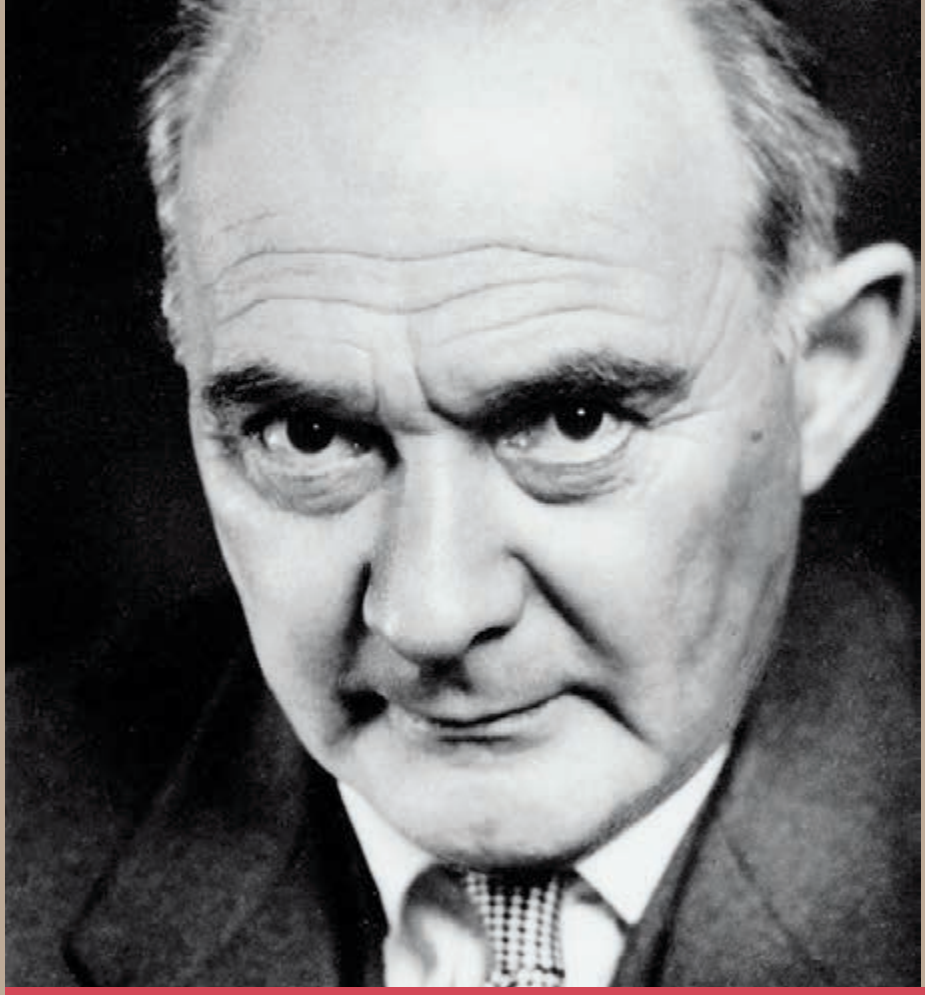

Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Perspectives and Prospects

Edited by Jos de Mul

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Foreword

The works of the German biologist, philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985) have remained relatively unknown to the English-speaking world until now. Without doubt, one of the most important reasons for this is the fact that so far only a few of his works has been translated into English. Moreover, the majority of the large corpus of secondary literature is also in German. For these reasons, the "Plessner Renaissance" that took place in the past decades went largely unnoticed among English scholars in the humanities and in the natural and social sciences. In order to widen the audience, the organizers of the IVth International Plessner Conference at the Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2009, which was devoted to Plessner's magnum opus, *The Levels of the Organic and Man: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, originally published in 1928], decided to hold the entire conference in English. Although the conference did not attract a large group of participants from English-speaking countries, it resulted, for the first time in the history of Plessner scholarship, in a substantive collection of papers on Plessner's philosophical anthropology written in English.[1] The present volume contains a selection of the papers presented at that conference, offering an excellent introduction to a philosopher whose work has proven to be inspiring for several generations of scholars.

I wish to thank Dr. Maarten Coolen from the University of Amsterdam, and Prof. Dr. Huib Ernste from Radboud University of Nijmegen, who acted as co-organizers of the IVth International Plessner Conference and helped

1 As only some of Plessner's works have been translated so far, the papers presented at the Rotterdam Plessner conference lacked a uniform translation of Plessner's key terms. In some cases it was just a matter of different spelling. For example, whereas in some contributions the German *exzentrisch* was translated as "eccentric", in other papers "excentric" was used. In other cases the differences concerned the entire word. The German *Grenze* for example, was translated as "boundary" by some authors and as "border" by others. In order to avoid conceptual confusion, in almost all cases the editorial choice has been a uniform translation. For that reason, the word *exzentrisch* is consistently translated as eccentric (a motivation for this particular choice is given in footnote 2 on page 12). However, in a few cases where different translations were caused by differences in context, for which the English language has different words, the choice has been made to keep the different translations. For that reason the German *Grenze* is translated with "boundary", but in some cases as "border". When an author used synonyms for stylistic reasons (for example by alternatively using "corporeality" and "corporeity"), the different translations have also been maintained.

with the selection of the papers for this volume. I would also like to thank Laurens van den Berg and Marjolein Wegman for their encouraging support while organizing the conference, and my research assistants Sassan Sangsari and Julien Kloeg for their help during the editing of the text. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their critical comments that have helped us to improve the book. Last but not least I would like to thank Inge van der Bijl, Ed Hatton, and Jaap Wagenaar of Amsterdam University Press for their first-rate assistance during the final editing and production of this book.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Helmuth Plessner Gesellschaft, the Erasmus Trustfonds, and the Faculty of Philosophy of Erasmus University for their generous financial contributions, without which the organization of the conference and the coming open source edition of this volume could not have been made possible.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the authors of this volume. Hopefully, their contributions mark the beginning of a fruitful reception and application of Helmuth Plessner's work by the English-speaking community of scholars.

Rotterdam, March 2014
Jos de Mul

Artificial by Nature

An Introduction to Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Jos de Mul

> Those who want to find a home, a native soil, safety, must make the sacrifice of belief. Those who stick to the mind, do not return.
> – Helmuth Plessner

The past few decades have been marked by a remarkable rediscovery of the work of the German philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985), who for a long time remained in the shadow of his contemporary, Martin Heidegger. During the first International Plessner Congress in Freiburg, in 2000, the organizers even dared to speak about a "Plessner Renaissance." However, with regards to the Anglo-Saxon academic community, it appears too premature to speak about a revival. Given that only a few of his works have been translated into English,[1] the interest in Plessner's work has mainly been restricted to Germany and, to a lesser extent, Netherlands, Italy, and Poland, so far. One does not come across his name, for example, in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Yet, the publication of *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* in 1999 – a translation of *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft: eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (1924) – and the forthcoming translation of his philosophical magnum opus, *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*], which originally appeared in 1928, indicate that there is an up-and-coming interest in Plessner's work among the Anglo-Saxon scholars.

One feasible explanation for the renewed acuteness of Plessner's philosophical anthropology lies in the virtues of his concept 'eccentric positionality"[2] and the related concept of the 'natural artificiality' of man.

1 Until recently, except for some smaller texts (Plessner 1964; 1969a; 19969b; 1970a; 1970b), no works of Plessner haven been translated into English. For an overview of Plessner's writings, translations in Dutch, French, Italian, Polish and Spanish, and secondary literature, see the website of the Helmuth Plessner Gesellschaft: http://www.helmuth-plessner.de/.

2 Some authors prefer to translate the German "*exzentrische Positionalität*" with "excentric positionality" in order to avoid association with the meaning "deviating from conventional or accepted use or conduct," which is attached to the English word "eccentric." Nevertheless, we decided to use the terms "eccentric" and "eccentricity" throughout this volume, not only because

These concepts not only enable us to grasp the fundamental biological characteristics of the human condition, but they also have proven to be fruitful in the social sciences and humanities. Plessner's writings not only foreshadow current – phenomenological, hermeneutic, and feminist – criticisms of rationalistic and instrumental approaches to the study of human life, culture, and technology, as well as the embodied, enacted, embedded, and extended alternatives that are currently being developed (Thompson 2007), but they also remain fruitful and worth studying in their own right. Demonstrating this will be the aim of this volume.

This introduction consists of four parts. As Plessner is not well-known in the Anglo-Saxon world, I shall first briefly sketch Plessner's life and works as well as place him in the context of twentieth-century continental philosophy. In the second part, I will introduce the concept of 'positionality,' which is central to Plessner's philosophical anthropology, and contrast this spatially oriented concept with Heidegger's temporally oriented concept of *Dasein*, and subsequently comment on the synchronic nature of Plessner's anthropology. In the third part, Plessner's three 'anthropological laws' will be presented. Lastly, a cursory overview of the contents of this book will be provided.

In the shadow of tomorrow: The life and works of Helmuth Plessner

Helmuth Plessner was born in 1892 in Wiesbaden, Germany, into an affluent family of partly Jewish descent.[3] His father was a doctor and the director of a sanatorium. In the then still prosperous city of Wiesbaden, Helmuth witnessed the grandeur of the last years of the German Empire. After successfully completing his studies at the gymnasium in his hometown, he went on to study medicine in Freiburg, followed by zoology and philosophy in Heidelberg. While in Heidelberg, he met highly acclaimed German scholars such as Windelband, Weber, and Troelsch. In 1914, he went to Göttingen to study phenomenology under Husserl and became fascinated with the philosophy of Kant. After obtaining his doctoral degree in Erlangen in 1918,

this is in accordance with the spelling used in most dictionaries, but also because it has been used in previously published translations of Helmuth Plessner's works, such as *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behaviour* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941] (Plessner 1970).

3 This biographical sketch has largely been taken from the biographical notes of his Dutch student Jan Sperna Weiland (Sperna Weiland 1989).

he worked under Max Scheler in Cologne, where he wrote his *Habilitationsschrift*, the thesis which qualified him for a professorship (1920). It was not until 1926 however, until he was appointed extraordinary professor of philosophy in Cologne. Between these periods, Plessner published his book *The Unity of the Senses* [*Die Einheit der Sinne*, 1923], and, partly inspired by Max Scheler, he worked on the first large-scale design of a philosophical anthropology. His *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, written in a rather obtuse German, appeared in 1928, only one year after the groundbreaking and highly influential publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*]. Moreover, Scheler's short but compelling study of *The Position of Man in the Cosmos* [*Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*] also appeared in 1928.

At the time, Plessner's philosophical anthropology received only little scholarly attention. However, this was not only due to his rather inaccessible writing. When the National-Socialists took power in Germany in 1933, Plessner was dismissed because of his Jewish ancestry. He emigrated to Istanbul in Turkey, but his attempt to obtain a professorship there failed. Upon being invited by his friend F.J.J. Buytendijk, he went to Groningen, in the north of the Netherlands, where he was appointed extraordinary professor of sociology in 1939, thanks to a number of sociological studies Plessner had previously published, such as the aforementioned *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924) and *The Fate of the German Spirit at the End of Its Civil Era* [*Das Schicksal des Deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche*, 1935], reprinted in 1955 under the title *The Delayed Nation* [*Die verspätete Nation*] – in which he analized the religious, social and philosophical roots of National Socialism. According to Plessner, the political barbarism of National Socialism could largely be attributed to the fact that, unlike most other states in Europe in the nineteenth century, Germany had not experienced civil revolution, which meant that the German people followed the path of cultural emancipation instead of political revolution. Given this background, it was not in the least surprising that to Plessner, philosophical anthropology – first and foremost – had a practical aim. In 1936, he gave an address on the task of philosophical anthropology in which he argued that the degeneration of the classical and Christian legacies had created a cultural void which fundamentally threatened the essence of humankind. The task of philosophical anthropology is to remind people of their possibilities, hidden in 'the shadow of tomorrow.'

The fact that philosophical anthropology remained important to Plessner during his sociology professorship can be seen from publications such as *Laughing and Crying: Inquiries to the Boundaries of Human Behavior* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941].

In 1943, after the German occupation of the Netherlands, his Jewish lineage forced him to go into hiding. After the war he was reappointed to a post in Groningen, but this time as full professor of philosophy. In 1951, he returned to Germany and was appointed professor of philosophy and sociology in Göttingen. In this position, he carried out various administrative functions, including that of dean, *rector magnificus* (vice chancellor) in Göttingen, and chairman of the German Association of Sociologists. Upon invitation by Adorno and Horkheimer, he also contributed to the research of the Institut für Sozialforschung (the Frankfurt School). In 1962, he was appointed for a one-year term as visiting professor at the New School for Social Research in New York City. In the last period of his academic career, from 1965 to 1972, he was professor of philosophy in Zürich, Switzerland. Plessner died in Göttingen at age 92 in 1985.

Between 1980 and 1985, Suhrkamp published Plessner's *Collected Writings* [*Gesammelte Schriften*] in ten volumes.[4] It will probably take quite some time before the entire collection is available in English. However, the English-speaking community can duly anticipate the translation of *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, a book that occupies a key position in his oeuvre and presents both Plessner's philosophy of nature and the building blocks of his philosophical anthropology, social philosophy, and philosophy of culture and technology. Without a doubt, *Levels of the Organic and Man* is Plessner's magnum opus. It will also be the chief point of reference of this volume.

Eccentric positionality

We can only understand the importance of Plessner's concept 'eccentric positionality' (*exzentrische Positionalität*) if we place it in the light of human finitude, a theme that dominates modern philosophy as no other (cf. De Mul 2004). Of course, the finitude of man is not an exclusively modern theme, as it already played a prominent role in medieval thinking. However, as Odo Marquard has shown, in modern philosophy there has

4 A selection of texts of Plessner not included in the *Collected Writings,* entitled *Politics – Anthropology – Philosophy: Essays and Lectures* [*Politik–Anthropologie–Philosophie: Aufsätze und Vorträge*], has been published in 2001 by Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing (Plessner 2001). In addition, Hans-Ulrich Lessing has published a series of previously unpublished lectures of Plessner, in which his philosophical anthropology is presented in a broad philosophical context: *Elemente der Metaphysik: Eine Vorlesung aus dem Wintersemester 1931/32* [*Elements of Metaphysics: Winter Semester Lectures 1931/32*] (Plessner 2002).

been an important shift in the meaning of the concept. Where the finite, in contrast to a transcendent, self-causing (*causa sui*) God, was initially understood as that which is created – that is to say, that which does not have its ground in itself – in modern secularized culture it is defined immanently as that which is limited in space and time (Marquard 1981, 120). A crucial difference between Plessner and Heidegger lies in their diverging points of departure with regards to their reflection on man, marked by related though distinctively different dimensions of human finitude. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's focal point is finitude in *time*. In this context, finitude is primarily understood as mortality and the human way of being (*Dasein*, literary translated: there-being), characterized by the awareness of this mortality, consequently is defined as a Being-unto-death (*Sein zum Tode*). In *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, however, Plessner's point of departure is finitude in *space*, in which finitude is primarily defined as *positionality* and human life, in its specific relation to its positionality, as decentered or, in his vocabulary, *eccentric* positionality (*exzentrische Positionalität*).

The fact that Heidegger takes the experience of temporality as his departure point vastly determines his abstraction from the corporality of man, and as a consequence shows an affinity to the idealistic rather than the materialistic tradition (cf. Schulz 1953-1954). In contrast, by putting the emphasis on the spatial dimension, Plessner assigns a central role to (our relationship to) our physical body. In Plessner's anthropology, the biological dimension plays a crucial role and an important part of his analysis aims at demarcating man from other – living and lifeless – bodies. However, although Plessner, as a trained biologist, pays much attention to the empirical knowledge about life, his focus is on the transcendental-phenomenological analysis of the material a priori of the subsequent life forms, particularly that of the human. In the first part of this volume, various aspects of Plessner's method and anthropology will be discussed and compared to competing paradigms in more detail. Here, I will restrict myself to a short introduction of some of the key concepts of his philosophy of nature and anthropology.

According to Plessner, the living body distinguishes itself from the lifeless in that it does not only possess contours but is characterized by a boundary (or border) (*Grenze*), and consequently by the crossing of this boundary (*Grenzverkehr*). Moreover, the living body is characterized by a specific relationship to its own boundary, that is, by a specific form of positionality. The positionality of living creatures is linked to their double aspectivity (*Doppelaspektivität*): they have a relationship to both sides of their

constituting boundary, both to the inner and the outer side (GS V, 138f.).[5] Anticipating Ryle's later critique, Plessner's concept of double aspectivity explicitly opposes the Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, in which both poles are fundamentalized ontologically. Conversely, Plessner considers life to encompass a physical-psychic unity; a lived body which, depending on which aspect is disclosed, appears as either body or mind.

The manner in which positionality is organized determines the difference between plant, animal and human being. In the 'open' organization of a plant, the organism does not express a relationship to its own positionality. Neither the inner nor the outer has a center. In other words, the plant is characterized by a boundary which has no one or nothing on either side, neither subject nor object (GS V, 282f.). A relationship with its own positionality first appears in the 'closed' or centric organization of animals. In an animal organism, that which crosses the boundary is mediated by a center, which at a physical level can be localized in the nervous system, and at the psychic level is characterized by awareness of the environment. Thus, what distinguishes the animal from the plant is that not only does it have a body, it is also *in* its body. Furthermore, the human life form distinguishes itself from that of the animal by also cultivating a relationship with this center. Although we inevitably also take up a centrist position, we have, in addition, a specific relationship to this center. There is therefore a second mediation: human beings are aware of their center of experience or being, and as such, eccentric. "Man not only lives (*lebt*) and experiences his life (*erlebt*), but he also experiences his experience of life" (GS V, 364). In other words: as eccentric beings we are not where we experience, and we don't experience where we are.[6] Expressed from the perspective of the body: "A living person *is* a body, is *in* his body (as inner experience or soul) and at the same time outside his body as the perspective, from which he is both" (GS V, 365). Because of this tripartite determination of human existence, human beings live in three worlds: an outer world (*Aussenwelt*), an inner

5 GS stands for Helmuth Plessner's *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS), edited by Günter Dux et al., 10 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980-1985). Volume V of these collected works contains *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch.* Some of the authors in this volume refer to the edition published by De Gruyter (Berlin and New York, 1975). Unfortunately the pagination of these two editions is not identical.

6 With this emphasis on the decentred position of the subject, Plessner's philosophical anthropology clearly anticipates the (neo)structuralist conception of man as we find it, for example, in the writings of Jacques Lacan (see Ebke and Schloßberger 2012).

world (*Innenwelt*), and the shared world of culture (*Mitwelt*).[7] Because of life's double aspectivity, each of these three worlds appears to human beings both from an inner and an outer perspective. Our body (as part of the outer world) is both physical body (*Körper*) – that is to say, a thing among things that occupies a specific space in an objective space-time continuum – and a living body (*Leib*) that functions as the center of our perception and actions. In its turn the inner world is both soul (*Seele*), the active source of our psychic life, and lived experience (*Erlebnis*), the theatre in which the psychic processes take place. With regard to the world of culture we are both an I (*Ich*), which participates in the creation of this world of culture, and a We (*Wir*) insofar as we are supported and formed by this shared world.

