

# Audiovisual Posthumanism



# Audiovisual Posthumanism

Edited by

Evi D. Sampanikou

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To Akis and all the children  
of a better tomorrow



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## INTRODUCTION

# WHY A *HUMANE* POSTHUMANISM MATTERS: POSTHUMANISM AND AUDIOVISUAL ARTS

EVI D. SAMPANIKOU

### **Posthumanism, Literary Theory and the Audiovisual Arts**

Only in recent years has the term “Posthumanism” been introduced to the terminology of philosophy (Ranisch-Sorgner, 2014, 7–16 and Braidotti, 2013, 55–104). It still meets with much scepticism in a large part of the international academia and with almost complete distrust in the Greek academic community where I come from. The mistrust against Posthumanism can be compared with the ways Postmodernism was confronted by the totality of academia. But, while the main argument against Postmodernism focused on the meanings of the prefix ‘Post-’ and its characteristics and symptoms (Jameson, 1991), on the question of Posthumanism the objections are mainly concentrated on the ideological content of Transhumanism (Rubin, 2014, 8–23) and its obsessions with the countless possibilities of “improving” the human race with the aid of biotechnology, leaving aside moral dilemmas about several forms of hybrid existence (Bostrom, 2014, 32–51).<sup>1</sup>

The critics probably ignore the fact that, while for many scholars, “posthumanism” is actually an identical term to “transhumanism”, other posthumanist scholars have completely different views. These scholars tend to analyse Posthumanism in *cultural* terms. Therefore, they consider posthumanism to be a philosophical trend that broadens the frame of the anthropocentric diptych of Greco-Roman/Renaissance Humanism and Enlightenment, including, for example, all other beings and the totality of

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<sup>1</sup> There are also political extensions, for example the founding in the State of California of a Transhumanist party that has actually appeared as a disguised National Socialist (fascist) party, see: [www.transhumanistparty.org](http://www.transhumanistparty.org).

Nature. This seems to be a rational consideration of an era intensely characterized by both the digital image and biotechnology, consequently an era not completely anthropocentric and open to all technological possibilities, while still respecting the notion of the biological being. These culturally oriented scholars also view Posthumanism as the ideological expression of *a contemporary cultural theory* born immediately *after* Postmodernism, a deeply *political* theory (Sampanikou, 2014, 241–242).

According to Gianni Vattimo (2013):

“The reason why a philosopher educated in the European tradition can feel interested in the ‘post-human’ thematic, is the fact that this same tradition has developed, at least since Nietzsche and above all since Heidegger, a critical consciousness of the inhuman aspects of the humanistic tradition. Humanism has been too long and too strictly connected to Eurocentrism, universalistic claims of the West (and of its religion, Christianity), colonial imperialism, that our culture may be considered mature for an abandonment of the very idea of ‘humanity’.”

To the aforementioned quotation we could definitely add Orientalism, as a central logic of Eurocentrism, firmly denied by posthumanistic thought. One of the fundamental elements of the above-mentioned view is the notion of ‘progress’ bearing huge responsibility for the degradation of the notion of the human being (Sampanikou, 2010, 407–408; Vattimo, 2013; Sampanikou, 2015). The notion of ‘progress’ has actually become the synonym of a continuing social *hubris*, especially when the globalized idea of *control* steadily deconstructs the Enlightenment ideals and even disclaims people’s political rights down to the basic *habeas corpus*. The recent example of the millions of refugees from Syria, the Middle East, Asia and North Africa could not illustrate this fact any better. The posthuman lens thus re-opens, probably for the first time after Antiquity and the Enlightenment, the issue of ‘the human as a political being’, offering a re-orientation to the human being’s values, worldviews and rights in a techno-centred posthuman era (Sampanikou, 2015).

But how and what is ‘the posthuman’ (that is us) thinking? What is the posthuman’s political vision? How does the posthuman conceive their place in the world? Do they, traditionally, continue to express existential agony through the arts of their era? And which art forms seem to be more representative? Of course, there is more than one answer to this question, as the multimedia audiovisual environment of the arts of the contemporary world indicates (Huhtamo, 2011, 27–47 and 2013, 10–19). Cinema, music, digital video, installation and performance art, virtual and augmented

reality, internet art, graphic arts and design, comics and graphic novels, and even more traditional arts, like painting and photography, coexist today with Kac's bioart, Stelarc's biotechnological experiments and Orlan's traumatic, self-humiliating surgeries (Sampanikou, 2014, 243–250). This book explores this landscape, focusing on the audiovisual arts of our times as posthumanist arts, within the broader cultural context of posthumanism, while giving emphasis to the production of new theories.

