standstill, if such artistic sensibility (as Joanne Dugan demonstrates with her street photo) were to get out of hand.

Third enownment (*Ereignis)*: detour – nomad – indirectness

Nothing in the project of modernity is feared more than the detour, the "forest path that ends in untrodden territory," as Heidegger put it. But today's technoculture differs from the previous life-world of modern, industrial technology in that the meaning of the former is nomadic. As monads of demand, we traverse the landscapes of meaning and remain only as long as the scant water there lasts. It is the media – from film to the computer – that suggest detours and encourage indirectness. Baudrillard and Eco have given the names "hyperreality" and "simulation" to an altered behaviour that steadfastly repulses any attempt to influence it directly. We learn history from Oliver Stone and Spike Lee, no longer from historical works, that objectivity game played by the members of the historians' guild. Action can be direct, but communication has to remain indirect if it wants to reach the postmodern person. This enownment's potential for humaneness can hardly be overestimated, since this development marks the end of authority – that of the voice and that of the facts.

Thomas Ruff's photo grows out of the idea of surveillance: it becomes the style of a new content, whereas John Lamka harnesses the hard sciences for his "*Zufalls-Spaziergänge"*, whose destination is the "unsolvable Gödel. Peter Nagy ironically takes up Neil Postman's media criticism in "*Unterhaltung löscht Geschichte aus*" and Erica Rothenberg denounces the directness of the all-too-modern media moguls with the question "Are you as happy as you could be?" Rodolfo Rocha has repeated Creation – by way of an all-too-common detour. Nihilism would be the wrong reaction, since nihilism would be negatively bound up with essentialism. What remains, then, is the adventure of thinking "without a net," which is also the title of a postmodern video about my work in New York, which recently won the prize for "best documentary film" at the International Video Festival in Cadiz.

Fourth enownment (*Ereignis*): silence – chaos – earth

The ecological crisis has had a long-term impact on technoculture, and has rehabilitated a sense for silence and death. The silencing of whole species, the deafness of humans, premature extinction, chaos with no way out: all these have caused more and more people to stop and think. "Interrupting" (Levinas) what we have always said and done, non-action, and ignorance have allowed us to experience the other possibilities of silence and chaos. Death is also a

rescue, silence is the beginning of all language, and the earth is our body – such mystical whisperings suddenly take on prescience and evoke fascination in the forms of chaos theory and ecosophy.

Thomas Ruffs "*Sternenhimmel*" (Starry Sky) has transformed a scientific photograph into an archetype. Silence-chaos-earth are the elements of Eve Laramee's ecological installations, which work with chemically active copper dust, water, salt, and the environment. Order in chaos, chaos in order allow the artist "to speak with the elements" without a word being uttered or a prediction made. Richard Prince titles his suggestion "Fuck Off and Die," which will be passed over in silence.

Fifth enownment (*Ereignis*): Quadrate (*Geviert*) – globe – artificial life

Anything that can be said philosophically about this will inevitably lead to misunderstandings, and yet this enownment (*Ereignis*) turns out to be the actual "turning-point" from the metaphysical to the non-metaphysical life-world. Present-day philosophical perception is still largely blind, but Hölderlin's poetic hyperperception has given it a subtle hint. Heidegger was able to express Hölderlin's overabundance with the "quadrate (*Geviert*) of heaven and earth, divine and mortal," at least to the extent that quadrate takes the place of the sublime X. This X, which haunted Kierkegaard as well, describes an existential paradox: it is an unknown, but it will radically change your life. What is referred to as quadrate may be already appearing in the global perspective (where the demand for humanity is increasingly making itself heard, if we can learn to see "globe" in the sense intended by the pre-Socratic Parmenides, as a "well-rounded sphere, with vibrations emanating in all directions from the centre." But this, too, sounds like obscure poetry, and Rilke's explanation of the "full and sound sphere and ball of being" is couched in the same medium as the cryptic hint. Heidegger defined the globe as the "revealing illuminating Oneness" and thus doubtlessly came closer to the phenomenon of the transcultural. But it is only in artificial life, which is guided by the quadrate in the activity of Homo generator and which has its predecessor in artistic production, that virtual humanity would surpass its own potential. But this also means that such humanity cannot be caught up with theoretically. Artificial life is authentic when it is self-ethics, lived-thought, as (hyper-)perception of its own activity.

Are there already works that have been created by Homo generator? Does the quadrate flash at least occasionally? If it does, is there anyone who can perceive it? Ellen Brooks's "Sunset Trees" and Eve Laramee's "Sinking Island" strike me as having some of this mood, in which we live peacefully in the cosmos, in the "revealing illuminating Oneness." Different in its gaze, but of a similar collectedness, is Joe Andoes minimalist oil painting "UNT". Even though they are products of technoculture, these artworks look away from it. They seek resistance in the detour. Mark Kostabi cast a sidelong glance (broken by quotes) toward technoculture, and has presumably captured a decisive trait of artificial life in the self-evidence that shows itself there.

The perception of virtual worlds thus turns out to be the start of a hyperperception of the virtually human in technoculture. To limit one's focus to digital worlds would only mislead, for not even in the computer can we experience what we are not already able to be.

Looking forward – calling forward – feeling forward

The nets of electronic communication are being cast worldwide and (almost) without limit. They capture and secure that which traditionally had escaped our attention and control. In this way, an ethics of fulfilment that is imperceptibly and preconsciously operative as "reason of the body" and "innocence of becoming" (in Nietzsche's words) runs into danger. Artistic/artificial hyperperception is constitutive of the self-responsible networld, but must not lead to ethics turning into a cycle of fulfilled dwelling upon the earth in an anthropocentrically functionalized manner.

Neither the (postmodern) renunciation of identity nor a self-diagnosis based on self-deception can betoken an ethical existence. The ways that happiness and suffering are fulfilled in the individual must remain imperceptible, but can nevertheless be perceived. Imperceptibility is decisive for fulfilment in life and is therefore also a fundamental trait of a humane networld. In the monadic "living-for-the-world" (Deleuze), social mimesis is medially produced in an incessant stream, but without cultivating a cognitive consciousness of purpose and goal. The (future) networld shall be fulfilled when its (initial) intentionality is dissolved in a hyperperception and opens itself up to the "twofold other" (Lyotard). Failing to hear something, fading away, blurring, forgetting, neglecting, distorting, "ashes" (Paul Celan) are some of the imperceptible hyperperceptions that permit ethical uniqueness, even in the net.

Authors' contributions

This is an original work researched and written by Wolfgang Schirmacher, translated by Daniel Theisen.