In closing this brief exposition of some of the key concepts of Plessner's philosophical anthropology, I wish to make one critical comment. According to Plessner, eccentric positionality is the highest level of positionality: "A further development beyond this point is impossible, because the living thing here really has reached a position behind itself" (GS V, 363). On a formal level, Plessner's dialectics of life here seems to remain bound to the closed dialectics of German Idealism. Moreover, this comment is difficult to interpret in any other way but as anthropocentric.[8] Given Plessner's biological background, this is rather surprising. On the basis of the (Neo)-Darwinian theory of evolution, it seems naïve to presuppose that evolution of life has reached its completion with man. Plessner undoubtedly had good methodological and political reasons for placing the diachronic dimension of life between parentheses in his *The Levels of the Organic and Man*. His analysis is not so much directed towards the evolutionary or historical development of life; but is rather a synchronic analysis of the conditions of the possibility of the different life forms on earth. As Lolle Naute, one of Plessner's students in Groningen and later successor of his professorship, has argued, this exclusively synchronic approach excludes the possibility of posing a number of important questions – for example, regarding the non-parallel historical development of the inner world (*Innenwelt*), the outer

7 A similar distinction has been made by Popper in *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Popper 1972, 118f.).

8 Though Plessner in his anthropology speaks in a universalist and anthropocentric terminology about 'man,' the notion of eccentric positionality cannot be termed ethnocentric. As we will see in the next section, the fundamental *openness* that characterizes the eccentricity of human beings is the very condition of possibility of cultural and individual differences. In this sense Plessner's philosophical anthropology is a non-essentialistic ontology, 'for forms of life are not defined on the basis of distinctive attributes but in terms of realized scopes of action' (Kockelkoren 1992, 207).

world (*Aussenwelt*) and the cultural world (*Mitwelt*). He therefore suggests supplementing Plessner's synchronic approach with a diachronic one (Nauta 1991). He argues, for example, following the sociologist Norbert Elias, for an examination of the decentralizing processes, in order to clarify the historical discovery of the three mentioned domains of eccentric positionality. However, according to Nauta, for Plessner the synchronic typology of the three life forms remains the fundamental conceptual framework. This implies that in Plessner's work, the impact of evolutionary, historical and/or technological developments on the existing types of positionality largely remains untouched. In my view, this restriction is neither theoretically nor practically fruitful. As we will see in the third part of this book, present-day converging technologies challenge the very ontological structure of human positionality. However, we will also notice that Plessner's terminology is apt to describe this ontological transformation of man.

Three anthropological laws

In Plessner's philosophical anthropology, culture and technology are inextricably linked with eccentric positionality: "As an eccentric being man is not in an equilibrium, he is without a place, he stands outside time in nothingness, he is characterized by a constitutive homelessness (*ist konstitutiv heimatlos*). He always still has to become 'something' and create an equilibrium for himself" (GS V, 385). This observation gives rise to the first of the three basic laws of anthropology, which in the last chapter of *The Levels of the Organic and Man* Plessner derives from the notion of eccentric positionality, stating human beings are *artificial by nature*.

> Man tries to escape the unbearable eccentricity of his being, he wants to compensate for the lack that constitutes his life form. Eccentricity and the need for complements are one and the same. Given the context, we should not understand "need" psychologically or as something subjective. It is something that is logically prior to every psychological need, drive, tendency or will. In this fundamental need or nakedness, we find the motive for everything that is specifically human: the focus on the *irrealis* and the use of artificial means, the ultimate foundation of the *technical artefact* and that which it serves: *culture* (GS V, 385).

In other words, technology and culture are not only – and not even in the first place – instruments of survival but an ontic necessity (*ontische*

Notwendigkeit) (GS V, 396). In this sense, we are justified in claiming that human beings have always been cyborgs, that is: beings composed of both organic and technological components. Strictly speaking of course, technical and cultural artifacts such as knives, cars, books and computers are not part of the biological body. Yet, as soon as they become part of human life they also become part of the human body scheme and cognitive structure.

The world of culture and technology is the expression of the desire of human beings to bridge the distance that separates them from the world, their fellow man and themselves. Since time immemorial technology has been directed at crossing the boundaries that are given in time and space with our finitude. This applies to 'alpha-technologies,' such as writing, which compensates for our finitude in time by enabling us to make use of the knowledge and experience of our ancestors and to pass on our own knowledge and experience to our descendents. It also applies to 'beta-technologies,' which have been developed abundantly, particularly since the birth of natural science. The telescope and the microscope, for example, have made it possible to (partially) overcome the spatial limitations of our senses. For this reason, Peter Weibel argues that technology must be primarily understood as *tele*technology:

> Technology helps us to fill, to bridge, to overcome the insufficiency emerging from absence. Every form of technology is teletechnology and serves to overcome spatial and temporal distance. However, this victory over distance and time is only a phenomenological aspect of the (tele)media. The real effect of the media lies in overcoming the mental disturbance (fears, control mechanisms, castration complexes, etc.) caused by distance and time, by all forms of absence, leave, separation, disappearance, interruption, withdrawal and loss. By overcoming or shutting off the negative horizon of absence, the technical media become technologies of care and presence. By visualizing the absent, making it symbolically present, the media also transform the damaging consequences of absence into pleasant ones. While overcoming distance and time, the media also help us to overcome the fear with which these inspire the psyche (Weibel 1992, 75).

On the basis of Plessner's second anthropological law – that of *meditated immediacy* – there is also a comment to be made regarding the hope that culture and technology allow us to take control over our lives. Plessner rightly points out that although human beings are the creators of their technology and culture, the latter acquire their own momentum: "Equally

essential for the technical artifact is its inner weight, its objectivity that discloses the aspect of technology that only can be found or discovered, but never made. Everything that enters the sphere of culture shows its dependence on human creation. But at the same time (and to the same extent) it is independent from man" (GS V, 397).

Technological actions and cultural expressions have all kinds of unintentional side-effects which place strict limits on predictability and controlability. Furthermore, as we are not alone in the world but interact with other persons, we are constantly confronted with interests and powers that conflict with our desires. And while life as we know it remains dependent on finite, physical bodies, the dream of immortality will always persist.

In Plessner's view, illusions of control no less than the religious hope to find eternal bliss are doomed to remain unfulfilled dreams. We find this expressed in Plessner's third anthropological law, that of man's *utopian standpoint*. The promise to provide that which by definition man must do without – "safety, reconciliation with fate, understanding reality, a native soil" (GS V, 420) – can be no other than a religious or secular illusion. The fact that for many people in a society such as ours, technology has taken over the utopian role of religion does not make this law any less valid. In reality, attempts to find or create a paradise often result in the very opposite. However, this should not surprise us, given that *in*humanity is inextricably linked with human eccentricity. Or as Plessner expressed it in *Unmenschlichkeit*: "The inhuman is not bound to any specific era, but a possibility which is inherent to human life: the possibility to negate itself" (Plessner 1982, 205).

Overview of the contents of this volume

In this volume, the focus is on Plessner's philosophical anthropology as he developed it in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* (1928) and a number of his subsequent writings. The reason for this focal point not only has to do with the great number of publications that Plessner devoted to philosophical anthropology in general and to various specific anthropological themes, but also because his philosophical anthropology constitutes the foundation for his writings in other disciplines, such as sociology, politicology and aesthetics. The volume is divided into three parts.

The chapters in Part I of this volume discuss Plessner's *philosophical anthropology* by situating it within the landscape of contemporary Darwinistic life sciences and competing philosophical accounts of human life in continental philosophy that are already more familiar in the Anglo-

Saxon academic community, such as those of Kant, Bergson, and Deleuze. Although various aspects of Plessner's philosophical anthropology come to the fore, the *eccentric positionality* of the human life form plays a central role in almost all of the contributions in this part. This is not surprising, as from Plessner's anthropological perspective – which focuses on the essential characteristics (*Wesensmerkmale*) rather than on gradual empirical development – it is especially in this eccentric positionality that *Homo sapiens sapiens* differs radically from other, non-human animals. It is because of this eccentricity that our species is artificial by nature and has developed itself in an abundant variety of cultural and technological expressions.

The contributions in Part II discuss a variety of phenomena of *human culture*, from the perspective of Plessner's anthropology, applying key concepts like boundary, positionality, and the three anthropological laws. The authors discuss cultural domains like human dwelling, multiculturalism, law, medicine, and social work, and throw light on dimensions like masks and role playing, as well as on the constitutive homelessness of man. In this part, too, Plessner's ideas are compared and confronted with the works of thinkers that are more familiar to the Anglo-Saxon world, such as Hannah Arendt, Johan Huizinga, Niklas Luhmann, and Richard Sennett.

Part III is devoted to *technology*, a dimension of the natural artificiality of the human life form, which seems to have become the most dominant feature of globalized postmodern societies. One of the themes in this part is the impact of converging technologies, like neuroscience, genetic engineering and information technology on human self-understanding. In connection with this, other chapters focus on the technological mediation of human identity, the cyborgization of man and the future of the human life form. Some of the chapters go beyond the human life form and discuss the eccentricity and criminal liability of artificial life forms. Within this context also the implications of these developments for philosophical anthropology as a paradigm for human self-understanding are being questioned. As the comparison with some leading theorists in the domain of philosophy of technology, such as Don Ihde and Stiegler will show, Plessner's views on technology continue to be of utmost relevance for today's thinking.

In the following I will give a more detailed overview of the subsequent chapters in this volume.

Part I: Anthropology

In the first chapter, *Philosophical Anthropology: A Third Way between Darwinism and Foucaultism*, Joachim Fischer distinguishes between two

different meanings of the word 'philosophical anthropology.' One can either use it to refer to a specific (sub)discipline within philosophy, or as the name for a specific paradigm. According to Fisher, Plessner's philosophical anthropology offers a paradigmatic shift in our conception of man, which enables us to bridge the gap between two competing paradigms of naturalism and culturalism. According to Fisher, Plessner's philosophical anthropology not only enables us to combine the approaches of naturalism and culturalism, but it also limits the range of application of each of these paradigms.

Hans-Peter Krüger continues the discussion of the relationship between Plessner and theories of evolution in *The Nascence of Modern Man: Two Approaches to the Problem – Biological Evolutionary Theory and Philosophical Anthropology*. In his contribution, Krüger discusses the interdisciplinary contribution of Plessner's philosophical anthropology to the study of the nascence of *modern* man (in the biological sense of *Homo sapiens sapiens*) in contemporary evolutionary research. Against the background of Plessner's notion of eccentric positionality and Tomasello's related notion of collective intentionality, Krüger discusses a number of topics that play a crucial role in the remarkably fast sociocultural development of modern man, such as mimesis, role playing, the emancipation of ontogeny from phylogeny, the transformation of human drives, as well as the specific relationship between generalism and specialism.

Heike Delitz also takes a comparative approach in her contribution. In "*True*" *and* "*False*" *Evolutionism: Bergson's Critique of Spencer, Darwin & Co. and Its Relevance for Plessner* (*and Us*), she approaches Plessner's relationship to theory of evolution from the perspective of his 'sparring partner' Henri Bergson. In *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson criticizes Darwin, Spencer and other contemporary evolutionary theorists for failing to understand the process character of the evolution of life. Although Plessner strongly criticizes Bergson for being a "philosopher against experience," Delitz explains that at the same time, Bergson was an important source of inspiration for Plessner. Not only do Plessner and Bergson both distinguish between the 'open' life form of plants, the 'closed' life form of animals and the 'natural artificiality' of the human life form, but they also share a fundamentally non-mechanistic approach to life. Especially this last characteristic gives both Bergson and Plessner a renewed relevance to our present "biological age."

In *Life, Concept and Subject: Plessner's Vital turn in the Light of Kant and Bergson*, Thomas Ebke continues Delitz's analysis of the relationship between Bergson and Plessner. According to Ebke, the philosophy of both thinkers is characterized by a 'vital turn,' which implies that life itself

dictates the concepts we employ to understand what life is. Contrary to the explicit claim of Plessner and many of his commentators, Ebke argues that this vital turn cannot be conceived of as a transcendental turn in a strict Kantian sense. Whereas Kant's transcendental deduction of the conditions of the possibility of objects leads back to the a priori forms and categories of the subject, Plessner's "deduction of the categories of the vital" leads him to a 'material a priori': the boundary-realization of living things, which is in the vital performance that is carried out both by ourselves *and* by the objects we experience. We are only able to deduce the specific boundary realization of other life forms because, as eccentric beings, we are able to take a transcendental perspective at the world that is no longer attached to our specific (centric) organic shape. Referring to a similar tension in the work of Bergson, Ebke argues that both philosophers of life were caught in a struggle between a transcendental analysis and the insight into the material a priori of life.

In *Bodily Experience and Experiencing One's Body*, Maarten Coolen shows that, concerning the bodily dimension of human life, Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology has remarkable similarities with Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Both thinkers emphasize the embodied intentionality of our being-in-the-world. However, according to Coolen, Merleau-Ponty underemphasizes the double aspectivity of human existence. As Plessner has shown, because of this double aspectivity, man not only *is* a living body (*Leib*), but he also *has* its living body as a physical body (*Körper*), that is a 'thing' amidst other objects in the world. Discussing Plessner's three anthropological laws, Coolen points at some crucial implications of this double aspectivity. Seen from the perspective of the law of *mediated immediacy*, human corporeality is characterized by the fact that as a living body, we mediate our (immediate) contact with the world by getting our physical body to do things. While we share this 'instrumental' use of our body with other animals, as human beings that are eccentric as well, we distinguish ourselves from sheer centric animals by experiencing the relationship between the living body and the physical body. Man's *natural artificiality* is closely connected with this: being aware of the inherent instrumental nature of his corporeality, man also experiences the shortcomings of his body and is being forced to supplement it with artificial (cultural and technological) means. In Plessner's view, the law of the *utopian standpoint* is another necessary consequence of our eccentric positionality: both being a body and having it, we can never find a fully secure place in the world, but instead maintain an perpetual longing for such a 'safe haven.' In the remaining sections of his contribution, Coolen

argues that the notion of eccentric positionality makes it possible to answer some questions that remain unanswered in Hubert Dreyfus's account of learning skillful action (which was inspired by Merleau-Ponty). Taking learning to skate as an example, Coolen shows that our body is not only familiar with the world, but also always remains alien to itself.

In *Plessner and the Mathematical-Physical Perspective: The Prescientific Objectivity of the Human Body*, Jasper van Buuren continues the discussion about the experience of our body as a physical body (*Körper*). In his contribution the focus is on the question whether the body as a physical *object* should be understood from a scientific or a prescientific perspective. Taking the scientific perspective of the body as a stepping stone, Van Buuren argues that, in spite of some passages in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* in which Plessner seems to endorse the primacy of the scientific perspective; this perspective is actually rendered possible by the prescientific objectivity of the body. Referring to Plessner's analysis of the difference between phenomenal things and Descartes's *res extensa*, Van Buuren argues that although our own physical body is not phenomenal, it does not fit into the Cartesian concept of *res extensa* either. In a sense, Van Buuren argues that both our physical body and our embodied subjectivity are intermediate layers between the interior boundary of eccentricity and physical things in Cartesian "directionless space." In his view the physical body is our body insofar as it is not yet subject, insofar as it does not yet reach out for a world that transcends it, even insofar as it is not yet organic, i.e. it is not yet a *living* body. In the final analysis, there appears to be a gap in the (ec)centric human life form between the physical and the living body. Both aspects inevitably exist next to each other, leading to two separate worldviews. Although Plessner's 'perspectivist dualism' should not be identified with Cartesian substance dualism, both dualisms point at a fundamental tension in the human life form.

Plessner's perspectivist dualism returns in Janna van Grunsven's *The Exploited Body: Torture and the Destruction of Selfhood.* In this contribution, Van Grunsven uses Plessner's notion of our twofold corporeality – of simultaneously being a body and having a body – to analyze one of the devastating aftereffects of torture as it is consistently mentioned by its victims, namely the permanent loss of trust in the self. Essential for understanding this phenomenon, as Van Grunsven takes it, is the consistently mentioned experience of having one's very own body turn against oneself during these horrific events. By first exploring David Sussman's insightful, yet conceptually flawed Kantian attempt to understand this peculiar encounter with our own body, she argues that it is Helmuth Plessner's rich conception of

human corporeality that allows us to understand its nature and conditions of possibility. Because our body can respond for us beyond the reach of our control, it is also the involuntary regions of our corporeality that make us deeply vulnerable to others, who can induce our involuntary bodily expressions even without our consent. Even though the victim is rendered completely defenseless at the mercy of another subject as she is obstructed in her autonomous control of her body, her eccentric positionality makes it impossible for her not to take up a position. It is precisely because we are condemned to always take up a position, and because we do this even when we have no autonomous control over our body, that torture through deliberate exploitation can turn the victim's body against herself, causing a permanent distrust within the victim, not just towards the world, but towards herself.

In *Plessner's Theory of Eccentricity: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Medicine*, Oreste Tolone discusses the relevance of Plessner's work for medical anthropology and the philosophy of medicine. His starting point, like several other authors in Part I, is the tension between being a body and having a body, aiming to balance these two positions. Referring to Plessner's three anthropological laws, Tolone claims that a healthy person is he who manages to stay in balance between naturality and artificiality, mediacy and immediacy, rootedness and utopia. However, as human life is characterized by a constitutional lack of balance, health is not something given, but rather something we always still have to achieve. When we fall back to either our centric pole or our eccentric pole, physical or mental illness and suffering are the result. As long as an ill person doesn't lose his eccentric position, he never coincides entirely with his own illness. According to Tolone, this has important implications for the doctor-patient relationship. Modern medical practice often reduces the patient to a sheer physical body, and thereby disturbs the balance required for a healthy life rather than restoring it. Although Plessner did not write extensively on the topics of health and illness, Tolone shows that his conception of the compound nature of man has certainly contributed to contemporary medical controversies, influencing authors such as Gadamer and Habermas.

Although Plessner uses the words "subject" and "object" occasionally, he predominantly refers to individuals that are characterized by eccentric positionality as *persons*. In *The Duty of Personal Identity: Authenticity and Irony*, Martino Enrico Boccignone investigates the phenomenon of personal identity, focusing on the relationship between personal and collective identity in our present globalized and medialized world. The author argues that, from a Plessnerian point of view, personal and cultural identities are

not essentialist entities, but rather open and dynamic structures involving differences in the way they change and are open to self-correction and reorientation. Taking up the Plessnerian notion of role playing already introduced in Krüger's contribution, Boccignone emphasizes that because of his eccentric positionality, every person is a 'double' (*Doppelgänger*), having both a private and a public dimension. From this point of view, Plessner criticizes both the Romantic ideal of a complete integration of individual and community, as well as the Frankfurt School notion of alienation that is based on this ideal. Referring to *Levels of the Organic and Man*, the author especially emphasizes the inscrutability and natural artificiality of human beings. Natural artificiality is not just a negative divergence or aberration from the naturality of the other living beings, but it is also the very basis for individual freedom, self-determination, and individual responsibility. The undetermined character of its agency implies the possibility of a relative emancipation from both natural and cultural environments and their constraints. It also opens fruitful perspectives for conceptualizing intercultural understanding and dialogue and mutual cultural fertilization. In the final section, Boccignone makes some critical remarks about the notion of (Heideggerian) authenticity, as the natural artificiality of man makes every individual and cultural identity inescapably temporal. Against such dangerous enthusiasm for authenticity, the author defends the 'ironic self,' which can be seen as an equilibrist that always tries to keep a delicate balance between the lack of a homeland and cosmopolitanism.

Part II: Culture

In *Anthropology as a Foundation of Cultural Philosophy: The Connection of Human Nature and Culture by Helmuth Plessner and Ernst Cassirer*, Henrike Lerch opens the second part of this volume. She introduces Plessner's philosophy of culture from the perspective of the hermeneutic life philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, one of Plessner's main sources of inspiration. She then compares Plessner's philosophy of culture with Ernst Cassirer's kindred position, as developed in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Both Plessner and Cassirer continue Dilthey's project of expanding Kant's critical analysis of human knowledge, which was mainly directed at the sciences that study nature, to the domain of the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which have culture as their object. Following Dilthey, both Plessner and Cassirer's focus on the dimension of the 'expression' (*Ausdruck*) in their theories on culture. However, Lerch argues that while Cassirer restricted himself mainly to an analysis of the symbolic forms (such as language, myth, and

science), Plessner connects these expressions to the bodily and biological dimension of human culture. Moreover, in the case of Plessner, expression is not restricted to human life, but becomes a key characteristic of all living beings.