### **The Volume, 'Audiovisual Posthumanism'**

The present volume is comprised of texts first delivered as papers at the Beyond Humanism Conference series, an annual international conference on Posthumanism first held in 2009. Most of the chapters in this volume have been developed from ideas first presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beyond Humanism Conference (2010) at the University of the Aegean in Mytilini (Lesvos, Greece), while a very small number come from articles first presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> Beyond Humanism Conferences (2014, Mytilini, University of the Aegean and 2015, Seoul, Ewha Women's University).

This *Introduction* is followed by the groundbreaking text written by Stefan Lorenz Sorgner and Jaime del Val, *A Metahumanist Manifesto* (2010), a text that has indeed produced a new philosophical approach to posthumanism, focusing on the notion of the 'Metahuman'.<sup>2</sup> The chapters of the book are organized in four parts. Each focuses on specific aspects of Posthumanism and the arts.

The first part, entitled *Ethics, Bioethics and Posthumanism*, deals with the ethics of Posthumanism, examining the relation of both Posthumanism and Transhumanism with the notion of *art* in texts about mythology, science fiction, classical philosophy and contemporary social theory. In the first chapter, Karen Gloy deals with 'The Four Stages of the Conception of Art', in which she discusses the notion of the classical, the imitation of nature according to Aristotle, the Renaissance concept, as well as the Darwinian concept of art as an evolutionary process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; finally, she deals with the contemporary concept of replacing nature with technology, as it is expressed in the arts of modernism and

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<sup>2</sup> The Manifesto was first read by the two authors in a special session during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beyond Humanism Conference (Mytilini), followed by a performance by Jaime del Val. It is now also published in [www.metahumanism.eu](http://www.metahumanism.eu) transformed into: <http://metabody.eu/metahumanism/> and appears in this volume with the permission of the authors.

postmodernism. Trijsje Fransen's, '*Prometheus Redivivus: The Mythological Roots of Transhumanism*' deals with the various versions of the myth, from Plato and Hesiod to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, focusing on creation and advancement in Posthuman terms. Dónal P. Omathúna's 'Transhumanism, Ethics and Science Fiction' examines how the posthuman–transhuman vision raises significant ethical issues, focusing on the long tradition of science fiction texts in both literature and cinema suggesting that human enhancement may lead to injustice and conflict, while Thomas Mavrofides, in his chapter, 'From Humans to Persons: Niklas Luhmann's Posthumanism', focuses on the main aspects of criticism of Luhmann's theory, in an effort to resolve what initially might have appeared as anti-humanism. Ioana Zirra, in 'Targets and Posthumanistic Consequences of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*', deals with a text that had acquired a meaning that took philosophy decisively over the threshold of humanism and became a starting point for several post-humanistic debates. George Voreas Melas, in his text 'Dune. The Birth of a Messiah. Enhancement vs Enlightenment', deals with the diachronically Posthumanist content and ethics of *Dune*, while Panayiota Georgopoulou, in 'Moving Beyond (Humanist) Sociology: The Complexity Turn in Social Theory', aims at a re-definition of social thought in less anthropocentric forms and orientations as Posthumanism indicates.

The second part of the book, entitled *Literary and Social Theory, Archaeology, Aesthetics and Posthumanism*, focusses on the relation of postmodern and posthuman thought and expression in contemporary literature and audiovisual art forms. In Yunus Tuncel's 'Simulacrum and Art as Self-Transformation after Nietzsche', the question of spectacle in recent French postmodern theory is related to the questions of Posthumanism. It is mainly analysed on the basis of the notion of art-making as a form of making of the self, a view also connected with Nietzsche's self-transformation. In Anna Sara D'Aversa's 'Posthumanism in the Work of Marcel- lí Antúnez Roca: Phenomenology of new aesthetics resistance strategies and artificialization of the living being', the posthuman–transhuman work of the Catalan micro-technologies and genetic engineering performing artist is analysed, while Titika Karavia's 'Probing the Posthuman. Body Modification in Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *Lorsque j'étais un oeuvre d'art*' deals with the limits of body modification and monstrosity in eccentric artistic procedures. Abraham Kawa, in his chapter 'Letter, Number, Cup, Female: V, Alan Moore and Posthumanism', takes us into the world of graphic novel literature focusing on notions of Posthumanism in the work of Alan Moore. Georgia Tzirou, in 'Preservation of Media Installation Art in the Posthuman Era.

Posthumanism and the artwork «Human Traces»', takes us into the world of contemporary installation art and issues of preservation in posthumanist terms. Yiannis Kourtzellis and Evi D. Sampanikou, in '3D Graphics and Post-Processual Archaeology: A Posthumanist Approach', explain how Posthumanism is also affecting the notion of 3D representation in contemporary archaeology. Finally, Konstantinos Vassiliou, in his text 'Dangerous Allies: Artistic Transgression and Posthumanism', investigates how, in new media art, Posthumanism has sought to renegotiate the relationships between humans and technology and also how Posthumanism offers new orientation to artistic transgression.

Part three, under the title *Posthumanism, Postmodernism and the Essence of Transhumanism in Graphic and Audiovisual Art*, relates specific contemporary theoretical and artistic fields, such as comics and graphic novel theory, feminist theory and aesthetics, contemporary music, experience design aesthetics, transgenic and bio art, digital cinema and videogames, with the evolution of both postmodern theory and posthuman philosophy. Evi D. Sampanikou, in 'Postmodernism, Posthumanism and Transhumanism in Science Fiction Graphic Novels. Enki Bilal and the «Hatzfeld Tetralogy»', explores the thin red line between Posthumanism and Transhumanism in the work of one of the most famous European graphic artists. Francesca Ferrando, in her text, 'A Feminist Genealogy of Posthuman Aesthetics in the Visual Arts', analyses three generations of women artists from both the feminist and the posthumanist perspective, explaining how women's art is redefining human boundaries in original ways, offering new insights into the possibilities inscribed in the shaping of posthuman embodiments. Alessandro Giovannuci, in 'Musical Posthuman Aesthetics: the Nomad Technobody of the DJ', shows how posthuman archetypes are traceable in the phenomenology of contemporary music and in particular in the shape of the DJ, as a mutual correlation between human flesh and technology, while Sofia Mytilinaïou, in 'Experience Design and Aesthetics of Interaction from a Posthuman Perspective', introduces us to a new art form, the *experience design* that puts human experience in an artistic frame and relates this experience to Posthumanism. Panayiota Polymeropoulou deals with 'The Transgenic Art of Eduardo Kac and the Posthumanistic Perception of his Artwork GENESIS', analysing this work further, while Marios M. Giakalaras and Christos P. Tsongidis deal with the notion of 'Avatars in Videogames' and their posthumanist content. In Patrícia Silveirinha Castello Branco's 'An Eco-Posthuman Reading of Avatar', the western Modern Humanistic project to rule over and master nature is criticized, while it is also argued that *Avatar* can be placed at the core of Posthuman views concerning the

shifting boundary line between the Human and the Animal, the Natural and the Technological. Finally, in Anna Hatziyiannaki's 'Stelarc: Towards the Creation of a Semi-Living Avatar. Investigating the Interface between Body-Smart Machines in Stelarc's Work', Stelarc's work is analysed as crossing the boundaries between cyberpunk fiction and reality, a work gradually exploring the interface between the actual and the virtual worlds, with the body acting seamlessly in mixed realities and with an intelligent avatar performing in the real world.