Robert Mugerauer also emphasizes the narrow relationship of biology to culture in *Bi-Directional Boundaries: Eccentric Life and Its Environment.* Taking Plessner's notion of 'boundary' as his starting point, Mugerauer focuses on the analogous, though potentially misleading relationships between membrane/cell, skin/body and wall/house or city. The skin of the body and the wall of a house or around a city play the same role as the semi-permeable membrane of a cell, which is not so much something that closes the cell off from the environment, but rather a boundary that both opens up the cell to the surrounding world and constitutes a shelter against it. These two aspects form part of a circular, self-sustaining process, in which the cell, body and city all show organizational closure coupled to a structural openness. Mugerauer argues that Plessner's basic insights with regards to these analogous pairs are in line with current scientific and phenomenological theories and research. He not only refers to the work of Maturana and Varela on autopoetic systems, but also to Heidegger's writings on human dwelling, and Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on territorialization.

In *The Unbearable Freedom of Dwelling*, Jetske van Oosten goes deeper into the built environment. In her contribution, Van Oosten discusses the effects of globalization and information networks on human dwelling. She discerns a growing uniformity in lifestyles, value systems and patterns of behavior, which can also be recognized in urban spaces throughout the world. In order to interpret and evaluate the emergence of such non-places, she confronts *New Babylon*, the visionary architecture of Constant Nieuwenhuys, with Plessner's notion of the "constitutive homelessness of man." First, Van Oosten argues that eccentric man, unlike other animals, indeed lacks a place he can call home. However, being an ambiguous life form that is characterized by both centric and eccentric positionality, man constantly longs for a home and – following the law of natural artificiality – has to create one for himself. Open for limitless possibilities of dwelling, man creates artificial homes, ranging from tents to skyscrapers. However, in everyday life, the law of 'mediated immediacy' implies that as soon as limitless possibilities become reality, they acquire an independent and unpredictable autonomy that resist man's freedom. In everyday life, traditions and habits rule. Constant's New Babylon, a visionary architectonical world in which nothing is permanent, glorifies man's limitless openness

and freedom to dwell. However, as a glorification of possibilities, it does not offer its inhabitants the (temporary) security and trust of a home. As such, New Babylon foreshadows our postmodern fleeting, transient and contingent world, full of non-places. However, according to Van Oosten, man never ceases to search for a definitive home. As the law of utopian standpoint predicts, man keeps oscillating between possibility and reality, between eccentric homelessness and a centric longing for a home.

In his contribution *Eccentric Positionality and Urban Space*, Huib Ernste continues the discussion about human dwelling. As a human geographer, he focuses on the relationship between human beings and the environment and that between man and space. However, whereas in the tradition of human geography, space got a lot of theoretical attention, the role of man has been underestimated. While Simmel still wrote his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" with a profound 'anthropological sensitivity,' under influence of modernism and the postmodern proclamation of the death of the subject in the work of Wirth and later urban geographers a growing neglect of the human dimension can be discerned. Ernste pleads for an anthropological return in human geography and he argues that because of the prominent role of the spatial dimension of human life in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, this theory holds special relevance. Notions like 'boundary' and 'eccentricity' can help us shed new light on the relationship between human beings and urban spaces, and can help us develop another, more human forms of urban policy. Following a suggestion of Delitz in her work on architecture, Ernste points at comparable developments in the contemporary French 'sociology of life,' for which Deleuze, taking up the work of Bergson, is an important source of inspiration.

In *Strangely Familiar: The Debate on Multiculturalism and Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, Kirsten Pols takes up a topical theme that has already been mentioned briefly by Boccignone in Part I of this volume. Referring to the often antagonistic debates on multiculturalism and identity politics, Pols demonstrates the relevance of Plessner's philosophical anthropology for this debate and for social and political philosophy and theory in general. The starting point of her investigation is the notion of *Unergründlichkeit*, one of the key concepts in Plessner's anthropology, which Pols translates as *indeterminacy*. It is because of the radical indeterminacy that characterizes the eccentric form of life and expresses itself in its natural artificiality, mediated immediacy and utopian character, that man not only lacks a home, but also a fixed self-identity. As a result, we are never completely familiar with ourselves. Our own self always already carries within its boundaries, aspects of the unknown and unfamiliar. Moreover,

indeterminacy also characterizes the political struggle for power in intersubjective relations among individuals. From a Plessnerian point of view, human history cannot be reduced to a single principle or purpose. The principle of indeterminacy not only excludes essentialism, historism and determinism with regard to Western culture, but it also has implications for the way we think of and deal with other cultures and eras. In the second part of her contribution, Pols focuses on the way our bodily existence affects the sphere of politics. Connecting to Plessner's analysis of *Laughing and Crying* [*Lachen und Weinen*, 1941], Pols argues that in multicultural encounters in which we are confronted with ambiguous or overwhelming meanings and emotions, our bodies temporarily take over the control over the situation. Awareness of these kinds of ambiguities and impotence may warn us against oversimplifying ethical discussions about cultural identity, group rights and cultural practices.

The next two contributions focus on masks, a phenomenon we find in all cultures and of which Plessner offers an interesting interpretation. As Veronica Magyar-Haas explains in *De-Masking as a Characteristic of Social Work?*, the phenomenon of the social mask is an immediate consequence of man's eccentric positionality and artificiality. To her, our life is characterized by a gap between ourselves and our experiences. Our experience of our own inner life and our bodily existence is always mediated by our eccentric experience of our experience, and so is our social life. Our interactions with other persons are always mediated by the social roles we play. Social masks are an integral part of our personality. As Plessner argues in *The Limits of Community* [*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 1924] and *Power and Human Nature* [*Macht und menschliche Natur*, 1931], it is precisely the fact that we are both centric and eccentric that characterizes our existence with an ontological ambiguity. Social masks both unveil and cover ourselves, and as such they are closely connected with the need for recognition and shame. In her contribution, Magyar-Haas investigates the implications of these general insights for social work. Connecting to a distinction Plessner makes in *Laughing and Crying* between involuntary mimic expressions and instrumental gestural expressions, the author analyzes a meeting of a group of girls in a youth center, in which the dialectics of de-masking and re-masking, shame and need for recognition, are used to realize changes in experience and behavior. Referring to related analyses of Butler, Sartre, and Levinas, she shows how shameful situations can serve as a method for stimulating individuals to internalize the predominant norms of the group.

In *Helmuth Plessner as a Social Theorist: Role Playing in Legal Discourse*, Bas Hengstmengel argues that Plessner's analysis of public life as a public

sphere of social roles, prestige, ceremonies, and tact, has a clarifying potential to legal discourse. Legal subjects in a process can be regarded as prototypical role players, as their action potential is strictly framed by process law, practices and customs. According to Hengstmengel, Plessner's notion of social roles can offer a model for the legal subject as an abstract bearer of rights and duties. After a discussion of several key elements in Plessner's social philosophy, which he developed in his social and political works – next to the aforementioned *Limits of Community* and *Power and Human Nature* Hengstmengel refers to the later work *On This Side of Utopia* [*Diesseits der Utopie*, 1966] – he briefly compares Plessner's theory with some related thoughts of Sennett, Tonkiss, Arendt, Huizinga, and Luhmann. They all seem to share the idea that artificiality and formality of roles, forms and masks contribute to a healthy distance between inner and outer life. Man inevitably has to be a double (*Döppelganger*) in order to protect the self and society. After a concise discussion of the required skills of diplomacy and tact, Hengstmengel concludes his contribution by pointing at some threats to both the stability of the self and the stability and functioning of the legal system.

That Habermas's reception of Plessner's idea does not come without tensions, is demonstrated by Matthias Schloβberger in *Habermas's New Turn towards Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*. The point of discord concerns the political dimension of human life. Although Plessner's philosophical anthropology is not inherently connected with a specific political orientation, it emphasizes human freedom and – because of the law of utopian standpoint – is rather sceptical towards the grand narratives of totalitarian ideologies such as fascism or communism. However, as from the perspective of the Frankfurt School, philosophical anthropology has often been criticized as being reactive (in the sense of naturalistic) and politically conservative. In his early work, Habermas did not criticize Plessner directly, but via his critique of Gehlen, whose philosophy is indeed naturalistic and conservative. Gehlen argues that due to the indeterminacy and malleability of human nature, human beings need the protection of strict institutions.

However, Plessner's philosophy is not naturalistic in the Gehlenian sense, but rather transcendental (though it is, as noted in Ebke's contribution, a transcendentalism of a special type), and neither does he defend a Gehlen-like institutional conservatism. Schloβberger argues that Habermas has neither revised nor modified this negative assessment of philosophical anthropology, even though he used some of Plessner's ideas in his latest works about the ethics of the species and the future of human life. It is only in his more recent publications on genetics and genetic manipulation

that Habermas seems to recognize that his approach so far lacked a certain explanatory power. By taking some ideas of Helmuth Plessner into consideration, he interprets the unavailability of human life as the unavailability of living beings who live in the tension between being a living body and having a physical body. However, to this day, he has not clearly articulated the full impact of this recognition. It forces Habermas to a paradigm shift away from his rationalist philosophy of language towards a philosophy of the expressiveness of living beings.

Part III: Technology

In *The Quest for the Sources of the Self, Seen from the Vantage Point of Plessner's Material a Priori*, the first contribution of Part III of this volume, Petran Kockelkoren makes a transition from culture to technology. His starting point is the philosophical quest for the sources of the self. Against the background of the postmodern proclamation of the death of the subject, Kockelkoren criticizes the conservative attempts to resurrect the modern, authentic and autonomous subject, as we find them, for example, in the work of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur. The self is seen as something that is inscribed in the human body. Opposed to this view, Kockelkoren, following Plessner, argues that self-awareness emerges out of the growing complexity of the organization of life. One of the consequences of our eccentricity is that our knowledge of the world around us, of our own bodies, and even of our so-called inner selves, is always mediated by language, images and technologies. Self and identities are the outcome of technological mediations and their cultural incorporations. Instead of being the origin of our actions and inventions, the self is rather the product of them. Kockelkoren concludes that the anthropology of Helmuth Plessner is very apt for the understanding of self-production in our present-day technological culture and media-society.

In *The Brain in the Vat as the Epistemic Object of Neurobiology*, Gesa Lindemann analyzes everyday practices in neurobiological laboratories from the perspective of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Her focus is on neurobiological experiments with invasive electrophysiology (electrodes lowered in the brain) that record complex neural events in order to develop an exploratory theory of the brain. According to the self-understanding of neuroscientists, they provide a mechanistic account of the brain and its functions from a third-person perspective. However, following Plessner, Lindemann argues that the interaction between living beings is always characterized by a second-person perspective. All living beings express

themselves by realizing their boundaries and mediating their contacts with their environment through these boundaries. Moreover, in the case of centric, conscious beings, the living organism perceives, expects and affects, whereas eccentric, self-conscious beings in addition expect the expectations of others. In a detailed description of the four stages a prototypical neurobiological experiment with monkeys, Lindemann shows that in the initial stages in which the experimenters train the laboratory animals, they unavoidably interact from a second-person perspective. It is only during the preparation and analysis of the data that the brain is constructed as the epistemic object of brain research. In this *deceptive* phase of the experiment, the brain no longer appears as the organ of the organism, but as 'the brain itself.' It is only in this final phase of this reductionistic procedure that the 'isolated brain in the vat' becomes the sole object of interest.

Johannes Hätcher also focuses on electrophysiology in *Switching "On," Switching "Off": Does Neurosurgery in Parkinson's Disease Create Man-Machines?* However, his subject is the therapeutic use of deep brain stimulation in patients that suffer from Parkinson's disease. Although brain stimulation is often quite successful in suppressing the symptoms of this disease, enabling the patients to control their body again and live a more or less normal life, there are often serious side-effects. Hätcher argues that Plessner's philosophical anthropology can help to better understand the psychosocial problems which often accompany neurosurgical therapy. One of the apparently dehumanizing implications of deep brain Stimulation is that the brain stimulation can be switched on and off. In Hätcher's view, however, Parkinson patients are not transhumanistic man-machines, but rather stay human in their natural artificiality. In the interviews he had with Parkinson patients and their partners, he noticed that they often had to laugh when they discussed the possibility of switching the patient off. Laughing in these cases expresses the experience that it is abnormal for a human person to react like a machine. By laughing in such abnormal situations, deep brain stimulated patients stay human in their natural artificiality.

Neuroscience and laughter are also the topics of Heleen J. Pott's *On Humor and "Laughing" Rats: Plessner's Importance for Affective Neuroscience*, in which she discusses laughing behavior of primates and lower mammals and the challenge this phenomenon seems to imply for the human self-image. Philosophers from Plato to Plessner have considered laughter as a uniquely human capacity. In recent times however, neuroscientific research seems to undermine philosophy's restriction of laughter to human beings. Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp famously defends the claim that circuits for laughter

exist in ancient brain regions that we share not only with chimpanzees, but also with rats. Pott argues that Plessner's anthropological interpretation of laughter enables us to show how there is a shared biological basis for human and animal laughter, whereas at the same time important ways of laughing are exclusively human. She distinguishes four characteristics that different sorts of laughter all have in common: a perception of incongruity, a buildup of bodily tension and its relief, a specific relationship towards the cause of the laughter, and a mechanism of social inclusion. In this sense, there is a clear continuity between the laughter of all centric beings, from the laughing rat to the laughing human person. However, one typical form of laughter, which is connected with eccentric positionality, is indeed restricted to human beings. If we burst out in laughter in a particular situation and we completely lose control over our body, we experience our twofold corporeality, the fact that we are embodied creatures and creatures in a body at the same time. We are, Pott aptly summarizes her contribution, capable of breaking out into laughter because of our fundamental brokenness.

In *A Moral Bubble: The Influence of Online Personalization on Moral Repositioning*, Esther Keymolen uses Plessner's anthropology to analyse online personalisation with the help of profiling technologies, which tailor internet services to the individual needs and preferences of the users. Referring to the work of various philosophers of technology like Ihde, Verbeek, and Pariser, she first explains how these technologies lead to a 'Filter Bubble,' "a unique universe of information for each of us." Next, she argues that this filtering also might influence our moral repositioning. Using Plessner's notion of positionality, she argues that profiling technologies build a *closed Umwelt* instead of an *open world*, resulting in an online environment that is characterized by *cold ethics* rather than by *hot morality*. In addition, she focuses on the *opaqueness* of the personalized interface. As there has not been much public debate about online personalization until now, clear rules or agreements on how to implement profiling technologies are lacking, according to Keymolen. Therefore, most of the time there is also a lack of transparency with regard to the operations that are being executed automatically 'behind the screen'. Moreover, because users have no direct access to the settings of the interface, they cannot judge for themselves whether the filtering of information is taken place accurately. Consequently, there is little room for moral repositioning. Online personalization might hamper normative reflection, establishing *moral stagnation*. By way of conclusion, Keymolen consider several means to avoid this stagnation. Based on a multi-actor approach, she focus on how users, technologies, and regulation may counter the negative effects of profiling technologies.

In *Eccentric Positionality as a Precondition for the Criminal Liability of Artificial Life Forms*, Mireille Hildebrandt takes up Bas Hengstmengel's discussion about the relevance of Plessner's anthropology for the study of law, though here in a high-tech context. The author explores to what extent Plessner's distinction between animal centricity and human eccentricity is 'the difference that makes the difference' for the attribution of criminal liability among artificial life forms (ALFs). Building on the work of Steels and Bourgine and Varela on artificial life and Matura and Varela's notion of autopoesis, Hildebrandt argues that even if ALFs are autonomous in the sense of having the capacity to rewrite their own program, this in itself is not enough to understand them as autonomous in the sense of instantiating an eccentric position that allows for reflection on their actions as their own actions. Evidently, this also means that only to the extent that ALFs do develop some sort of conscious self-reflection, would they, in principle, qualify for the censure in criminal law. As Plessner does not connect personhood to human beings but rather to eccentric positionality, in principle, ALFs would qualify for personhood.

Dierk Spreen continues the discussion about the cyborgization of man in *Not Terminated: Cyborgized Men Still Remain Human Beings*. As the title already indicates, Spreen defends the thesis that, because of the fact that man always has been artificial and living in an artificial world of culture and technology, electronic implants, artificial limbs and organs etc., do not mark the end of man. However, this does not mean that the technological extensions of the human body that has been made possible by the converging technologies do not raise any questions or debates. The appearance of body-invasive technologies going beyond the boundary of the skin results in theoretical fashions, which on the one hand doubt the significance of man as the basic category of anthropology-based sociology (trans- and post-humanism), and on the other hand question important conceptual differentiations such as those between nature and culture or between organic and technological entities. In contrast to this position, Spreen, closely following Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology, argues that the technologization of the body stays within the limits of man's possibilities, so that we very well may speak of "human cyborgs." In addition, he argues that within the context of the cyborg, it remains reasonable to keep up conceptual distinctions such as nature/culture or life/technology. Finally, Spreen states that particularly modern man is inevitably related to a discursive space of self-reflectibility, where man's natural artificiality takes specific shape and at the same time remains open for change. Moreover, this is not a process in a particular fixed direction.

In the age of "reflexive modernity" (Giddens 1991) it is open for permanent debate and reflection.

In *Plessner and Technology: Philosophical Anthropology Meets the Posthuman*, Peter-Paul Verbeek also contributes to this permanent reflection. He interprets human enhancements and posthumanism from the perspective of Plessner's notion of positionality. He starts his exposition with a discussion of the striking role technology has played in the tradition of philosophical anthropology since the end of the nineteenth century. On the basis of a short overview of the views on technology of, among others, Kapp, Schmidt, Gehlen, and Stiegler, Verbeek concludes that all of these representatives of this tradition have emphasized that there exists no sharp boundary between humans and technology However, Plessner's notion of natural artificiality radicalizes this theme of man as a *deficient* being (*Mängelwesen*), because for him, the human deficit is not the lack of an adequate organic set of instruments for survival, but the consequence of human eccentricity. Next, starting from Plessner's second anthropological law of mediated immediacy and using some further distinctions made by philosophers of technology Ihde and Kockelkoren, Verbeek discusses the different ways technologies mediate the relationship between humans and the world. Human beings embody technologies, interpret the world through them, interact with technologies, and use technologies as a background for experiences. However, according to Verbeek, with technologies such as brain implants, psychotropic drugs, and intelligent prostheses, we enter a new type of relationship with technology, in which man and technology seem to merge more radically than ever. Verbeek argues that it is here where we can encounter a new type of positionality, which he dubs meta-eccentricity. Rather than just having an eccentric relationship to our centric position, we enter a relationship to our eccentricity as well, which thereby becomes malleable.

In *Philosophical Anthropology 2.0*, Jos de Mul concludes the volume with a reflection on the impact of the converging technologies (nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science) on the paradigm of philosophical anthropology. As Joachim Fischer explained in his contribution to this volume, philosophical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century can be conceived as a successful response to the (Darwinian) naturalization of the worldview. While the debate on naturalization often resulted in an unfruitful opposition between radical reductionism and radical transcendentism, Plessner's hermeneutical phenomenology of life offered a promising 'third way.' However, Plessner's phenomenology of human life is not completely free from essentialism and

anthropocentrism. This urges us towards a revision of some crucial elements of his philosophical anthropology. This revision is especially relevant in order to adequately respond to the challenges of current neo-Darwinism and the converging technologies that are intertwined with it. Whereas classical Darwinism challenged the human place in cosmos mainly theoretically, technologies like genetic modification, neuro-enhancement and electronic implants have the potential to 'overcome' *Homo sapiens sapiens* it in a more radical, practical sense. This urges upon us a fundamental post-essentialist and post-anthropocentric human self-reflection. The claim that Plessner's phenomenological anthropology still offers a fruitful starting point for the development of such 'philosophical anthropology 2.0' is demonstrated by a reinterpretation of Plessner's three 'anthropological laws' in light of today's converging technologies.

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Part I
Anthropology

1 Philosophical Anthropology

A Third Way between Darwinism and Foucaultism

Joachim Fischer

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate and explicate the technique of Philosophical Anthropology.[1] The thesis is that Philosophical Anthropology is a particular (and arguably extremely important) theory in that it steers a course between naturalism and culturalism, in other words, between Darwin and Foucault. Plessner might have said 'between Darwin and Dilthey,' but today, Philosophical Anthropology appears as a paradigm which sits between the theories of Darwin and Foucault. It builds a bridge between biology on the one hand and social and cultural sciences on the other; a bridge which could neither be constructed by Darwin (and his followers) nor by Foucault (and his followers). Yet, this bridge allows us to accept both paradigms as ways of thinking while simultaneously limiting their spheres. This Philosophical Anthropology is reconstructed with reference to Plessner's *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928] and to his sophisticated (and subtle) concept of 'eccentric positionality.'

Philosophical Anthropology: Discipline or paradigm?

It is important to distinguish between two uses of the term 'philosophical anthropology': philosophical anthropology *as a discipline* (a sub-discipline within philosophy) and Philosophical Anthropology *as a paradigm*.[2] In the 1920s there were two philosophical movements in this field, out of which two senses of the term 'philosophical anthropology' were born. In 1928 there emerged almost a new discipline called 'philosophical anthropology' within philosophy, instanced by, for example, Bernhard Groethuysen's *Philosophische Anthropologie* (Groethuysen 1931 [1928]), and later by Michael Landmann's *Philosophical Anthropology* [*Philosophische Anthropologie. Menschliche Selbstdeutung in Geschichte u. Gegenwart*, 1964] (Landmann 1974). This dis-

1 The reason to write 'Philosophical Anthropology' with capital letters will be explained in the next section.

2 For better orientation the text differentiates between 'philosophical anthropology as a discipline' and 'Philosophical Anthropology' (written capital letters) as a paradigm.

cipline is concerned with the question 'Who or what is man?' The discipline 'philosophical anthropology' is an organized collection of answers to this question, marked by a tradition of European thought, and later on farther afield (Hartung 2008). It developed as a discipline through contributions from different contemporary paradigms, such as psychoanalysis, philosophical hermeneutics, existential philosophy, the phenomenology of the body, the phenomenology of human *Lebenswelt*, the anthropology of Feuerbach, early Marx, and so on. Later, this discipline developed rules governing what it means to work within philosophical anthropology as a discipline, in an interdisciplinary framework between different human sciences.

By contrast, under the same title of 'Philosophical Anthropology' (to distinguish it from the discipline here written with capitals) there emerged at the same time a philosophical-anthropological paradigm: a particular approach to thought, with a distinctive procedure, which attempts to arrive at a theory of man via a theory of biological life in general. This is exemplified in the writings of Scheler (Scheler 1961 [1928]) and Plessner (Plessner 1975 [1928]). This developing paradigm, under the title 'Philosophical Anthropology,' was shaped by diverse thinkers and researchers: Scheler, Plessner, later Rothacker, Gehlen, Buytendijk, Portmann, and so on. While the work of these individuals is not the subject of this paper, it is important to note that Plessner was not alone in his intellectual interests in this area. Despite the use of different terminology and focusing on different interests, these thinkers shared an overarching approach, an approach they identified as 'Philosophical Anthropology,' and this participation in a shared paradigm was the background to their sometimes strange (and often bitter) rivalry.[3]

The equivocation of the term 'philosophical anthropology' as a discipline on the one hand and as a paradigm on the other, leads the philosopher down two tracks at once. We can compare the *discipline 'philosophical anthropology'* to other disciplines in philosophy (such as epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, etc.) *and* we can also compare the *paradigm 'Philosophical Anthropology'* with other paradigms (such as neo-Kantianism, naturalism, existentialism, phenomenology, critical theory, philosophical hermeneutics, poststructuralism, theory of social systems, etc.). Thus, the equivocation proves itself to be useful for research. Of course, Plessner and the other thinkers who created the new *paradigm* belonged also to the new *discipline*, but their noteworthy achievement lies in the invention of the paradigm called 'Philosophical Anthropology.'

3 Philosophical anthropology as a paradigm within this group of thinkers and researchers is reconstructed in Fischer 2008. See also Rehberg 2009 and Borsari 2009.

Cartesian dualism as the challenge: Philosophical Anthropology as a response

This paper concerns only the paradigm called 'Philosophical Anthropology,' not the discipline. More specifically, it is concerned with the theoretical strategy of Philosophical Anthropology, a strategy competing with other paradigms that engage in some form of analysis of the human world. In order to elucidate this theoretical strategy, it is necessary to understand the competing approaches, out of which Philosophical Anthropology has developed its unique approach. While Cartesisan Dualism had already been modified by the beginning of the twentieth century (the period of the genesis of Philosophical Anthropology), it has once more radicalized at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As a result, it split into two competing paradigms: between naturalism on the one hand (especially in the form of Darwinism, the core paradigm of the natural and neuronal sciences, or at least of the life sciences) and culturalism (or so-called Foucaultism in the cultural and social sciences) on the other, which are two opposing extremes in a spectrum. For naturalism, the distinction between nature and culture is a distinction within nature itself; for culturalism, and all social-constructionisms, the distinction between nature and culture is an a priori distinction made by culture itself.

It is very important to understand that these two theories continue the legacy of classical Cartesian dualism, a dualism between the thinking thing and the extended thing (mind and nature), but with new terms and new means: the evolutionary paradigm now takes the side of the natural, physical thing, and culturalism takes the mind as its subject. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, biology on the one hand (Darwin), and historic-cultural constructivism in the shape of historicism and hermeneutic philosophy on the other (Dilthey), gave new expressions to the two wings of Cartesianism: in place of the physics of the inanimate thing there was now the mechanism of the organism (including the brain), and in place of the thinking subject there was now language as an inter-subjective medium of thinking (the so called 'linguistic turn'). Cartesian dualism allows each of the two competing paradigms to expand their span over the entire Cartesian domain: evolutionary biology claims now to explain not only life but the sociocultural world as a whole,[4] and, vice versa, culturalism,

4 An important contribution to evolutionary anthropology was, of course, the initial research into the great apes by Wolfgang Köhler (1917).

by means of the linguistic turn, explains natural science and the evolutionary pattern as a mere cultural interpretation-scheme of special historicity.

Anticipating the theoretical strategy of Philosophical Anthropology one could interpret this phenomenon as an attempt to reach a convincing position regarding cultural and social science in an era that is rigorously dominated by evolutionary biology. Philosophical Anthropology is a third agent, but not a sheer mediator: it is more sophisticated than that. It first relativizes the Darwinian analysis of life (including human life), and simultaneously it both liberates and limits the sociocultural perspective. Philosophical Anthropology makes a generous concession in favour of naturalism without being a naturalistic approach itself. At its core, there is a philosophical biology which is constructed in response to evolutionary naturalism and at the same time it conditions the social and cultural sciences. Hence, it can claim to be a good 'fit,' inclusive of both theoretical worlds.

We can now characterise the two wings of Cartesianism as the challenge of naturalism in the shape of Darwinism, and the response to this challenge by culturalism in the shape of Dilthey and Foucault. Having done this, we can then elucidate the theory we call Philosophical Anthropology. We will conclude with short remarks suggesting what one gains by the use of this paradigm.

Darwinian naturalism

Darwin's theory of evolution has not only become a key theory within biology itself, but also a biologically-founded theory within anthropology. As Ernst Mayr claims, "No modern thinker, can, in the end, avoid thinking, when it comes to the essentials of his worldview, as a 'Darwinist' thinks" (Mayr 1988). We can think of the Darwinian paradigm as a rocket with two phases: first, the theory of life or living organisms, and secondly, embedded within this theory, a theory of the human being.

Darwin's theory of life, expressed in *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Darwin 2000 [1859]), understands all species of living organisms (both those still in existence and those now extinct) as resulting from an evolution inherent in the very nature of living things. According to this theory, the variety now observable in living organisms did not result from a creation by a transcendent power, but from a process of development ruled by certain inherent mechanisms: genetic variation arising through the process of reproduction, natural selection of variations which are suc-

cessful in their environment, and finally, the stabilisation of successful species of organisms. It is important to note that these variations include not only organs and other physiological achievements, but also kinds of behavior of individual organisms (in higher species), predispositions for certain behaviors, 'moods,' and other non-physiological characteristics. The theory postulates that all organisms (extant and extinct) are connected to one set of ancestors.

The second phase of the evolutionary 'rocket' Darwin himself introduced in *The Descent of Man* (Darwin 1990 [1875]) published some twenty years after *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Impressed by abundant empirical evidence, Darwin was led to compare human beings to other creatures within the realm of living things, and came to the thesis that there was a common descent of plants, animals, and human beings, and that the natural origin of human beings is the same as that of other higher primates. This systematic inclusion of man in the living world amounts, scientifically, to the inclusion of anthropology within biology. Darwin himself contrasts his thesis with a traditional idealistic self-interpretation of man: for Darwin, the human mind derives from lower forms of cognition, the human language from the voices of mammals, the moral sentiments from social instincts. Evolutionary theory allows us to systematically understand all those characteristics over which man seems to have a monopoly simply being mechanisms of life (evolved traits), and to reduce all anthropological terms to biological terms. Darwin's key claim is: "Nevertheless the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (Darwin 1990 [1875]). This theory of the merely gradual differentiation in the evolution of life, covers the 'impulses' of life. The struggle for survival of the individual organism, and the survival of the species by reproduction, the mechanisms of variation, selection, and stabilization all function at the human level and explain all human phenomena, including what we think of as sociocultural; all patterns of conduct, all symbolic interactions, all inner moods and mindsets, can be explained as epiphenomena of the mechanisms of survival and reproduction common to all living things. Evolutionary theory as a naturalistic paradigm postulates 'bio-power' in the human being – but in a sense other than that used by poststructuralists and Foucault. It is not that sociocultural constructions and disciplining discourses that have come to wield power over human life in historically diverse ways and govern life by these cultural constructions, but rather that life itself is the determining power: bio-power is the power of life itself extending into all human constructions and discourses. In this evolutionary theory, all aspects of the sociocultural can be 'biologized' or

explained with reference to nature: within the Darwinian paradigm, one can observe and explain how life itself ramifies through all the branches and stems of the mental, emotional, social, and cultural world (Dawkins 2009; Eibl 2007). Similarly, with biological psychology, sociobiology, biological cultural science, and evolutionary epistemology, this bio-evolutionary programme of an 'evolutionary anthropology' penetrates into the sociocultural sphere: "Der Darwin-Code. Die Evolution erklärt unser Leben" – the title of a Darwinist study published during the year of Darwin 2009 (Junker and Paul 2009).

Culturalism and constructionism: Responses to Darwinism within Cartesianism

Darwinists can claim that we have been living in a 'biological epoch' since last third of the nineteenth century (Illies 2006). How can we challenge this claim? We can differentiate between two categories of response: *Darwin or God* (Klose and Oehler 2008) and *Darwin or Foucault*. In popular debate, there is much interest in the attempt to re-establish theology, and the theological theory of the creation of living beings (including man) by God, but the theory of creationism is not influential within science. Within science, the alternative to the Darwinian approach is constructionism, which is highly developed and dominates the scene with a broad spectrum of variation. It is important to introduce the defining features of constructionism here, as it will serve us to contrast it with Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm. Two contemporary constructionisms that have attempted to respond to the first Darwinian challenge (theory of life) were neo-Kantianism (the renewal of idealism) on the one hand, and historicism, or hermeneutic philosophy (especially as seen in Dilthey) on the other (De Mul 2004). On what common principle do these responses rely? The key principle of such approaches, the starting point of the paradigm, is always the inherent 'order' of thought and speech, which, be it an intellectual or symbolic or linguistic order, is itself unaffected by nature. This principle is common across all the various forms of constructionism, regardless of whether it involves the order of language, symbols, writing, symbolic forms (Cassirer), historical a priori (Dilthey), or the respective epistemologies of word-view and self-view (Foucault).

Seen from this point of view evolutionary biology appears to be a mere discourse, a linguistic construction on 'life,' according to the rules of a certain discourse-formation and part of the discursive 'bio-power' (the term now used in Foucault's sense). The decisive move within the theoretical

chess game of socioconstructivism or historicism or poststructuralism is to claim that the distinction between nature and culture is only possible *within* culture, within the respective symbolic order of social culture (Reckwitz 2006). 'Life,' particularly human life, enters the game only according to socially-constructed systems and worldviews, marked by subjugations of the body and bio-power-control of populations, techniques of controlling life, contingent rules (instantiated in discourses, images, language, symbolization, and bio-politics) and the contingent decisions of inter-subjective or trans-subjective cultural order. All of these concepts *define* what can be accepted as 'life' and as 'human.' All naturalisms, including evolutionary theory, can be deconstructed as merely a strategic discourse or narrative, and can therefore be suspended, repealed, or cancelled.

Philosophical Anthropology: A third way

Against this historical background, we are now ready to introduce Philosophical Anthropology. To understand Philosophical Anthropology, it is important to remember that all of the thinkers within this paradigm retain a non-Darwinian idealistic self-interpretation of man, i.e. that man is special in self-knowledge and self-determination, and liable to cultural social construction. This position is foundational for Philosophical Anthropologists and not open for discussion. As such, the reductionist Darwinian theory constitutes a real challenge to thinkers in this field. The strategy of Philosophical Anthropology as a philosophical paradigm is to follow neither evolutionary theory on the one hand, nor to evade (as culturalistic constructivism does) the basic question of nature and life on the other. In other words, it tries not to follow naturalism, nor to dodge the question of nature in the same way Dilthey and Foucault did. What Philosophical Anthropologists accept from the evolutionary approach is explanation from within nature, i.e. that there is an explanation of life inherent within nature – without recourse to theological models or teleological models of the purpose of nature. In short, they accept the basic role of biology (Jonas 1966). Philosophical anthropology places itself in a *concession to* Darwinism and nonetheless does not *coincide with* Darwinism.

The key issue in any theory of Philosophical Anthropology therefore is its internal relation to a philosophical biology (Grene 1965). Every Philosophical Anthropology, as a paradigm, invents a philosophical biology by means of which it then unfolds a theory of social culture. In challenging Darwinism, the relationship to a particular philosophical biology is decisive. It is there-

fore characteristic of Philosophical Anthropology that in its conceptual framework, it never *starts as* an anthropology, but rather, before considering man, deals with the wider theory of life. It is typical of this approach to reach consideration of the human only in the wider context of all living things. In contrast to the impulse of evolutionary theory, the guiding impulse here, when considering the living world in general, is to avoid surrendering to the irreducible experience of man as a reason – and discourse-mediated being, capable of self-detachment, language, ecstasy, laughing, crying, and so on. In the view of the Philosophical Anthropologists, there is nothing wrong with evolutionary theory as a theory of life, except that it is inadequate as a theory of human beings, as it is unable to explain their special experiences. The credo of Philosophical Anthropology is: as a philosopher, you are responsible for the biology which interprets man. So philosophers have to be responsible for inventing a proper philosophical biology compatible with the theory of life in general, but also appropriate to the interpretation of man. That is the task in which Philosophical Anthropology engages in this biological epoch in which we find ourselves. In biologically-informed talk about the organic world, the phenomena of life should be described in such a way that – after consideration of the organic in general, the human organism is at last considered – the *experience* encountered at the beginning (the self-detachment, self-determination, or dignity of man) should not be proven to be an illusion or a mere epiphenomenon. To put it in another way, the strategy of Philosophical Anthropology, faced with the challenge of Darwinism, is to arrive at a unified theory wherein a non-reductive concept of man-in-nature, achieved within an inclusive theory of life, is capable of dealing with the contrasts between plants, animals, and man. In a sense, all the Philosophical Anthropologists are working like detectives or investigators, sifting through the findings of empirical biology for discoveries which might allow them to stress the *Sonderstellung* of human organisms. Therefore, they are deeply interested in the discoveries of Driesch (1921), Von Uexküll (1996), Buytendijk (1928), Bolk (1926), Portmann (1990), and many other biological researchers whose biological discoveries might offer an open door to the anthropologists' philosophical biology.[5] Let us explicate the paradigm more precisely. Provided that the Darwinian theory of man is either a type of vertical reduction akin to a conceptual reductive operation which translates all theological or philosophical assertions concerning man

5 And they all were deeply impressed by Henri Bergson and his philosophical dealing with evolutionary theory – the 'L'évolution creatice' (1944 [1907]) was a model for their own attempts at similar enterprises.

to assertions about natural science or biological states, or it is a type of vertical reduction in parallel to an ontological reduction in which the human being in the end is nothing other than a natural body, then Philosophical Anthropology turns the table by turning the reduction upside down.

In short, it operates as a theory of vertical emergence within a theory of living things which itself includes a theory of the stages of living things (without recourse to theology or teleology). By this theory of vertical emergence in nature, the *Sonderstellung* of man can be carefully characterized (Thies 2004). Therefore, one can see at first sight that the anthropology of Feuerbach, for instance, does not belong to this paradigm, because it shares the operation of reductionism. So Feuerbach, characterized by his materialism, need not be counted as a progenitor of Philosophical Anthropology.

Philosophical Anthropology and Plessner's 'eccentric positionality'

Now is the time to explain Plessner's term 'eccentric positionality' (Plessner 1975 [1928]).[6] The discussion so far will hopefully aid us in accurately defining and sharpening our Philosophical Anthropology by using Plessner's rather sophisticated concept. The concept itself reveals how Philosophical Anthropology works as a paradigm. In fact, other advocates of the philosophical-anthropological approach. e.g. Scheler or Gehlen, Portmann or Jonas, more or less tacitly accepted Plessner's term. Plessner takes for granted self-detachment, self-determination, and all the properties classically (and idealistically) ascribed to human beings, but he does not begin with them – i.e. they are not his point of departure. The goal here is to reach the peak of the culturalist endeavour (the whole realm of cultural and social sciences), the so-called hermeneutic sphere, but not by beginning with its own assumptions. As the operation of Philosophical Anthropology requires, Plessner reaches the classically idealistic terms in a roundabout way, via an excursus in the theory of life. He starts with the idea of the thing. The thing appears as a phenomenon to the subject, but the drive of Plessner's theory is not to try to reconstruct the experience the subject has in relation to the phenomenon, but rather to focus on the phenomenon of the thing itself. His approach prefers philosophical attention to the thing (the object, that which is experienced) over attention to the subject (that which experiences). Thus,

6 For useful interpretations of this important term, see, for instance, Eßbach 1994, Krüger 1998, Fischer 2000 or Lindemann 2005.

he starts with the distinction between inanimate and living things, and characterizes living things as defined by a 'boundary' (*Grenze*). Organisms, or living things, are marked by boundaries; they are boundary-realizing things. An organism has boundary-contact with its environment; it builds up its own complexity in metabolism with the environment by means of its boundary. This approach of defining organisms by their boundaries has many implications. Plessner can explain the properties of organisms by this condition (according to empirical biology: and this constitutes the main part of *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*), but can also pave the way for an application of this analysis to the sociocultural sphere of man. The boundary of the organism is not only a result of the fact that living things have to organize their own survival (i.e. solve the question of stabilisation), but the idea of the boundary of an organism also includes the notion of 'expressivity' – another important difference between living and inanimate objects. By their boundaries, living things become manifest at their surfaces, and by their surfaces as boundaries these living things are *phenomena* in the deep sense of the word. It is extremely important to note at this point that Plessner's philosophical biology, constructed within a Philosophical Anthropology, already encapsulates the basic idea of 'expressivity' by defining living things by their boundaries. And 'expressivity,' since Dilthey, is vitally important as the key term of self-awareness in the social and cultural sciences. Thus, Plessner creates a connection to the cultural and social sciences from within a philosophical biology via the establishment of a fundamental category which includes the idea of 'human expression' (Plessner 1964).