The fourth part, entitled *Media Artists on Posthumanism*, presents the views of contemporary media artists and theorists whose work and writings deal with aspects of Posthumanism. Amanda Beech, in 'What Would We Mean by Realism?', offers a renovating view of the artist as *realist*, examining a few key problems of thinking through the correspondence between the nature of the image, that is the image as part of an unreconstructed world of the given, and its politics, and how idealisms become incapable of representing the realism they are seeking, turning it into a condition of 'being without a cause'. Bridget Crone, in her chapter, 'Image and the Appearance of the Image: Fear, Speed, Force', examines the idea of "image" as marked by the speed of its dissemination, but not marked by representation or by its representative capacities, and also in relation to the terror alert system in the US, in which the image can be a tool for effective control. Finally, Pill and Gallia Kollektiv, in their text 'Towards an Anti-Humanist Critique of Immaterial Labour, or How to Negotiate with Vampires', discuss Marx's *Capital* and how the appeal to the respectable and charitable side of bourgeois culture is insufficient for resisting the rational, albeit ruthless, capitalist. They also discuss how Marx's views, and his proposal to adopt the discourse of the Capitalist to negotiate the limit of the working day, point the way towards an anti-humanist critique of the kind that art has been unable to take up from its assumed position of externality to the system within which it operates. These views have given rise to an anti-humanist tradition in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, from Arendt to Althusser, which is now also dealing with Posthumanism.

Reading all the above-mentioned texts, one can easily observe that the central attitude in Posthuman philosophy could be the evolution of the Postmodern confrontation of the 'uncanny' and its identification with the Other. This still remains a multi-levelled and complex issue, either as a 'politically correct' statement or as a new ethical argument. New forms of 'otherness' have now been developed, for example, the condition of being a refugee at a moment when the international political scenery changes and new economic elite hierarchies are formed. The notion of the 'Other'



in contemporary capitalism is thus gradually transformed into a hyper-realistic image that grows more and more and contains the viewer in an everlastingly temporary and controlled environment of virtual reality, in exclusively Posthumanist terms (Wilson, 1996, 321–330; Virilio, 2001; Zizek, 1996, 290 and 2001, 113–124; Jameson, 1991, 1–20; Harvey, 1990, 39–68).

Having the honour of being the editor of this volume, I would like to thank all the contributors for their participation. I would also like to thank John Ingamells who did an excellent job as a proofreader, Victoria Carruthers, Commissioning Editor at CSP for having done the whole way with me and all the other members of CSP involved into this publication. Corresponding and working with all of them has been a great experience for me. Hopefully, this collaboration will have produced an influential book.

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# TEXT

## A METAHUMANIST MANIFESTO

JAIME DEL VAL  
AND STEFAN LORENZ SORGNER

1. *What is Metahumanism?* Metahumanism is a critique of some of humanism's foundational premises such as free will, autonomy and the superiority of *anthropoi* due to their rationality. It deepens the view of the body as field of relational forces in motion and of reality as an immanent embodied process of becoming that does not necessarily end up in defined forms or identities, but may unfold into endless *amorphogenesis*. Monsters are promising strategies for performing this development away from humanism.
2. *The world as relational complex* – The Metahuman as Metabody: Metahumanist critique proposes to deepen the understanding of reality as an unquantifiable field of relational bodies, or *metabodies*, in changing and constitutive relation with one another. Herewith, we attempt to finally overcome the Cartesian split between body and mind, object and subject, by proposing a view of the mind as an embodied relational process, and of the body as relational movement, that operates from the molecular and bacterial, through the individual and psychic, to the social, planetary and cosmic levels, and in other dimensions of experience. There is no possibility to map a totality or limits of the forces that constitute a metabody and there is no ultimate exteriority to them, though they may gravitate around provisional nodal points that account for an immanent perspectivism and the formation of power relations.
3. *Towards a Common Relational Body*: Traditionally relationality has developed into or been subjected to a variety of systems of intensive regulations. In contemporary *capitalism of affects* relationality is increasingly being subjected to control through technologies which produce global standard affects by distributing discreet choreographies.

The *Panchoreographic* is the biopolitical meta-system of control in which *metabodies* are being preemptively appropriated. Possibilities to reappropriate and redefine technologies of becoming need to be shown.