To develop and extend this approach into the sphere of human beings, Plessner needs not only a theory of different types of living things, but also a concept that will enable him to differentiate between different levels or stages of boundary-regulation. This need is satisfied with the concept of 'positionality.' It replaces the key notion of *idealism* (Fichte's *Setzung*, or the self-positioning 'I') with a *naturalistic* idea – passive positionality (*Gesetztheit*) or being positioned. This positionality marks a deep concession of Philosophical Anthropology towards Darwinism, because it highlights the relative passivity of organisms – being pushed by the anonymous force of nature into the boundaries they have to keep. The living body is given by nature. Positionality implies that there is no Creator who makes and positions living beings; there is no self-positioning 'I' who positioned nature (as the Non-I): nor is there a society or culture which creates or defines life. Positionality entails only that the anonymous force of nature pushes individual organisms into their boundaries and borders, disposing them

to stay within a specific spatial environment.[7] Plessner now continues his Philosophical Anthropology by distinguishing stages of positionality, driven by the goal to classify plants, different kinds of animals, and human beings. He distinguishes between *open* and *closed* forms of positionality, and next between *a-centric* and *centric* positionality. Mammals and within them primates, belong to the latter group. One could say that the emergence of 'centric positionality' denotes the breakthrough of intentionality in the evolution of life. Plessner explains this intentionality towards the environment (*Umweltintentionalität*) from the practical correlation between organism and environment. In doing so, he gives this key concept of phenomenology and pragmatism a crucial place in his reconstruction of the levels of the organic.[8]

And one has to bear in mind that Plessner's intention with 'centric positionality' is to include what he calls 'frontal positionality.' This is very important for his next step, because with the term 'frontal positionality' he can draw attention to the observable fact that some kinds of brain-animals are already in communication with the brains of other animals: by the frontal appearance of their positionality, i.e. by their expressive boundary surfaces, visual patterns, touching and shouting, which allow interactional co-ordination and imitation between positionalities. There is already a relationship between the individual organism and the society, even at the level of 'frontal positionality' – perceiving each other through the senses.

We can now turn our attention to human beings. Plessner suggests the concept 'eccentric positionality' for the characterization of our life form. One could say that Plessner, or Philosophical Anthropology in general, captures in this term the 1-2% difference in genetic make-up between the great apes and human beings. 'Eccentric positionality' implies that in these living things there is a kind of disengagement or detachment from life, but *within* life, and, because this happens within natural life, it has to be lived in life, to be connected to life. Eccentricity takes place within positionality. Eccentric positionality means detachment from the body within the body, or in other words, detachment from life within life. Thus, one can adopt Plessner's approach within both rival paradigms of Cartesian dualism: within Foucaultism/culturalism it operates at the level of discourse; within Darwinism/naturalism it operates at the level of the biological in human life.

7 Perhaps 'positionality' as the key term of a philosophical biology is more appropriate than 'auto-poiesis,' which means something like *self-creation* or *self-organisation of life* because positionality contains the notion of the moment that life happens to the organism, when it is set or positioned in its boundary.

8 One has to take into account Plessner's deep affinity with the new understandings of ontology propounded by Hartmann (1975).

But detachment from life within life means for this type of living being that it has to invent something in place of nature (it has to invent cultural society) and then to embody this invention *within* nature, because eccentric positionality always remains 'positionality' – forced upon the living being by the anonymous force of nature.

Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm: What do we get out of it?

What have we gained from the use of this kind of paradigm? Using the paradigm, we can generate original anthropological categories, *Sonderstellungs*-terms, reserved for human beings alone. Eccentric positionality entails both that all anthropological categories are transformed, broken-bridged *vital* categories, still working within the anthropological dimension, and also that these anthropological categories are opened for variation and determinations by historic categories, concepts of 'styles' of human life. So, through Philosophical Anthropology, we have established a connection to the bio-power both in the Darwinian sense, as well as to the bio-power in a Foucaultist sense. To generate such anthropological categories, Plessner introduces the so-called laws of 'natural artificiality,' 'mediated immediacy' and the 'utopian standpoint,' all of which are guidelines for the discovery of anthropological categories. Consider, for example, laughter and crying. For Plessner, this pair is the paradigm of the paradigm, the key example of what he intends to do with Philosophical Anthropology (Plessner 1970 [1941]): only eccentric positionalities can and must laugh and cry – in moments of crisis of sensible orientation, laughing and crying are vital reactions of the positionality to the crises of eccentricity. Every organism has to physically react to crisis, but only an eccentric-positioned being, which exists within a constructed world of sense and reason, can be thrown off kilter by the unexpected, unavoidable reality of the natural world. Laughing or crying, as reactions to crisis, are not cultural constructions by human beings, but things happening to their bodies: it is a regenerative return to the positionality, to their passivity, to the experience that they are living bodies. In short, they are regenerative powers of human life. At the same time, this vitality, this evolutionary bio-power in laughing and crying can and must be disciplined by the Foucaultist bio-power which disciplines, controls, and regulates the occasions of expressions of laughing and crying through the various forces of culture within society.

Darwinism and Foucaultism seen from the perspective of eccentric positionality

Philosophical Anthropology is a way of thinking which, as we have seen, operates somewhere between Darwin and Dilthey, and which re-emerges as a fascinating approach that stands between Darwin and Foucault, between the alternatives of naturalism and culturalism. Plessner's key concept of eccentric positionality could be an appropriate way to grasp, within a proper philosophical biology, the sociocultural dimension of man. If it works, this approach could offer a technique to control and limit the claims of Darwinism as well as those of Foucaultism. If it works, the technique of Philosophical Anthropology can be seen not only as a paradigm within the discipline of philosophical anthropology (among other paradigms), but as a subtle paradigm within epistemology, in ethics, in bioethics, in cultural sciences (De Mul 1991), in philosophy of technology (De Mul 2010), in psychology (Coolen 2008), in sociology (Claessens 1980; Tomasello 2008), and human geography (Ernste 2004), in philosophy of nature (Grene 1974), and ecophilosophy (Peterson 2010), even (as Max Scheler has applied it) in modern metaphysics.

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2 The Nascence of Modern Man

Two Approaches to the Problem – Biological Evolutionary Theory and Philosophical Anthropology

Hans-Peter Krüger[1]

Biological and medical anthropology, social and cultural anthropology, and historical anthropology – each investigate different aspects of the human condition. Yet the first specifically *philosophical* anthropological task consists of integrating these different aspects into a single interdisciplinary framework. Such a framework must systematically capture the interconnections between nature and culture, as well as individuality and sociality. As far as temporal and historical issues are concerned, such a systematic and interdisciplinary framework must also be able to provide us with some orientation with respect to human evolutionary history. In short, it must perform a significant heuristic function. In this interdisciplinary sense, philosophical anthropology is not a special anthropological discipline but rather a universal anthropology, which circumscribes the field of research as a whole and shapes it to be compatible with all other anthropological subfields. The structure and function of philosophical anthropology is assessed by its ability to weave together a number of disciplinary tasks.

One encounters the second task of philosophical anthropology as soon as one seriously reflects upon the historical fact that posing and answering anthropological questions has itself been an integral part of the human condition since the Axial Ages, that is, since the stabilization of high cultures of the personality between approximately 500 BC and 500 AD. Apparently, this institutionalization of personality, which, at that time, was enjoyed by only a small minority, made it possible to distinguish man from other living creatures by distinguishing *persons* from other creatures. Such distinctions and their modifications functioned as differential criteria, albeit from a point of view we would recognize today as anthropocentric and ethnocentric. This problem of elevating the predominant self-perception to the status of a central standard for everyone and everything else has only grown more pointed since the dawn of modernity. One can thus follow Michel Foucault in calling the epistemic and political constitution of modernity an anthropological circle (cf. Krüger 2009, ch. I. 1.). One must, therefore,

1 Translated from the German by Daniel Smyth.

also investigate what makes anthropologies possible and how they are able, by means of methodological control, to put themselves in a position to manifest political authority. Otherwise, particular anthropologies and even philosophical anthropology itself degenerate into an ideological muddle, as history has taught us all to frequently.

To the best of my knowledge, only Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology has managed to convincingly fulfill both of these philosophical tasks (cf. Krüger 2009, ch. II. 4., Krüger 2010, ch. I.). Hence, that is the system I have chosen to work with. As it would go beyond the scope of this essay, I have to restrict myself to only explore the first of the two tasks mentioned above. I will begin with some contemporary proposals for how to think about the evolution of *modern* man (in the biological sense of *Homo sapiens sapiens*). Second, I will reconstruct the most important interdisciplinary contributions to this question within the discourse of philosophical anthropology. There has of course been a great deal of empirical progress in the various related special disciplines in the last two decades. Nonetheless, the conceptual task that arises in reflecting on the evolution of man remains fundamentally unchanged. Despite the close relationship between man's new sociocultural niche and his new sociocultural environment in the evolution of nature, the questions posed within philosophical anthropology were more developed both philosophically and anthropologically than they are in the contemporary discussion.

How are variation and selection connected in the evolution of modern man? The formation of a sociocultural niche of collective intentionality

The modern, synthetic theory of evolution (Mayr and Provine 1998) no longer recognizes a single and unified necessity, but only the contingent interplay of two distinct processes. There is neither a place for preformation, nor for any telos or compulsion towards higher development. The two types of processes that this theory is concerned with are those of variation and selection. Variation has to do with the genotype, i.e. with the alteration of the inherited material typical of the species. As they are being passed on to the next generation, genes can be altered by several mechanisms. These can involve external influences, i.e. mutations in the narrow sense (e.g. by radiation, poisons, viruses), by errors in replicating DNA and RNA patterns in an organism's sperm or ovum, or through the recombination of genes in sexual reproduction. On the other hand, selection has to do with the

phenotype, i.e. with the modes of behavior specific to a species within its specific environment. This behavioristic understanding of the phenotype is broader than its reduction to a physical manifestation of the organism's genotypic potential. What can be observed from the outside, is behavior. The functions of physical structures are functions of behavior in its genetic, epigenetic, behavioral and symbolic dimensions (Luhmann 1997; Jablonka and Lamb 2005). Although one can clearly distinguish between variation and selection, the two processes must interact, however contingently. The survival of the genotype is impossible without reproductive behavior, assuming sexual dimorphism. Selection not only presupposes organisms that behave in certain ways, but also genes that are inherited through successive generations. Thus, the distinction between variation and selection is not a complete division and separation of the two sides, but rather raises the question of how they are connected. However, this question cannot be answered all too hastily, as though one already knew the answer. Instead, one must investigate and answer the relationship on a case-by-case basis (Jablonka and Lamb 2005).

In response to the question of the connection between variation and selection, two hypotheses have been pursued repeatedly in mammalian and avian biology: 1) population and 2) niche. Many mammals are social and live together throughout successive generations. They do not simply meet in order to reproduce while otherwise living in isolation from one another. Rather, they jointly care for the brood and share food or hunt together. In a particular spatiotemporal environment, they constitute populations, upon which the survival of individual conspecifics (and thus of their genes) depends. To this extent, the transmission of a particular genotypic variation also depends on the social status of the relevant organism within the population in that area. The social modes of behavior lie along a spectrum from cooperative to competitive and thus depends on the sex of the organism and the particular reproductive functions that sex fulfils in cooperation and competition. The formation of populations facilitates behavioral learning throughout successive generations. Population formation can become a niche formation when the social collective reintegrates enduring behavioral functions within itself and when cooperation and competition between members are kept within specific boundaries by means of quick and effective hierarchies. Yet, for niche formation to occur, the surrounding environment must also be favorable and conducive to the social organization of the population. This favorable relation may be contingent and have nothing to do with the social collectivity, i.e. it may be passively bestowed upon it. Or, it may be a direct consequence or side-effect of the collectivity's existence,

e.g. as a result of the collectivity entering symbiotic relations with members of other species in expelling and eliminating competitors, i.e. when the fostering relation is a result of the collectivity's own activities. According to Hugh Miller (1964), one also speaks of *insulation*: in a living community there is a center and a periphery in the sense that those creatures in the center are subjected to less selective pressure than those on the periphery. I use the concept of the *niche* in the sense of a relatively stable interplay between a social collective and an environment favorable to it. Naturally, niche formation is not something intended by the niche or the relevant social collective, but rather is the result of various feedbacks, both social and ecological in kind.

If niche formation is to be found throughout the mammalian world, it is perhaps most significant for the evolution of primates. Indeed, the appearance of man seems to depend on it to such an extent that a certain inversion occurs. Here, I mean the inversion of passive niche formation into active niche formation: *active* or *passive* in terms of the social collective. Compared to other primates, there is an increasing gap between the genotype and the phenotype of modern man in the biological sense, i.e. *Homo sapiens* in the last 100,000 to 200,000 years. Within this period of time, the human genotype has hardly varied at all, while the modes of behavior (phenotype in broader sense) have varied enormously. Simply imagine what humans in East Africa might have looked like prior to the global spread of *Homo sapiens* some 100,000 years ago, and compare that with how they look today, in the midst of economic, political and cultural globalization in the great metropolises of the world. The clearest leap in phenotype (modes of behavior) is located – according to the old biological classification – approximately 40,000 to 60,000 years ago with the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, because a certain sociocultural accumulation can be reconstructed from this point on. The biological theory of evolution cannot explain such a great jump in such a short period of time – not even for the period of time that separates *Homo sapiens* from *Homo sapiens sapiens*, i.e. at least 40,000 years, but no more than 160,000 years. One must therefore work with numerous intermediary steps distributed in space and time. This strategic approach has recently been convincingly pursued by Michael Tomasello in his *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (1999) and Steven Mithen (for the evolution from the early forms of *Homo* to *Homo sapiens*, cf. Mithen 1996).

Articulated in the framework of the biological theory of evolution, the hypothesis is as follows: a new niche must have developed, which provided for processes of cultural learning that were then able to build upon one another and thus accelerate evolution enormously. The construction of

such a niche becomes more plausible if one thinks of it as a series of small incremental steps. This series could have begun with kin selection (including mutual cooperation). It could then have increased in strength through reciprocal altruism (including strong or indirect reciprocity) and eventually culminated in selecting in favor of culturally integrated groups (i.e. cultural group selection). In order to avoid misunderstandings, I should remark that, though I use the abbreviations that are customary in the discourse of biological evolutionary theory, I do not believe in the myths of either the egoistic or the altruistic gene. In biological evolutionary theory it is not genes, but rather organisms that are the proper subjects of behavior. Without an organism that behaves in certain ways in its environment, its genes would not be activated or deactivated at the right time, nor would they be replicated, transmitted or inherited. It contradicts the biological theory of evolution to replace the two processes of variation and selection with a myth of some single, prior necessity, as has unfortunately been done in Anglophone discussions in the last few decades.

But for the purpose of mathematical modeling, one can make use of the unconscious effect that, when it comes to mutual cooperation between blood relatives, their shared inherited material can be passed on without the need for each of the related organisms to reproduce. The "*Gesamtfitniss*" or "inclusive fitness" (Hamilton 1964) of a non-reproducing individual can be improved throughout successive generations, if it cooperates with its relatives whose own reproduction involves passing on some of the genes they share. Thus, the non-reproducing individual nevertheless manages to reproduce indirectly. The idea of indirect effects can also be formulated ecologically, if one proceeds beyond kin selection. Members of different species in a shared environment can also cooperate to their mutual advantage at the expense of a third species, their needs and cooperative capacities need only be complementary to one another within a shared environment. One famous example of this is the honey guide – a type of bird, which leads the honey badger to beehives by means of its call. Reciprocity occurs when the costs for each cooperative partner are, on average, lower than the benefits that the partner draws from the collaboration. In practice, reciprocal altruism is to be expected from species that live together in stable groups in which repeated encounters between the same individuals are likely. Nevertheless, this model carries with it the possibility for deception. If deception becomes chronic, then the model collapses. The model is only evolutionarily viable when deception is punished in such a way that it cannot become the rule. If one assumes that a creature has some awareness of the indirect effects of its behavior and that this awareness

grows over the course of the creature's life – as one may assume in the case of primates – then the effects of indirect reciprocal altruism can only stabilize as cultural norms develop, which are predominantly maintained and whose sporadic violation is punished.

If one takes these three steps together – kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and cultural group selection – they enable "an evolutionary cascade of selective processes" (Hurford 2007, 304). This cascade of positive selective processes – cooperation, mutuality, reciprocity, and culture formation – may have exerted feedback effects on the selection of individuals and their traits (including their sexual selection) as well as on historical changes favorable to cultural stabilization. Following Tomasello, one can let oneself be guided by the idea that collective or *shared intentionality* (as opposed to merely *individual intentionality*) and the cultural learning of *role reversal* (as opposed to other forms of behavior) predominated in such niche constructions.

Connecting the contemporary discussion with the interdisciplinary discourse of philosophical anthropology

World and imitation in a socio-cultural environment: Joint activity and mimicry in a bio-social environment

Within the interdisciplinary discourse of philosophical anthropology, one makes a categorical distinction between *Umwelt* (either understood as surrounding bio-social or sociocultural world) and a *world* as such. What came to be the contemporary problem of niche formation used to be discussed using this sort of terminology – and all the better, to my mind. Ever since Jakob von Uexküll's theoretical biology, it has been clear that there is a correlation between the physiological structure of organisms (their blueprint) and their behavioral functions in a determinate environment. Different species have different environments, and often not the environment that the biologist takes them to have at first glance. Thus, snails and spiders do not perceive any thing-constants in their environment, while primates, as Wolfgang Köhler's experiments with chimpanzees showed, doubtlessly operate with things, albeit not with any awareness of the physical laws governing them, as we do. In order to categorically sort this and other empirical discoveries, Max Scheler introduced the distinction between a *world* (*Welt*) and a *surrounding-world* or *environment* (*Umwelt*) (Scheler 1995, 39-45). Biologists use their own worldview as the framework for distinguishing between the environments specific to various creatures. Of course, even

at that time it was well known among zoologists, amongst whom Helmuth Plessner was one, that mammals and especially primates stand in social "co-relationships" (*Mitverhältnissen*) (Plessner 1975, 308), and hence live in a *bio-social environment*. But Plessner did not want to prematurely identify and risk confusing this with a sociocultural environment such as that humans actively create. Such *sociocultural environments* are made possible by world-frameworks, which Plessner explicates near the end of *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928] as the presuppositions of practices among persons (cf. Plessner 1975, ch. 7).

For Plessner, there is a fundamental difference between an animal environment that is merely social in the sense that animals spontaneously "join in" on the behavior of their conspecifics and are subsequently able to "mimic" such behavior, and an environment where there is genuine "imitation" of behavior.[2] In the latter case, one must be able to answer two questions: *What* is being imitated? (i.e. which state of affairs is being exhibited?), and *Who* is being imitated? (i.e. which person?) (Plessner 1948a; 1948b; 1961a). These two questions cannot be answered by describing how similar organisms behave similarly, i.e. in accordance with Von Uexküll's correlations. For these correlations are – ontogentically and phylogenetically – *prior* to the imitation of personal roles and *prior* to the exhibition of states of affairs. The sociality of mammals, according to Plessner, is not made possible by a shared world (*Mitwelt*) in which persons share a form of mindedness. Today, one could follow Tomasello in speaking of *mind* in an elementary sense, whenever the criterion is fulfilled that collective intentions become grammaticalized (Tomasello 2003).

From a contemporary point of view, we can see that Plessner was right to distinguish between spontaneous joint activity, temporally delayed mimicry and imitation (of something and of someone). This is demonstrated by the discussion of individual and collective intentions of the first and second order in non-human primates as compared with human children. The philosophical issue is not who happens to be empirically correct, but rather whether the research programme provides us with categorical distinctions which help us address meaningful questions. It may be, as Tomasello has acknowledged in the interim, that chimpanzees demonstrate shared attention, collaborative activity and even first order shared intentions in some behavioral areas – particularly competitions for dominance. Yet, chimpanzees are nevertheless unable to form shared intentions about

2 Translator's note: In German a distinction is made between "*Mitmachen*" (join in, or joint activity), "*Nachmachen*" (mimic, mimicry), and "*Nachahmung*" (imitate, imitation).

shared intentions, i.e. intentions of the second order. Furthermore, only the latter embodies the culturally stable, truly collective intentions upon which human children build up their behavior (Tomasello 2008). Chimpanzees do not understand the recursion of symbols, which reach beyond what is perceptible (relative to an individual's memory) in situations, assuming the repetition of drive satisfaction. The number 5 means something different from the empirically perceptible and memorable insight that five bananas are better than two bananas for a very hungry belly. Of course, the empirical research into first and second order intentions must be carried further.

In the interest of advancing such research, however, we must clearly eliminate the anthropomorphic confusion of joint activity and mimicry with imitation – a conceptual confusion that makes sophisticated and differentiated empirical research impossible. Spontaneous joint activity between conspecifics involves mirror neurons, a mechanism Plessner could not have known about in his time. But this neurophysiological correlate confirms what Plessner had described as *joint activity*: if a creature perceives here and now what his conspecific is doing, this automatically generates neural activity in those regions of its brain which prepare for sensory and motor engagement that corresponds to the behavior of the conspecific. Mimicry is then simply such joint activity with the addition of individual memory (Plessner 1975, 278-286). If the creature can re-imagine something that it already perceived, this triggers comparable neural activities. Having once been successful in satisfying a particular drive, the creature follows the same strategy in its next moment of need. Imitation, however, involves more, namely the mind, which possesses a cultural history of its grammaticalisation, in which questions concerning what and who is being imitated can be posed and answered. This is only possible in an eccentric positionality, as Plessner calls his specification of *world* as opposed to environment. Eccentric positionality triadically *removes* itself from the dyads of centric positionality – thus *eccentric*. It positions itself outside of centric interactions between the organism and the environment and outside of centric interactions between organisms only to return from this outside to the interactions themselves. Thus, Tomasello speaks of a so called "bird's eye view" (Tomasello 2008, 160, 179, 266). Imitation cannot be explained by mirror neurons, which only represent a genetic precondition, but not a sufficient condition. Imitation demands an emotional motivation that leads a creature to identify itself with a sociocultural figure external to the organism or to distance itself from that figure (cf. by contrast, Iacoboni 2008, 99f.).

As far as Scheler and Plessner were concerned, Köhler had proven that chimpanzees have a high degree of practical intelligence, but that this

intelligence remains bound to the individual organism – to its sensory and motor mechanisms and its individual memory. According to Plessner, it was crucial that chimpanzees lack a "sense of the negative" (Plessner 1975, 271): they remain empirically generalizing positivists – a view that has been radically advocated in the contemporary literature by Povinelli (2000). Chimpanzees do not expect any *states of affairs* that, independently of their own organism, also exhibit other perspectives. They expect only *states of fields*, which they negotiate senso-motorically until they suddenly arrive at an insight (Plessner 1975, 272, 276f.). Yet they are unable to detach this insight from the type of senso-motor situation in which they attained it and transfer it into other sorts of senso-motor situations. They generalize within a behavioral function – for example, competition or tool production – and this generalization is quite individualized insofar as it is memory-based. Anthropomorphically speaking, this also has its benefits: they neither believe in ghosts nor in natural laws. But most importantly, their expectations do not have a world framework that has emancipated itself from their senses and their motor possibilities. They do not expect states of affairs in spatial emptiness, e.g. in a Newtonian world, or in a silent, still world of empty time. It is *not* constitutive of their behavior to have a symbolic, i.e. a triadic structure of the world, which cannot be derived from *any* empirical generalization. In contrast, one recognizes practices among persons precisely in such symbolic-triadic presuppositions, i.e. in mindedness, not only in the external and internal world but also in the joint-world (Plessner 1975, ch. 7.2). World structures do not take shape frontally, dyadically, immediately or directly, i.e. they are precisely *not* like an environment or surrounding world. Rather, they take shape mediatedly, indirectly, along detours, triadically, on a stage that presents the foreground, within a framework of *world* that forms the background and bleeds out into a 'nowhere and never.' Humans must therefore be able to alter their behavior. Their centric form of organization requires centric behavioral possibilities, i.e. a *centric positionality*, as Plessner calls his conception of an animal environment. But first, a *human* sociocultural environment must be created. This is made possible by a triadic world framework in which persons share a form of mindedness symbolically (Plessner 1975, ch. 7.3-7.5).

Between laughter and tears: Playing with and playing in personal roles

Plessner's theory of personal roles further develops the concept of imitation, the basics of which we have introduced above. It does so in such a way that a temporal dynamic arises within behavior along a certain spectrum, which

must be experienced in order to be learned. The theory concerns both playing *in* and playing *with* personal roles (Plessner 1960; 1961b; 1961c; 1967). These forms of play occur between the poles of laughing and crying, which are no longer considered as 'playable' (Plessner 1941). This was the theme of my book *Between Laughter and Tears I: The Spectrum of Human Phenomena* [*Zwischen Lachen und Weinen I: Das Spektrum menschlicher Phänomene*, 1999]. Rationalistic philosophies treat the capacity of speaking and acting as the essence of man, whether it be implicitly or explicitly. For Plessner, they are the provisional results of another process, by means of which we are able to take on and put ourselves into playing personal roles and to come out of them again: namely, by playing *with* them. Fundamentally, a person stands outside of his or her organism. From there, the person can distinguish the extent to which he or she lives in a vital body – as though in a sheath – and the extent to which he or she possesses this organism from the outside, in treating it as he or she might treat other bodies. Every person thus has a twofold relation to his or her body. He or she lives in it, but can also possess it from the outside (Plessner 1975, 293). In order to do so, the person must take on a role outside of his or her organism, i.e. in sociocultural interactions with others.

Here, there are various kinds of cases that structure this role-play. Minimally, a role consists in a habit, i.e. in moving pictures in accordance with which one enters onto the scene, and in an idiomatically determinate language (dialect) that matches the habit. One can exceed such a role by over-identifying with it, e.g. by passionately overshooting the role in the eyes of others. Conversely, one might fall short of the expectations that others have about the role, because one is compulsively preoccupied with something else. Both kinds of phenomena – passions and compulsions – may be conditioned, in which case they are generally tolerated, or they may become *un*conditioned. In the latter case, they destroy the role, and, if there does not happen to be a more appropriate role, then the whole existence of the role becomes questionable. Those affected either slip off into superhuman realms, or they undershoot the level of personality altogether. Subsequently, the realm of human behavior gets left behind, for which every culture has any number of expressions and taboos (holy, divine, devilish).

Plessner's fundamental thought is quite simple and cross-culturally observable: we all learn human behavior between laughing and crying. When we are no longer able to respond to a situation in the sense of a determinate role, the situation gets called into question. If no modifications of the role manage to resolve the situation, we attempt to answer it by playing laughter or tears. And should this change of roles not help either,

then we break into non-played laughter or tears, provided the situation does not involve any form of violence. Thus, we arrive at the limits of human behavior. At these limits, though the person is no longer able to give any answer, his or her body still is, despite the fact that his or her competence to play the role collapses. In non-played laughter, the body breaks out of the relevant habit and language out into the world. For the person concerned, the situation involved too many possibilities of meaning that simultaneously contradicted with one another. The person as it was, flees out of its own organism. In non-played crying, however, the person collapses in on herself and falls back into his or her body. For such a person, the whole situation has become senseless. The person gives up on answering the situational question and instead simply hands herself over to the body, which, as it were, shrivels up (Plessner 1941, 359-384). It is not difficult to recognize the structure of personality from *The Levels of the Organic and Man* (1928) in Plessner's analyses of *Laughter and Tears* (1941). In both limit cases, the locus of personality vanishes from the interactions of the organism to its environment. Either the person flees outwards, away from the body, because he or she sees too many contradictory world-possibilities and is paralyzed. Or the person – lacking distance from the situation – falls into the interactions themselves and ultimately into her body, because no horizon of sense or meaning manages to establish itself. Anyone who has thus experienced the limits of her own behavior and is now able to live with them may express her sovereignty in a smile (Plessner 1950).

One can now run through the whole spectrum between laughter and tears anew, by considering these limit experiences and asking how sociocultural roles might be changed in order for persons to be able to live better, or, as one could also say, in order for living creatures to be able to live in a personal manner. In this respect, surely Plessner's greatest achievement since his *Limits of the Community* [*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 1924] consists in having indicated the anthropologically necessary twofold structure of personal roles. A role is a mask in the sense that it can publicly reveal and privately conceal. If a person has to live both within her body as well as outside of it, then, structurally speaking, she needs to be able to distinguish, for herself and for others, between the private and the public sphere. This twofold structure contains a great civilizing lesson, which must not be sacrificed to any community ideology. Every living person needs the freedom to play. She must be able to distinguish between herself as the bearer of the role, and herself as the player of the role (Plessner 1961b, 195-204). Or, as G.H. Mead puts it: there is no "I" without such a "mine" and a "me." This is the reason Plessner speaks of the "We-form of one's own I" in the *Levels* (Plessner 1975, 303).

The evolutionary potential of emancipating ontogeny from phylogeny: The extra-uterine year, plasticity to domestication, fetalization and corticalization

In the nineteenth century, it was common biological practice to assume that, as the phrase went, ontogeny (individual development) recapitulates phylogeny (species development) only in abbreviated form. Since at least the 1920s, however, biologists have begun earnestly investigating the extent to which a limited emancipation of ontogeny from phylogeny might lead to new evolutionary potentials, particularly to potentials that can be conceived as peculiarities of the appearance of modern man. Therefore, I will briefly address the increasing gap between human ontogeny and the phylogeny of *Homo sapiens*, as contrasted to non-human animals. This gap is characterized by the following *biological* phenomena: an extra-uterine year, nidicolous vs. nidifugous animals, and the plasticity to domestication (especially during the imprinting phase). These phenomena are connected to others: premature nativity, fetalization and cerebralization (brain growth relative to the rest of the organism) and corticalization (growth of the cerebral cortex relative to the rest of the brain). In all of these respects, Plessner is fundamentally in agreement with Louis Bolk, Adolf Portmann and Frederick Jakob Buytendijk (Plessner 1964; 1965a; 1965b; 1967a; 1967b).

Among primates, the periods of childhood and adolescence increase the closer the primate resembles human beings. It spans from about 6-7 years to 14-20 years. Adult behavior must first be learned in play. Such behavior is certainly not present immediately after birth, nor is it simply a question of the growth of the organism. In humans, even the first year of life outside of the uterus is quite striking. It is only at the end of this year that the cranium grows together, which is typically a part of embryonic development in the uterus. What is today called the "revolution" only sets in thereafter (between the ninth and twelfth month). It is only after this that the infant proceeds to walk upright, learns shared intentions in shared attention with adults and develops language skills. Beginning in the third year of life, the child's use of language becomes recursive, i.e. emancipated from perceptual situations and the memory of perceived situations and, as of the fourth year, the child becomes familiar with narration and the independent correction of unintelligible discourse, without recourse to perception (cf. Tomasello 2003). Even enculturated great apes – i.e. apes that have been raised among humans – reach the limits of their linguistic development at a level that human children reach in their third year. The apes never master the recursion of triadic symbols upon triadic symbols.

For the purpose of understanding the fundamental biological problem involved, let us limit ourselves to the first year of life in human infants. It makes sense to refer to this stage as an "extra-uterine year" insofar as it involves embryonic developments that typically take place in the uterus among other animals. Anatomically speaking, this premature birth enables the infant, which has a large head and brain relative to the rest of its body, to be born through the mother's pelvis. The pelvic circumference is limited through bipedalism. Comparatively speaking, premature births are, for humans, the norm and this requires particular care within a niche. The development of the brain in the extra-uterine year accelerates so exponentially that crucial phases continue all the way into puberty – phases in which "superfluous" neural connections, i.e. those that are used too seldomly in behavior, are eliminated (Singer 2002). It is important to note that this does not only involve an externalization of embryonic development into sociocultural relations between the infant and adult persons. Conversely, this sociocultural externalization of the organism remains occupied with tasks that, by biological standards, largely belong to embryonic development. In a certain sense, the cultural social collective – and, in particular, the mother-child relationship – has now taken over the role of the uterus, at least until the separation from the parents begins some time during puberty. The sociocultural niche must provide for such fetalization, cerebralization, corticalization and increasingly prolonged ontogenesis, i.e. the niche must develop special resources and caring skills. This is not simply a question of nutrition, but also of lasting emotional connections between the sexes and generations, including, not least of all, playing opportunities for the children. Sociocultural structures require, biologically speaking, organismal plasticity, and are thus limited exclusively to genetically and behaviorally fixed organisms. And when social and cultural phenomena recursively reflect back on themselves, when they develop self-reference, then they require still more fetalization and an extension of the phases of play in childhood and youth. It is here that the potential for self-amplifying feedback-loops emerges, which enables specific cultural development.

One can also describe the same fundamental problem under a different aspect by using the terminology of domestication. For several millennia, humans have made use of a biological mechanism – that of imprinting – which is not only found in mammals but in several bird species as well. Yet, even these animals care for their brood for a relatively long time. It is through these social relations that species-specific behavior is acquired. If one alters these social relations by subjecting the young animals to human care after lactation (viz. after the nesting period), they can be domesticated.

It is well known that our familiar species of domestic animals (dogs, cats, etc.) was shaped in this way. Transferring them into a different social niche can, over the course of many generations, not only alter their behavior, but their genetic material as well. The model of domestication is thus highly instructive, for it artificially accelerates a process that can be redescribed as the formation of social niches or, as the case may be, bio-social environments. Naturally, this model already presupposes the presence of humans and thus, viewed phylogenetically, presents a circular account of the self-domestication of a particular primate species. But it is nevertheless helpful insofar as it shows what can happen when ontogeny becomes somewhat emancipated from phylogeny by means of niche formation.

Let us consider yet another terminological distinction stemming from the biology of Plessner's time, in order to redescribe the anthropological problem from a comparative perspective. It was standard practice to distinguish between *nidicolous* (or *altricial*) and *nidifugous* (or *precocial*) animals. The distinction turns on the time at which the offspring are able to independently leave the nest. Nidicolous animals remain in the nest for a long time. They come into the world unripe and unready. Nidifugous animals, like geese and hares, leave the nest quite early. But this only means that they are organismally "ready" to move independently by themselves. It does not mean that they have already mastered the adult repertoire of their species's behavior. This is something they learn by following the adult animal to which they became accustomed during their imprinting phase. While the role of the imprinter is typically played by the mother, this is not necessarily the case, as can be seen in the case of domestication. Schneider (1975) therefore refers to nidifugous animals as "mother followers" ("*Mutterfolger*") and Hassenstein (1975) calls man the "clinger" ("*Tragling*"). If one attempts to apply this distinction to humans – albeit only indirectly – then one would have to say that, on account of the extra-uterine year, humans are secondary nidicolous animals, and accordingly also secondary nidifugous animals. The human combines both variants of ontogenesis found in mammals and birds, but on a phylogenetically different initial level, namely that of primates.

Yet, none of these intra-biological comparisons ultimately solve the problem of how modern man came to being. However, they do show what sorts of evolutionary possibilities have occurred in the animal realm. The nascence of man in natural evolution is nowhere near as inexplicable as dualists often claim if one is willing to take seriously the thought that a bio-social environment might develop which supported fetalization and cerebralization, and specifically the development of the cerebral cortex,

i.e. corticalization. But this also means that one cannot approach biology reductionistically. For it already includes social and cultural phenomena, if by "culture" one understands the non-genetic transmission of behavioral styles that serve to further adopt to ones particular environment. This is customary today in primatology. Populations of the same species have to display partially different behavior in different environments. In Plessner's time, one refrained from speaking of animal cultures, because the concept of culture (at least for Plessner) entailed self-reference of triadic symbols to triadic symbols.

Symbolic transformation of the life drives and the obviation of organs

The symbolic transformation of drives plays a prominent role in the interdisciplinary discourse of philosophical anthropology. If one considers the evolutionary history and phylogeny of man, the characterization of the human species as *rational* cannot work top-down, proceeding from pure reason, but only bottom-up. This issue of the symbolic transformation of drives – which was given a particular inflection by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory – is bound up with other issues such as compensation, suppression, repression and transference. These drew attention not only at *inter*-personal but also *intra*-personal relationships, even if these were psychologically restricted to individual case studies which themselves are difficult to assess for social reasons. In so-called pathological case studies, it is not just the claim of transhistorical validity that appears dubious in light of cultural-historical research. They also relate to how personal relationships to things developed, and how personal matters appeared as thing-like. The question regarding the symbolization of drives simultaneously requires consideration of the opposing question, namely, how symbolization might be connected with relations to things. In this respect, one cannot get around Paul Alsberg's hypothesis about the technological obviation of organs in human behavior. But how should we think about the connection between the symbolization of personal relationships and of things?

It was already clear to Scheler that one must distinguish between instincts and drives (Scheler 1995, 22-27). Instincts genetically determine fixed behavioral patterns. It is precisely such fixed determination that is lacking in life drives. Between their stimulation and their fulfillment, there is some flexibility with regards to time and strategy. Their fulfillment is, to an extent, learned. Scheler also recognized that learning through association presupposed dissociation. His hypothesis, which has regained contemporary significance, was that the cerebral cortex was the organ that

dissociated instinctive and associative connections between sensory and motor mechanisms. Corticalization counteracts the instinctive networks, which are phylogenetically inscribed, as well as the associative connections, which are ontogenetically developed. This represents the neurophysiological correlate for the psychic phenomena we experience in behavior as the intelligent and symbolic satisfaction of drives. Thus, the appearance of humans, viewed physiologically and functionally, must not only involve an increasing role for the brain, i.e. cerebralization, but must also and especially involve growth in the cerebral cortex, i.e. corticalization. Plessner calls the cerebrum the organ of pauses, which interrupt the coupling of sensory and motor mechanisms (Plessner 2002, 174-177). Responses to stimuli are not immediate and direct, but rather take detours through dissociation, renewed association, intelligent reconstruction and emotional bonds that can be symbolically meaningful.

Scheler and Plessner start with the assumption that primates possess an energetic superfluity of drives, which, when they are not fulfilled, become symbolically charged in behavior and can be lived out in bodily fantasies. It is at this point that symbolic binding, fulfillment and transference come into play (Plessner 1961a; 1961b). Scheler and Plessner share this fundamental thought with Freud, but it is striking that neither of them adopts any of his special interpretations – e.g. the Oedipal complex – because these bear on a special cultural-historical semantic. As far as anthropological comparisons are concerned, the only thing of interest is the general mechanism by means of which symbolic transference, compensation, suppression and repression is brought about. To determine what these forms signify and how we should assess their relation to one another, Scheler develops his own grammar of the life of feelings (cf. Krüger 2009, ch. II. 7.) and Plessner his own spectrum of human phenomena. The symbolization of the life drives is key to the transition from the bio-social to a sociocultural environment. Mindedness developed from the ground up through the dynamics of sympathy (Scheler) or imitation (Plessner), rather than from the top down through pure reason or calculi.