4. *Towards a politics of movement and radical pluralism*: A radical pluralist politics is a non paternalist movement that works through power structures to avoid the retotalitarianisation of politics. It does not aim at an ideal final state but stresses the need to permanently overcome contemporary challenges that arise by necessity through combining the immanentism proposed by the metahuman with the perspectivism of the posthuman, stressing the importance of movement versus identity.
5. *The metahuman as postanatomical body*: We propose to challenge the anatomies, forms, cartographies or identities that constitute the humanist concept of the *anthropos*, and the technologies that allow for such representations to take form. Anatomy, as a map of human and social bodies, can only be articulated from an external perspective to the body. We challenge the Cartesian split that situates us as subjects external to an objective reality and to other subjects. Through reappropriating and subverting technologies of perception we may dissolve the condition of exteriority and therewith anatomy and the destiny of the body, not for the sake of a new anatomy, but of a postanatomical body. *Metahumanism* thus proposes an aesthetics of the amorphous, by considering *metamedia*, *metaformance* and *metaformativity* as possibilities to permanently redefine sensory organs.
6. *Metahumans as metasexual*: Metasexuality is a *productive state of disorientation* of desire that challenges categories of sex-gender identity and sexual orientation. A metabody is not ultimately categorisable in terms of morphological sex or gender but rather is an *amorphogenesis* of infinite potential sexes: *microsexes*. It is *postqueer*: we are beyond the understanding of gender as performative. Metasex not only challenges the dictatorship of anatomical, genital and binary sex, but also the limits of the species and intimacy. Pansexuality, public sex, poliamoria, or voluntary sexwork are means to redefine sexual norms into open fields of relationality, where modalities of affect reconfigure the limits of kinship, family and the community.
7. *Redefining science and knowledge*: Immanentism and perspectivism do not need to be self contradictory concepts – we hold both of them! Yet, we propose the need to introduce immanence into knowledge production, and the revision of encrusted structures. Perspectives are

contingent nodes within stratified intensities of the *metabody*. We propose both to explode and dissolve existing strata and to move through its nodes reconfiguring perspectives as well as immanence.

8. *Towards a relational ecology – Metahuman Ethics*: A *metabody* is to be understood as a sustainable relational body that includes *anthropoi*, other species, technology and the environment. Metahuman ethics avows to bring about forms of interaction that avoid the permanent superiority of a force over others, so that a certain non-violent equilibrium is reinstated over and over again.
9. *Towards the transformation, amorphogenesis and emergent becoming of metahumans*: There is no need to distinguish between procedures of genetic enhancement and classical education. Both rely on untimely distinctions or use given representations of a normative regime which are not universal but the result of paternalist political technologies of affective production. We understand alteration processes of the *metahuman* as flowing types of *amorphogenesis* of the relational body, all being equally subject to ongoing critique.
10. *What is the Metahuman?*: The metahuman is neither a stable reality, essence or identity, nor a utopia, but an open set of strategies and movements in the present. It implies the need to deterritorialise strata of power and violence and induce new forms of embodied relationality by producing a *frontier body* that is operating on existing boundaries and redefining them. A *micro-recherche* considers the genealogies of bodies, movements and affects for the purpose of both challenging existing regimes and producing new forms of resistance and emergence.



**PART ONE:**  
**ETHICS, BIOETHICS AND POSTHUMANISM**

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE FOUR STAGES OF THE CONCEPTION OF ART

KAREN GLOY

Terms such as post, trans, late, neo, etc. are going through a boom period right now and are concepts key to the understanding of our contemporary culture and societal, political, and especially artistic and philosophical situation. When the term post-modernism, which was used in competition with the concept of late-modernism, lost its lustre, post-humanism or post-biologism, as well as trans-humanism and trans-biologism, became the vogue. With them – as their names illustrate – a situation is designated which transcends the mere human and natural in the direction of the no-longer-human and the no-longer-natural, in other words, in the direction of a world of machines and constructions. In addition, a subtle distinction is made between the post-human and the trans-human – accordingly in biologism as well – which results from the partial or total substitution of the human or natural factor. Post-human is the designation for the combination of the human and technical in so-called machine men or cyborgs, trans-human, or trans-biological, means the total abdication of the human and its substitution by the technical.

This development was made possible by the innovations of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, in particular, in computer technology, robotics, nano and information technologies. By means of these innovations, virtual worlds can be generated with the help of data helmets, data gloves, head-mounted displays and three-dimensional movie glasses in which one can virtually move around at will, e.g. one can move through rooms of museums and their exhibits, visit the tombs of pharaohs which are restricted to the public, or admire caves with prehistoric designs and similar attractions, all while, in reality, sitting comfortably in a reclining chair. Through data gloves, patterns can be impregnated on the palms of the hands which generate artificial sensations, such as “now my hand is touching cold



water”, without this being the case in reality. A special case is the multi-sensor theatre, developed and installed by Mort Heilig, which operates with one-person boxes, in which the visitor watches a movie in stereo, hears sounds such as the noise of a passing motorcycle and simultaneously smells odours and aromas which are wafted into his nose by means of small air hoses – in the above-mentioned case, oil and gas odours.<sup>1</sup> In lieu of the real world, virtual worlds can be generated – “simulacra” according to Jean Baudrillard – which lack a distinguishing criterion from the real world. We can thus imagine box worlds in which men are constructed virtually, who in turn construct virtual men and so on ad infinitum, where the relationship to reality is being severed or has always been severed. This problem of the impossibility of distinguishing between real and imaginary worlds, between reality and dreams, has forever intrigued philosophers. Descartes expressed this in an especially impressive manner in the first *Meditation*, describing a dream in which he sits next to the fireplace holding and moving a piece of paper in his hands. While, in this case, the capacity of man to perceive is preserved and only the perceived or perceivable object is shifted into an indifferent, indistinct sphere, a radicalization of the problematic takes place in the moment in which the capacity to perceive is also basically changed, increased, perfected or modified, based on the increasing use of artificial limbs and the substitution of man by machines and robots. Already now, all intellectual activities such as reading, writing, calculating and playing chess can be performed better and more efficiently by computers than by humans. Time announcements are performed better by the iron lady; the solutions to calculation problems, for which humans need more than their entire lifetime, are found within seconds or minutes by computers; computers which play chess such as *Deep Thought* have Elo class, i.e. grandmaster class, against which even the best chess players in the world have difficulties. Sensorial and motoric tasks are performed more optimally in an artificial manner by escalators, elevators, mixing and washing machines, household robots, etc. than in a natural manner. Beyond the perfecting and optimizing of human capacities, their total alteration is thinkable, which goes in the direction of a transcendence of human capacities which can no longer be understood by us. Even when it has so far remained the specialty of science fiction novels and movies to simulate a world which has no similarity to our own, this possibility is no longer a utopia, but has become a real, tangible possibility.

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<sup>1</sup> See Waffender (Hrsg.): *Cyberspace*. Ausflüge in virtuelle Wirklichkeiten, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1991, 120.

Since the relationship of the natural to the artificial, or technical, can be described as a relationship that, since ancient times, has dealt with the prototype and the image, as can be found in the famous Aristotelian definition according to which art and technology are an *imitatio* of nature and, since this relationship has experienced grave changes in the course of the history of the mind and civilization, including the history of art and technology, I would like to retrace this development in four stages: *first*, art and technology as imitation of nature in the status quo; *second*, art and technology as free creations of the artist (genius); *third*, art and technology as imitation of an evolutionary nature; and *fourth*, art and technology as a substitution of the natural.

## 1. Art as Imitation of Nature in the Status Quo

In the second book of the Aristotelian *Physics*, one can find the famous and much-quoted definition of art, according to which art is the imitation of nature. This definition requires a closer discussion of the terms used.

On the one hand, the term art – *techne* in Greek – covers not only the skills that are considered art nowadays such as painting, sculpture, poetry, dramaturgy and music, but also crafting skills and, indeed, not only artistic crafts and those higher artistic performances which we now call styling, designing, etc., in the fields of architecture or exhibitions, but also the very common crafting activities such as the construction of houses, weaving, darning, etc. The Greek word covers the creative, liberal arts as well as the crafts and practical skills, which underwent a special development as technology. Identical in their origins, art and technology took historically different turns and are now again converging.

On the other hand, it must be noted that nature (*physis* or *cosmos*, respectively), according to Greek ontology, is something given and existing, which is indeed not rigid or static, but living and moving in itself – Plato calls the *kosmos* in *Timaios* a *zoon*,<sup>2</sup> i.e. a living being or a living thing – which, however, consists of perpetual self-reproduction and self-preservation. When processes take place in this moving world, they are teleological processes oriented towards an immanent purpose, such as we can observe in the developmental processes of plants, animals and human beings: for instance, when an oak tree develops from an acorn or a human being from an embryo. The Aristotelian formula, that man generates man, expresses this adequately. The teleological, purpose-oriented process realizes only those possibilities which are contained within it from the

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<sup>2</sup> Plato: *Timaios*, 30 d.

beginning and may not be confused with the modern evolutionary process. In antiquity, nature remained within its limits. Movement, change, life are immanent movements of a whole, enclosed in itself, self-relating and autarchic, repeating only its own possibilities. Possibility and reality are identical in their scope. The real is that which is possible and only that which can be realized is possible.