In the end, however, the symbolization of the life drives cannot be the whole story of the transition from a bio-social to a sociocultural environment. Symbolization creates an extremely important filter between the organism and the environment, reducing both adaptive pressures (from the perspective of the organism) and selective pressures (from the perspective of the environment). But this does not yet explain how it is possible to establish distance from the environment in the biological sense with which we began. The foundations of this achievement are to be found

in the use and eventual production of tools by great apes. Paul Alsberg's striking description of these phenomena is enshrined in his principle of the "obviation of the body" (*Körperausschaltung*). What he means by this is the withdrawal of the human organism from direct and immediate contact with the environment. Instruments get interposed and these instruments then mediate human organs, protect them, extend them and make them more effective in manipulating objects in the environment. There are two principle manifestations of such mediation. First, the hand – the principle organ of contact – whose freedom of movement steadily increases and whose capacity for leverage can be extended and strengthened. A second manifestation is the new perceptual space that results from walking upright. The latter leads, as Plessner puts it, to "distance-seeing" (*FernSehen*) – seeing beyond the immediate vicinity – whereby the organism learns to distinguish backgrounds from foregrounds and becomes aware of the phenomenon of *being* seen by others (Plessner 1970, ch. 3).

Plessner's originality lies in his attempt to solve the problem of how chains of human conduct have altered by means of an integrative model. In doing so, to my understanding (Krüger 2001, 118-128), he develops three questions and three matching hypothetical answers: a) How does habitual conduct get called into question?, b) How is this question answered – i.e. how does one respond when habitual conduct is called into question?, and c) How does this answer (or response) become habituated over time? In answering these three questions, the various sense modalities are not sharply separated from human language. Rather, the specific task of answering these questions is to be understood within the framework of the symbolic function of the senses. Plessner's symbolic function integrates three aspects of human conduct by answering these three questions (see his *Unity of the Senses* [Plessner 1923]): first, a) the *aisthesis* of the senses – both in perception and imagination – *thematically* interrupts habitual conduct, then b) one answers or responds to these new themes by means of *precisification* and paradigmatization in discourse and finally c) this paradigmatically precisified answer or response to the aberrant or divergent theme is then made reproducible by means of *schematization*. It is in this manner that the response itself becomes habitualized. Technology and science are fundamentally understood to embody such schematizations. Thus, this model does not rely on the typical dualism between the customary and the innovative, but rather on a historically processual interconnection between phases of questioning, responding and renewed habitualization. The dualism arises – from the perspective of this new model – as a special case in which the connection between a response and its schematization is

dissolved and one either forgets *which* question (or questionable status) one was responding to or even forgets what the question was in the first place.

This model must be understood in conjunction with Plessner's unusual understanding of language, which seeks to overcome precisely this dualism: the development of linguistic self-reference in written text must be coupled to the creature's senses in its behavioral field if language is to maintain this sort of automatic intelligibility and transparency. Conversely, this means that the symbolic function of human beings' senses must differ from that of animals, which cannot rely on a recursive dynamic of symbols upon symbols in the structure of their conduct. Plessner understands language as the coupling of expressions with actions or, to use J.L. Austin's terminology, as the coupling of the performative and the constative (cf. Krüger 2001, chapter 1. 2.). Actions (constative) are understood based on the model of the integration of the remote sense of sight and the tactile, proximate senses (embodied in skin and the hand). Expressions (performative) are conceived in terms of voices – one's own and that of others – as well as in terms of proprioception (perception of one's own body) (Plessner 1975, 339f.). The various sensual domains are connected with language, which makes linguistic metaphors intelligible, insofar as these arise through symbolic transference and coupling of various sensible domains with one another.

Generalists and specialists in the formation of conduct

One can ultimately distinguish between *generalists* and *specialists* among primates – although this distinction should not be understood as mutually exclusive, since both sides can complement each other in various ways (cf. Plessner 1961b, 166f.). A population is specialized to the extent that its adaptation to the environment only bears on a special kind of environment, e.g. a tropical forest habitat, a savannah or, if one includes aquatic mammals, a specific kind of aquatic habitat. Viewed in terms of positive selection, this means that the relevant sort of adaptation is only favored by selective forces in a certain kind of special environment. In contrast, general adaptations stand out insofar as they are reinforced by many different kinds of environments by, for example, favoring the spread of the species through positive selection. One can sort primates' practical intelligence and their capacity for symbolization in terms of their general and their special adaptive and/or selective advantages in particular environments. Thus, intelligence and symbolization are candidates for adaptive and selective advantages that arise through the generalization of forms of conduct. In contrast, the practi-

cal connection of individual organisms' intelligence and symbolization with particular sensory and motor mechanisms, which are only advantageous in a particular kind of environment, would speak in favor of an adaptive and selective advantage attained through the specialization of forms of conduct. The history of the appearance of modern man is a progression through various specialized habitats, resulting in a species that managed to survive in all corners of the earth. The tendency to generalize forms of conduct has apparently been advantageous throughout all of man's early and transitional forms. In contrast, great apes – our closest relatives – seem, on the whole, to have been specialists.

To this extent, one must work out a more detailed account of how this thought – regarding the distinction between generalizing and specializing tendencies from the perspective of evolutionary theory – applies to each of the levels of learned conduct and their combinatory possibilities. Ultimately, one must be able to translate this distinction in terms of the distinction with which we began, i.e. the distinction between bio-social and sociocultural environments. In bio-social environments, various biological behavioral functions are already distributed among the various sexes and generations in various forms of cooperation and competition. Here, it appears that generalizing behavioral features, such as intelligence and symbolization, are only capable of adorning forms of conduct that are already biologically predetermined. However, the logic of the formation of sociocultural environments functions differently, because these are made possible by a shared symbolic world, particularly a shared symbolic joint-world. The starting point here is itself something general which is shared symbolically and intelligibly but which must be specialized according to the specific environment, even in a sociocultural environment. One has already posed the question in the wrong way if one thinks that evolutionary and cultural history is just the story of the triumph of the generalization of forms of conduct over their specialization. Rather, each intermediate step poses a new problem of re-distributing and re-combining generalizing and specializing behavioral tendencies (cf. the paleoanthropological suggestions in Mithen 1996). This holds true not only for bio-social environments but for sociocultural environments as well. Even the relationship between these two kinds of environment cannot be conceived as though the former simply replaced the latter all at once, for these kinds of environments may well have complemented one another. As inconceivable and improbable as this may seem, one must acknowledge that it gains viability through fact that only *one* of all the many species of *Homo* that arose in the last millennia managed to survive.

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3 "True" and "False" Evolutionism

Bergson's Critique of Spencer, Darwin & Co. and Its Relevance for Plessner (and Us)

Heike Delitz

> Underlying the doctrines which disregard the radical novelty of each moment in evolution there are many misunderstandings, many errors. But there is especially the idea that the possible is less than the real, and that, for this reason, the possibility of things precedes their existence [...] [T]hey could be thought of before being realized.
>
> – Henri Bergson

Plessner and Bergson: Two theories of (human) life

Plessner's particular way of thinking about human beings within the realm of organic life cannot be adequately discussed without reference to Henri Bergson's philosophy of biology, nor without reference to Plessner's critique of Bergson. Bergson seems, at first glance, far more interested in evolutionary biological thinking than Plessner, although upon closer inspection, one can make the case that it is in fact also a crucial issue for Plessner. This paper seeks to analyze Bergson's subtle dispute with the evolutionary theories of his contemporaries: Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer (Bergson 1995, 51), and also that of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1963 [1809]), as well as the theories of the neo-Darwinians, neo-Lamarckians, and neo-Vitalists mentioned in *Creative Evolution* [*L'Évolution créatrice*, 1907] (Bergson 1944). In his lectures on the history of philosophy, Bergson argues against the 'spiritualists' (Spinoza, Leibniz) and the Old Vitalists or 'duodynamists' (Bichat) (Bergson 1990, 45), and this is why he refuses to call himself a 'Vitalist': for Vitalism uses distinctly different principles for inorganic matter on the one hand, and life on the other, whereas Bergson explicates a philosophy of *immanence*. His differentiation between inorganic matter and living matter, a distinction typical of Vitalism, *appears* stronger *than it actually is*, as we will see below.

With Plessner's philosophical anthropology in mind, let us concentrate on the tension between Bergson's philosophy of biology and evolutionary theory. Bergson expounds his own philosophy of biology using the concepts of *élan vital* and *creative evolution*, often in explicit and incisive disagreement

with philosophical, and especially biological, theories of evolution. In the last chapter of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson calls these theories the work of 'false evolutionists.' His arguments, which accept empirical findings but shine a new analytical light on them, are far from being 'irrationalist,' as labelled by Plessner, and by philosophers since Plessner's time. As a result of his vocal critics, biologists who know Bergson's *name* but are unfamiliar with his *work* call him absurd or mystical (for one exception to this, see Russel 1945, 1). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to first accurately display the core of Bergson's argument, and then show how, from this starting point, he develops a whole new philosophy – a new philosophy of biology, and a new philosophical anthropology in particular. Although we will focus on Bergson, Plessner's work will always be in the background of the discussion: both his critique of Bergson's philosophy of biology, and Plessner's own philosophical anthropology. One can clearly see here *two* distinct traditions in philosophical anthropology, both of which seek to answer the Darwinian challenge.

Plessner's critique of Bergson

Bergson, at first glance, does not fare well under Plessner's critique, especially upon reading *Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928]. Plessner's treatment of Bergson here is similar to his assessment of Jakob von Uexküll and of his theory of specific environments for different species (cf. Von Uexküll 1926). Plessner begins with a discussion of Bergson's philosophy of biology, criticizing contemporary 'ideologies of life.' He begins:

> Each age finds the word which explains it. The terminology of the eighteenth century culminated in the concept of reason; that of the nineteenth in the concept of development; that of the current period in the concept of life. [...] In this word, the age perceives its own energy, its dynamism, its play, its joy in the daemon of the unknown future – and its own weakness, its lack of origins, devotion and capacity to live. [...] A philosophy of life arises, originally determined to spellbind a new generation, just as each generation becomes held by a philosophy in the spell of a vision – now called thereby to lead it to knowledge and thereby to free it from disenchantment (Plessner 1975, 3f.).[1]

1 I am grateful for corrections Matthew Maguire.
I follow the still unpublished translation of Scott Davis (*The Levels of the Organic and Man*). However, the pages refer to the German edition (1975).

Bergson is used as a sparring partner for Plessner's own philosophical anthropology: a protagonist in his project of 'disenchanting' philosophical anthropology by dispelling irrationalism. For Plessner, Bergson, with his philosophical method of 'intuition,' is a philosopher who works against experience, a point he stresses repeatedly. Admittedly, this point is *not* made in Plessner's first main publication, which, in some respects, shares similar views with Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1911 [1896]). In *The Unity of the Senses* [*Die Einheit der Sinne*, 1923], a first exposition of his own philosophical method, Plessner, like Bergson, expounds the idea of a 'partial coincidence' of subject and object (1980b [1923], 106-120) and takes Bergson's ideas seriously. But later, in particular in *The Belated Nation* [*Die verspätete Nation*, 1935], Plessner makes it quite clear that Bergson's approach has to be differentiated from his own.[2] Bergson's *Creative Evolution* seems to have been a significant landmark in a growing movement of German anti-intellectual ideologies (Plessner 1983 [1935], 211). Therefore, in response to the unexpected and remarkable success of *Bergsonism* as a movement, Plessner had to expound a new philosophy of biology.

But this is merely a first impression of the Bergson-Plessner relationship: a closer inspection will reveal that there are many more explicit and implicit Bergsonian influences in Plessner's thought. For this, one only needs to look at Plessner's first philosophical work. In 1913, Plessner expresses his frank admiration for Bergson's project of a new integral philosophy or a new *metaphysics*. Bergson is, according to Plessner, 'until now the only metaphysician of our days' (1980a, 14). Of course, there always remains room for debate as to what 'metaphysics' is. For Bergson, metaphysics is nothing other than the careful clearing of one's own last concepts and notions, the clearing of 'pseudoproblems' posed as if they were real problems. In other words, the task of philosophy is the *invention* of new ways of thinking. Thus, any philosopher carries the burden to invent notions and concepts, or to pose new problems – always only *one, infinitely simple* idea, whose articulation he (or she) seeks as a life-long pursuit (Bergson 2002d, 234). Plessner's 'self-contradictory' or 'paradoxical' arguments seem now to be his 'one simple idea,' for which he is indebted to Bergson in some way. At one point, Plessner indeed refers to Bergson's skepticism about various philosophical terms and scientific concepts, as this would be his (Plessner's) *own* core idea: According to Plessner, Bergson views traditional philosophical terminology to engage in a destruction of the continuity of becoming (Plessner 1980a,

2 For the difference between Bergson and (old) Bergsonism, see Merleau-Ponty 1964. See for the '*gloire*' of Bergson also Combe 2004.

70n22). But, the differences between Bergson's and Plessner's approaches are nowhere near as deep as they have since come to be viewed. As early as 1913, Plessner endorsed the early criticisms of 'Bergsonism,' while being at the same time impressed by Bergson himself (he is clearly more impressed by Bergson than by Nietzsche).

Furthermore, one particular achievement of Bergson is absolutely crucial for Plessner's own work. In the first chapter of *Levels of the Organic*, Plessner applauds Bergson's exposure of a *circulus vitiosus* in Spencer's theory of evolution, and in all other philosophical approaches that seek to analyse human beings as part of the natural world. For Bergson (according to Plessner) raises the crucial question: How can one think of man as both subject *and* object of nature at the same time? In Plessner's view, Bergson applies this criticism to Spencer's work in diverse ways and each time succeeds in exposing circular arguments. Spencer adopted, on the one hand, a natural evolution approach to cognitive categories, and, on the other hand, took these categories as the basis for evolution in nature: the circular argument lying between the 'mechanical natural formation (corresponding to the categories), and the genesis of these natural formations, which *themselves* naturally *were no longer* mechanical' (Plessner 1975, 7). Plessner sees his own avoidance of 'circular argumentation' as that which contrasts his approach to that of Bergson; for he considers 'circular argumentation' to be 'the principle of construction' of Bergson's philosophy (ibid., 12). Bergson's solution, alluded to in the word 'intuition,' is also criticized: his method of '(organic-vitalistic) intuition' is evasive, contradicts the facts, and is 'speculative' (ibid., 8). Bergson seems to be unable to think of human beings as *subjects* of nature, and in particular unable "to consider human beings as subjects of a cultural-historical reality, as moral persons conscious of responsibilities, determined in just the same way as corporeal nature and phylogenetic history is determined" (ibid., 12). As I will demonstrate later, with a little help from Deleuze (1991), one *can* understand Bergson's method of 'intuition' *not* as Plessner understands it, but rather as a philosophical method that does not merge into the triad of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and Kantianism. In any case, one has to note Bergson's philosophical distance from most of the labels his readers have imposed upon him during the twentieth century: irrationalism, (old) vitalism, intuitionism, and so on.[3]

3 For the German ("fruitful") misreading of Bergson, see Raulet 2005. Maybe Heidegger almost reached Bergson's point in criticizing the implied metaphysics in philosophy and science. But in the end he missed it too. According to him, Bergson was thinking time as space, like Aristotle.

Explicitly mentioned in the late article "Conditio Humana" (but implied in his earlier works as well), Plessner seems to acknowledge the seriousness and rigor of Bergson's philosophy: he acknowledges Bergson as the 'immediate forerunner of philosophical anthropology.' Bergson, together with Wilhelm Dilthey a '*Spätling*' of the nineteenth century, expounded a similar philosophical anthropology in his attempt to bring together organic life and mind, biology and philosophy. But once again, there is a critical undertone in Plessner's treatment of Bergson: in his "turn away from the gesture of pragmatic knowledge (the methodical figure of exact sciences) Bergson evades Spencer's circle and wins the freedom of living nature and of the position of man." At the same time Bergson (according to Plessner), in his attempt to distance himself from evolutionary anthropocentrism, "constricts human being's living body on the narrow, pragmatical *Homo faber*" (Plessner 1983, 149, 154). Plessner dwells on Bergson's critique of Spencer, but focuses on Bergson's alleged weakness (his epistemology). Plessner underestimates both Bergson's *method* as well as his carefully defined *distinctions* between plant, animal, and human life: his philosophical anthropology. Plessner can be accused of oversimplifying Bergson's analysis: "Bergson's 'la plante est un animal endormi' is the creed of all romantics." With reference to the method of "introspective intuition," plants are, for Bergson, different "from animals only through the lack of a waking consciousness" (Plessner 1975, 225). Such an analysis has no place in Plessner's own philosophy of biological or philosophical anthropology: the idea of the "open form," for example, "can be exhibited in all plant-life-externalizations as the founding unity of its essential features, without resort to any sort of psychic or psychoid drive-powers" (ibid., 225). There may be, however, some slight Bergsonist flavor in *Power and Human Nature*, as Plessner invents here the idea of *creative* groundlessness; he describes man as the "location of the creative breakdown of his cultural world" (Plessner 1981, 160). This is a hidden Bergsonism which becomes all the more striking when Plessner articulates "sentences about the inconceivability of life and inexhaustibility of human ability," which by no means imply a "thought which wants to cling asymptotical on life (like Bergson), but rather take on a positive position to life in life" (189). In fact, it is not at all easy to identify the differences between Bergson's and Plessner's philosophy as each side tries to defensively distance itself from the other. Plessner always gives us *some* negative critique of Bergson, though he is clearly won by Bergson's general approach, and by many of his crucial

Obviously he didn't catch the change in Bergson's writings since his Latin thesis (*Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit*, 1889).

arguments, especially in *L'Évolution créatrice*. This is because Bergson's work seems, to Plessner, to be the first philosophical analysis in which the philosophical challenge of evolutionary biology is recognized. Furthermore, Bergson articulates here a philosophical perspective on human beings as *subjects and objects of nature*, which is crucial to Plessner's own project.

Bergson's critique of scientific evolutionary theories

The enormous challenge Bergson posed for Plessner is revealed by the fact that Plessner felt the need to constantly criticize Bergson. There appears to be, beyond all the criticism, perhaps an underlying Bergsonian influence: Bergson was the first to expound a philosophy of biology and a philosophical anthropology in the sense of Plessner's *Stufen*. Plessner never articulates what he takes to be the core of Bergson's philosophy, perhaps even because he did not fully understand it. One therefore has to look into Bergson's own work to see the kernel of Plessner's philosophy of biology or 'general organology' (Canguilhem 2008a), as well as its ramifications for different areas of the biological world. The argument is complicated, especially in its critique of evolutionary theories; but, because of the radicalism of the approach, it is the potential starting point of a novel analysis of organic life.

This new philosophy of biology can be outlined in four main points:

1. Evolutionary theories, because of their concept of time, see all organic life 'already given' or *sub specie aeternitas*, but the view *sub specie durationis* is surely essential.
2. 'Life is a tendency of action in matter; which wants to grow over itself,' to act expansively and with greater and greater choice – a tendency toward undirected growth and dissociation.
3. Plant, animal, and human are the principal loci of this tendency.
4. 'Freedom' is the 'form of human life.'