The third term of the Aristotelian definition, i.e. imitation, is also to be understood on this basis. It does not simply mean copying, providing a poor imitation of reality, but implies the perfecting of the possibilities lying within nature. Playing witness to this tendency to idealize are not only the art works of ancient Greece but also the Aristotelian definition which, if one takes a closer look, consists of two parts. “On the one hand, art perfects that which nature is not able to accomplish; on the other hand, it imitates what is given by nature.”<sup>3</sup> While Aristotle goes partly beyond the purely mimetic aspect, it must be taken into consideration that perfection may not be interpreted in the modern sense of a new conception, a transcendence beyond the limits given by nature to itself, but as the realization of possibilities, lying in nature itself, which for whatever reason sometimes remain unrealized, fail or are corrupted as manifested in defects, deformities and monstrosities. A real transcendence has different ontological preconditions. In Greek thought, however, the cosmos is the ideal – based on its self-referential and autarchic character – to which the artist and art must subordinate themselves. The basic dependency on, and interconnectivity with, nature determine the artist’s understanding method. The artist executes on the outside that which nature performs inside or can perform inside.

The homology between nature and art or technology, respectively, becomes manifest, for example, in the circular, rotating and highly artistic movements of a ballerina, which appear so light and gracious, so “natural” as we like to say. Aristotle bases his view on a thought experiment: if natural objects were to be artificially created, they would have to be generated in the same way as they are generated naturally, and if an artificial object such as a house or a ship, produced by an architect or a shipbuilder, were to be generated naturally, it would have to be generated in the same way as they are generated artificially. This comparison makes clear that an artist is only perfect when they quasi automatically (i.e. naturally) create their work. An artist who deliberates on which tools to use and which operations to perform possesses insufficient familiarity with

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<sup>3</sup> Aristotle: *Physics*, 199 a 15–17.

their object and is disturbed in their relations to it. It is a banal truth that art is the more perfect the more it appears natural.

The structural analogy between art and nature or technology, respectively, raises the question whether the artfulness that we observe in the artful construction of a bird's nest for raising its young, in the artful cobweb of a spider for catching flies, in the artful arrangement of petals and stamens around the ovary for pollination of a plant, can be traced back to a *conscious* purpose of nature – similar to the case of art and technology where a conscious purpose precedes the act – or to a simple purposeful *activity*. The passage through the various areas of nature, starting from the human and animal areas to the vegetative, imposes a certain reluctance on Aristotle to assume a conscious purposefulness of nature.

He seems to assume an unconscious purposefulness which is, however, to be explained in analogy with artistic and technical activities. Independent of how he sees the status of awareness, it is clear that between nature and art or technology, respectively, a necessary homology exists. This conception changes in the following periods.

## 2. Art as Imitation of the Free Creative Force of God

While in the entire antiquity and the middle ages – insofar as they follow the ancient tradition – the mimetic perception of art is dominant, a new definition of art appears during the Renaissance based on a strengthened self-consciousness of man, his separation from the god-created cosmos, although not without the theological background of Christianity. This new definition sees art as the free, autonomous performance of man in analogy to the divine process of creation. The artist advances to an *alter deus* based on his similarity with God or His Son, which allows him to recreate the divine *ars infinita*. In this comparison of God and man, it is not the similarity to God or His Son that plays the major role – a role that could lead one to the conclusion that a dependency exists – but rather the fact that divine predicates can be attributed to the artist such as his unique metaphysical rank, his creative power, his infinite talent of invention and productivity, etc. Pointedly, one could talk here about a usurpation of divine attributes, which justifies the often raised reproach of the *hybris* of humanity during the Renaissance.

The *locus classicus* for the new definition of art can be found in Nicolaus Cusanus's essay *De mente* ("On the Spirit") of 1450, which, together with two further essays, form part of the so-called complex of the *Idiota* essays, where the focus is on the *idiotia* and his new self-

understanding. *Idiota* does not mean the mentally defective, but the uneducated and, indeed, the one who is not educated in literature, the layman who is confronted with the educated of his time, on the one hand, the theologian, on the other hand, the scholastic philosopher and, third, the orator as representative of humanistic education. Although uneducated in comparison to them, he develops a self-understanding that grows out of his naïve activity and makes him, in combination with his *devotio* (humbleness), a parodistic counterfigure to the educated class, distinguished by its arrogance. Here appears the combination of work (performance) and sentiment of self-value, a combination which was up to that time not at all natural or self-evident.

In the second chapter of *De mente*, the *idiota* presents to his conversation partners what his own art or craft, for instance the very common and far from extravagant spoon-carving, means to him. When carving spoons out of wood or producing artificial-technical products such as plates and pots, he is not able to do this, according to Cusanus, in view of given ideas such as an idea of a spoon, plate, pot, etc. because there are no ideas of artifacts in nature. Rather, he is forced to invent them himself and therewith, godlike, imitate the infinite innovative and creative power of God. The finite human spirit is seen in analogy to the infinite divine, not insofar as he re-creates the given divine thoughts (ideas), according to which God created the world, but insofar as he – like God – creates new ideas and executes his work in accordance with them. Here, imitation does not mean reproduction of an eidetic being but repetition of the creative activity itself. This capacity establishes the singular position of the artist or craftsman.

For the first time in history, a completely positive evaluation of technology occurs. Contrary to this, the ancient myths have stressed the ambivalence of technology, the greatness of it on the one hand and the *hybris* and transcendence of the natural limits imposed on man on the other hand. Prometheus, who invented fire, was chained to a rock as punishment; Hephaistos, the inventor of the art of metal-working, was a lame, subterranean working god; Icarus, who constructed the first flying machine fell in the water and drowned. The purely positive appreciation of technology has also been the reason for the social appreciation of artists and craftsmen ever since the Renaissance, which culminated in the cult of the genius.

With the example of the spoon carver, Cusanus picks up an old platonic problem, the question of the existence of artificial ideas. While ideas of natural objects are conceded without much hesitation, this is not equally the case with ideas of artifacts. Plato mentions in his dialogues an entire

series of such ideas: the idea of the table and chair in the *Politeia*, the idea of the harness, also there in the tenth book, the idea of the batten in *Kratylos*. In contrast, there is the testimony of Aristotle<sup>4</sup> that in the Academy no ideas of artificial objects were accepted and, in the context of important classifications in Platonic texts, e.g. in the introduction to *Parmenides* or in the seventh letter, ideas of artifacts are strikingly missing. Based on the structural analogy found in Aristotle of nature and art, or technology, respectively, it may have been inherent in the tendency of Greek thought also to accept ideas of artifacts, since for instance the circular form of the spoon or the plate can be found in the disc of the sun, the handle in the shape of a stick, the form of a pot in the shape of a hollow space, all of which in turn have natural ideas as their examples. Everything newly produced seems to be reducible in some way to already existing things. The idea of the total correspondence of possibility and reality in antiquity did not allow that man become spiritually original. However, for Cusanus, the ideas of artificial products, be they artistic or crafted or technical products, are inventions of the human spirit, which point to its creative power.

The epochal new definition of art is, in regard to the history of the mind, only to be understood on the basis of Christian theological ideas such as the doctrine of creation, the omnipotence of God, the thought of infinity, free will, etc. They provide the nourishing ground for the development of a new conception of art but they are not yet sufficient. Although many ancient thoughts proved to be compatible with Christian doctrine, shown by the fact that the Greek theory of art was preserved during the entire medieval period, we find a completely new impulse at the beginning of the modern age which explains the criticism of the old theory and the beginning of a new one, i.e. the subjectivistic turn. It consists of the severance from the objectivity of the ancient and medieval world and the discovery of the autonomous ego, independent of God and nature, in many cases even opposed to them, with its own power, originality and creative activity. This innovation has motivated the idea of genius in modern times.

Despite all the freedom and independence, the conception of the artist and his work remains limited in one point, compared to the omnipotence fantasies of the present post-humanism and post-biologism, which can be illustrated by the example of Shakespeare's ingenious work. While Shakespeare's works appeared as irreparably confused, chaotic, barbaric and tasteless to representatives of earlier epochs, who were oriented towards the canonical means of style and the rules of antiquity and to the

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<sup>4</sup> Vgl. Aristotle *Metaphysics*, I,9, 991 b 6 et seq. And XII, 3, 1070, 18–20