As there have always been many misunderstandings of Bergson's position, it is necessary to articulate what the concepts of *évolution créatrice*, *élan vital*, and *durée* actually mean. These concepts arose in the context of Bergson's profound disagreement with his contemporaries' evolutionary theories, especially with the following authors and their concepts: Herbert Spencer in his theory of evolution as a directed process from simple homogeneity to complex heterogeneity (following Coleridge's theory of life (1848) and Von Baer's law of embryological development, 1827-1838); Charles Darwin in his theory of gradual variation and selection according to adaptation (1864);

Hugo de Vries in his theory of mutation (in place of infinitesimal gradation) (1909-1910); Theodor Eimer in his idea of 'orthogenesis' as a directed line of evolution arising from the inheritance of acquired characteristics (1890); August Weismann in his theory of germ plasma (1893) as the only place of variation (instead of the inheritance of adopted characteristics as Darwin argued). This last theory is the platform for a later synthetic evolutionary theory and for today's genetic theory (together with a concept of mutation derived, but altered, from De Vries).

Bergson does not deny any empirical facts about the history of living organisms. On the contrary, the idea of evolution and the corresponding empirical facts are taken for granted. Bergson stands *resolutely* on the factual foundation of evolutionary biology (Bergson 1944, 70), yet delivering a new interpretation of these facts. So, the crucial question concerns what Spencer, Darwin, and others mean by the word 'evolution,' and what perspective they therefore develop with respect to biological life in general and human life in particular. Thus, there appears to be a task common to both evolutionary theory and Bergson's analysis: namely, to explain the manifold forms of living organisms, the common ancestry of all, and the extinction of some. To *count as* an evolutionary theory in the first place, a theory must offer some answers to these issues. Addressing these issues, Bergson develops a quite distinct philosophy of the 'true' evolutionary character of organic life. His overall task is, of course, more than the development of a philosophy of science, or a philosophy of biology. Rather, the task is to develop a 'right' idea of life as a whole, and therefore nothing less than an analysis of all that is. Bergson therefore constructs a new metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and philosophical anthropology. To understand his project, we must clarify first the notion of 'evolution' in Spencer, Darwin, Lamarck, the neo-Darwinians, and the neo-Lamarckians. We must also clarify the implications of 'finalistic' theories here, as (at least in Bergson's view) these are equally as mechanistic as the other theories mentioned. We then need to clarify Bergson's position. His analysis claims to find a characteristic common to these diverse theories of evolution; namely, that they are all *mechanistic*, in a sense I will explain below.

What then is the core of evolutionary theory in Bergson's view? Spencer, Darwin, and all the other evolutionary theorists mentioned above presuppose *gradual* variations. 'Gradualism' is a crucial concept in any evolutionary theory. 'Evolution' *means*, for any such theory, a process of change through infinitely small steps. In Spencer's words, evolution is a movement from an "indefinite, incoherent homogeneity toward a definite, coherent heterogeneity" (Spencer 1867, § 138), by "daily infinitesimal steps"

(Ribot 1874, 158).[4] Darwin defines his process of evolution in the same way: as a process which operates by way of the smallest steps, through successively slight variations. The "process of modification must be slow and gradual" (1864, 277), and "Natura non facit saltum" (1864, 173). The Latin phrase is an old philosophical dictum which can be found in, for instance, Leibniz and, *mutatis mutandis*, even in Aristotle. Variations have to be slight so that the whole organism can still function in spite of the mutations or variations. Thus 'evolution' is conceived of as a step-by-step process. Indeed this seems to have been, until recently, the most obvious way of conceptualizing 'evolution.' It is surely still an axiom of today's evolutionary theory, whether Gradualist or Punctualist, though both approaches can account for small 'jumps' under certain environmental circumstances.

It is here that Bergson develops his argument that every evolutionary theory contains assumptions inherited from classical philosophy. Bergson's critique is that all these theories present evolution *as something other than* a process. Every evolutionary theory is approached from the viewpoint of eternity. Evolutionary history is divided in stages which can be seen *all at once* from this viewpoint: this is "spatialized" time (Bergson 1944, 233). Such a concept of time, where it is seen as a series of intervals rather than as a continuum, is embedded in an ancient metaphysics: analysis of time into a series of states-of-affairs implies an underlying classical metaphysics. *Becoming* for Bergson, in contrast, is among the most striking characteristics of life. Ultimately, *becoming* is also the natural state of matter: the universe changes from one level of organizational complexity to a lower one (détente, entropy), whereas living organisms usually do the opposite. But in both animate and inanimate realms, duration "means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new" (1944, 14). Because of their concept of time, Bergson calls these evolutionary theories *mechanistic* in that they understand (individual) development and (trans-individual) evolution as agglomerations or combinations or series of states-of-affairs.

Bergson rejects the idea of a 'life force'; he emphasizes instead the distinctly "empirical character" of his notions, especially of *élan vital* (Bergson 1935, 92). Even in some of his last letters he continues to refuse having to concede the existence of a vital force. "I have enumerated [...]

4 "Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation" (Spencer 1867, § 145).

the ignorances which make up a certain quite special vision of evolution and life, at the point that I mark by writing the word *élan*. [...] My so-called metaphor is [...] the precise, and at the same time global, notation of possible observations. And this is why it is radically distinct from sterile images," such as a vital force or a will to power (Bergson 2002b, 369). Biologists, and, for that matter, ordinary people, think of time in notions of intervals: of minutes, or, seconds, or parts of seconds etc. In contrast, 'we' (we all who take 'time' as related to 'space') think of time mechanistically. Mechanistic theories (which postulate the smallest possible steps and therefore fragment *becoming*) also crucially rely on chance or randomness to play a major role in evolutionary processes. As chance is merely a name for causes-yet-unknown, scientific theories must provisionally build the reality of randomness into their analyses. If we knew all causes and all pre-existing states-of-affairs, we could see the course of evolution at a glance: "*all is given*." If all is given, there is no becoming. The essence of any "mechanical explanation, in fact, is to regard the future and the past as calculable functions of the present, and thus to claim that all is given" (Bergson 1944, 43). Hence, radical mechanicalism implies a "metaphysic in which the totality of the real is postulated complete in eternity, and in which the apparent duration of things expresses merely the infirmity of a mind that cannot know everything at once" (Bergson 1944, 45). It is in this way that the Spencerian method turns out to be false, for it "consists in reconstructing evolution with fragments of the evolved" (Bergson 1944, 396). It is this way that Spencer, Darwin, neo-Darwinians and neo-Lamarckians err: they observe reality in its present form, analyze it into fragments, then integrate these fragments – thus failing to capture the essence of *becoming* (Bergson 1944, 396).

An alternative approach is found in finalism, seen for instance in the vitalism of Hans Driesch. It is a theory which can be pitted against any mechanistic theory. But for Bergson, such vitalism (finalism) is "quite as unacceptable," and "for the same reason." Finalists speak *per definitionem* of an 'end' of evolution: they assume a pre-existing model which has to be realized. According to Bergson, finalists essentially follow Leibniz's idea of a 'preformed world.' Finalism is therefore nothing more than a retrenchment in the mechanistic metaphysics of Leibniz. The only difference is that finalism considers utility as being immanent rather than external. Any teleological theory always posits that material things and sentient beings merely realize a program of events previously determined: there is no invention, no creation. Finalism is thus only an "inverted mechanism" (Bergson 1944, 45). In his 'directed evolution' of individuals through "suspension" of entropy

(as 'entelechy' is defined[5]), Driesch is nothing more than a *mechanist*. Like the principle of mechanical causality, the principle of finality leads to the conclusion that "all is given"; again, there is no *becoming-another* (Bergson 1944, 52). On the same account, the failure of embryological theories *and* of developmental theories alike is that they do not grasp evolution as a living *process*.

Because they assume a classical metaphysics, a philosophy of identity and dualism, both gradualist-causal and finalistic-intentional theories are false accounts; they cannot grasp the *continuous becoming* of the natural world. Yet evolutionary biology *claims* to explain becoming by assuming time to be continuous and only divided into discrete intervals for its explanatory power. However, this is not enough for Bergson as he sets out a new understanding of time: present and indivisible *duration*. Because life is becoming, one must substitute the "false evolutionism" (which "consists in cutting up present reality, already evolved, into little bits no less evolved, and then recomposing it with these fragments, thus positing in advance everything") with "true evolutionism," in which the future is unforeseeable (Bergson 1944, xxiv). For Bergson, such is the very task of philosophy. Physicists (and perhaps biologists too) properly understand their roles when they push "matter in the direction of spatiality"; but has metaphysics understood its role when it has simply trodden in the steps of physics (Bergson 1944, 227)? Inert matter has duration, because of entropy. But with regards to inert matter "we may neglect the flowing without committing a serious error," because of our practical interest, and because matter "is weighted with geometry; and matter, the reality which *descends*, endures only by its connection with that which *ascends*," i.e. with life (Bergson 1944, 401).

However, the error shared among all evolutionary theories lies at an even deeper level. In classical metaphysics (which posits distinct states-of-affairs instead of a continuum of being), the error lies in "false questions." Bergson exposes a *logical* failing in classical philosophical analysis (and by extension in evolutionary theories too) which purports to describe reality: the failing is seen in particular in their notions of nothing, disorder, and possibility. Any analysis of such nature gives rise to apparently meaningful questions which in reality are vacuous (Bergson 1944, 240ff.). Consider, for instance, Leibniz's question (why does there exist something rather than nothing?),

5 The action of Entelechy consists in "suspending" possible becoming; it is "unable to cause reactions between chemical compounds, […] unable to create differences of intensity of any kind. But entelechy is able […] to suspend […] the reactions which are possible with such compounds as are present, and which would happen without entelechy" (Driesch 1929, vol. 2, 180).

or the analysis of primary disorder as absence of order (which can be found, for instance, in Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory). The negative idea of absent order is empty, it is a logical failure. "In analyzing the idea of disorder thus subtilized, we shall see that it represents nothing at all, and at the same time the problems that have been raised around it will vanish" (Bergson 1944, 243). Furthermore, "this confusion is the origin of most of the difficulties raised by the problem of knowledge, among the ancients as well as among the moderns" (Bergson 1944, 248). The same illusion can be found in the concept of the possible: it is always seen as reality *minus* its existence, already given and then negated. So the idea of the *possible* is *richer* than the idea of the *actual* (a given reality *plus* its imagined absence), yet one always assumes the opposite to be the case. The same happens with the ideas of order and existence: one believes "that there is *less* [...] in the concept of disorder" than in the concept of order. But for Bergson, "there is more intellectual content" in these ideas: one has to conceptualize existence *and* its absence; or reality *and* its possibility. So, within the "doctrines which disregard the radical novelty of each moment in evolution" there are multiple errors. But it is "especially the idea that the possible is *less* than the real" which becomes misleading, since such thought implies that "the possibility of things precedes their existence" and as a result, "they could be thought of before being realized" (Bergson 2002e, 228). The possible is thus only the "mirage of the present in the past": the "image of tomorrow is already contained in our actual present, which will be the past of tomorrow." It is precisely here where we encounter the illusion. "One does not see that the contrary is the case, that the possible implies the corresponding reality with, moreover, something added" (Bergson 2002e, 229). There is, therefore, no becoming, but only a succession of states-of-affairs in evolutionary theories. So we have to "resign ourselves to the inevitable: it is the real which makes itself possible and not the possible which becomes real" (Bergson 2002e, 232). Recognizing the problem, Deleuze suggests that we speak of the *virtual/actual* instead of the *possible/real*,[6] or in notions of *differentiation* as *becoming another*, instead of conceptualizing 'being' or reality as *identity*. The "difference [...] in the virtual grounds the movement of actualisation, of differentiation, as creation." It is thereby "substituted for the identity and the resemblance of the possible, which inspires only a pseudo-movement" (Deleuze 1994, 213). Rather than awaiting realization, the virtual *is fully*

6 For the first time, in 1960, in his course on Chapter III of *Évolution Créatrice*: "Bergson prefers not to say that the possible becomes real; but rather that what is virtual is actualizing itself" (Deleuze 2004, 181).

real; what happens in evolution is that the virtual is actualized. The concept of the virtual/actual is another way of rendering Bergson's *élan vital*: the process of life as actualizing unforeseeable directions in different living forms, which can be identified as 'possible' only retrospectively.

Bergson, armed with this concept of the virtual/actual, adopts a point of view which differs substantially from that of any evolutionary biology and any evolutionism. He is interested in the phenomenon of various forms of life resulting from a unique 'effort' or 'impulse,' and therefore sets out a theory of 'ascent' instead of descent ('*creative* evolution'). Furthermore, he invents an entirely new ontology, of *immanence* rather than of duality (an ontology apparent as early as *Matter and Memory*), and a new metaphysics, that of *difference* rather than identity. This philosophy of Bergson is adopted and explicated by Deleuze, from the 1960s onwards, under the term "philosophy of difference" (1994) or new "vitalism" (Deleuze 1995, 143). The starting point of this philosophy (a philosophy shared among others by Cornelius Castoriadis and Gilbert Simondon, even if only implicitly) is the concept of *becoming-another*, instead of *being* (*Sein*): the concept of the radical *new*, in place of identity or doubling. Here we should be mindful of Foucault's critique of philosophy of identity in *The Order of Things*, and Castoriadis's similar critique in *Imaginary Institution of Society*. Both argue that classical philosophy is unable to think of the new *as* new, and unable to think of becoming as *becoming-another*. Such failure to arrive at any concept of identity seems to be a flaw of evolutionary theory, due to the fact that any such theory is inherently 'mechanistic' (Bergson) in the sense of *fragmenting* time, and seeing all possible evolution as 'already given.'

This philosophy of difference, or better yet, of *differentiation*, has its own *method*. Bergson always stressed the *effort* of 'intuition.' The method he calls "intuition" is characterized by an "exceptional effort" to leave "nothing outside" (Bergson 2002c, 251). It consists, according to Bergson and supported by Deleuze, of three steps. The first "concerns the stating and creating of problems" (exposing pseudo-problems and posing genuine problems): "I recommend and have practiced for some fifty years a method which essentially consists in envisaging special problems in philosophy, as is done in the positive sciences [...] the true difficulty is to *pose* the problem" (Bergson 2002b, 370). The second step requires the discovery of "differences in kind" rather than gradual differences of degree. The third step is the "apprehension of real time" in concepts and notions of becoming. Together, this "gives the 'fundamental meaning' of intuition: intuition presupposes duration. It consists in thinking in

terms of duration" (Deleuze 1991, 14, 31).[7] In other words, the Bergsonian method is a process of removing "the positive notation of 'immediate data' in a dialectic of time" and substituting the "intuition of essences into a 'phenomenology of genesis' [linked] together in a living unity" (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 156).

Bergson's concept of life

Life is becoming, that is why Bergson attempts to find a viewpoint *sub specie durationis*. For this he needs a new method. To find such method, he re-analyzes not only the concept of time, but also the role of 'adaptation' in evolutionary theories. Evolutionary theories explain only the variations occurring at a given moment, but not the course and trajectory of a series of adaptations. This view of adaptation conveys a fairly passive idea of the nature of living organisms. The prevailing evolutionary theories explain only *what has been selected*, instead of explaining what *arises*. Furthermore, they attribute any adaptation to accidental, gradual variation. But over the course of evolutionary history, there must have been many variations serving no useful function, and there must also have been many different ways in which an adapted organ, for example, could be brought about in the evolution of a species. Bergson discusses the theory of the heredity of useful properties with great skepticism, concluding that there are too many chances and states-of-affairs. The same criticism holds for neo-Lamarckianism, with its individual purposeful changes and its living 'heritage' of useful developments. With their unstated classical metaphysics (analyzing time as a series of intervals), evolutionary theories rely on a hidden model: nature is seen as combining things and elements successively, whereas according to Bergson, the process of dissociation is more important: "Life does not proceed by the association and addition of elements, but by dissociation and division" (Bergson 1944, 99). Evolutionary theories, with their particular concepts of time and life, are tools for inquiring into the function of nature.

7 Moulard-Leonard (2008, 89-104) refers to Bergson's method as a "transcendental/virtual empiricism": "I have been arguing that the word virtual precisely aims at conveying the transvaluated status of those pure conditions: they are absolute outside of experience and can therefore not be found in experience" (which would be the Kantian thought); but "their ontological principle is one of alteration and mobility, so if there is a sense in which they can still be called pure forms, then they can no longer be reduced to some ready-made, abstract containers for experience" (99f.).

The notions of order and disorder as used in classical evolutionary theories can also expose hidden models and philosophical assumptions. Life, according to Bergson, is a process of differentiation. It is not the case that disorder is the default situation and that order requires explanation. Life, he says, is a 'tendency,' and there is no *directed* evolution. Acknowledging that all theories of evolution are (more or less) adequate heuristic images, Bergson feels compelled to present a new image: life as *ascent*, differentiating itself with unforeseeable direction, with matter functioning both as a vehicle and obstacle. He also claims that within this image, there is a tendency for living things to have and to spend more and more energy in more and more explosive and directed ways. With this approach Bergson challenges ancient metaphysics, which is prone to thinking of time as an extensive manifold, and instead invites the perspective of being regarded as an unforeseeable, intensive manifold. Such philosophy of life thus has to think in terms of a process, of simple and indivisible acts.

Bergson's development of this notion can easily be spotted in one very specific case: the development of complicated organs (1944, 105ff.). The case of complex organs is an old chestnut in the battery of arguments against gradual evolution. However, one has to reach Bergson's conclusion in order to understand how different his argument is from the traditional arguments in this field. He does not set out to rate organs by functionality, but rather to categorize organs into very different families, such as mollusks and vertebrates. Here he proposes a unique explanatory image: the hand which moves through iron filings (Bergson 1944, 105f.; cf. for the importance of this image, see Fujita 2007). Depending on the energy behind the motion of the hand (its 'impulse' or 'effort'), it comes as far as it does and no further, and forms such and such shapes. Bergson does not wish to analyse this situation by looking at the cause (the hand) and the effect (the shape of the filings), but rather to see the hand's moving through the filings and forming a shape as *one simple act*; in any state complete in itself:

> Let us now imagine that [...] the hand has to pass through iron filings which are compressed and offer resistance to it in proportion as it goes forward. At a certain moment the hand will have exhausted its effort, and, at this very moment, the filings will be massed and coordinated in a certain definite form, to wit, that of the hand that is stopped. [...] [T]here has been merely one indivisible act, that of the hand passing through the filings: the inexhaustible detail of the movement of the grains, as well as the order of their final arrangement, expresses negatively, in a way,

> this undivided movement, being the unitary form of a resistance, and not a synthesis of positive elementary actions. [...] The greater the effort of the hand, the farther it will go into the filings. But at whatever point it stops, instantaneously and automatically the filings co-ordinate and find their equilibrium. [...] According as the undivided act constituting vision advances more or less, the materiality of the organ is made of a more or less considerable number of mutually coordinated elements, but the order is necessarily complete and perfect. [...] That is what neither mechanism nor finalism takes into account, [following the] idea, that it would have been possible for a part only of this co-ordination to have been realized, that the complete realization is a kind of special favour (1944, 105f.).

It is in this manner – by thinking of moving energy or the impulse to act within matter – that Bergson models life in general. 'Impulse' in this context is another word for *élan vital*. It may take the place of 'chance' in evolutionary theories.

This theory of life is applicable to plants, animals, and human beings in their similarities and differences. The overall idea is to model life (as totality and individuality) as a *process*. In the case of organs, it is the *act* of viewing which is important, not the parts of the organ or their functions. An individual is thus seen as an energy-act or a motion. An animal body is not a conglomeration of organs but *formed energy;* and any morphology is a very specifically directed and form-fixed motion. Life as a whole, according to the process-view, is an *energetic* question (correlating to Carnot's law of energy). The task of analyzing life is meant to describe the continuities between the movement of inorganic matter and the functioning of living matter; to bring *indetermination* into the necessities of inorganic matter; to reach suspensions of entropy. Within this "effort" against entropy there are at least three essential categories (plants, non-human animals, and human beings). Understood as forms of energy or impulse, plants are one particular category that are constituted of matter, collect energy, and have no motility (self-propagated displacement through space). Animals are defined by motility, (more or less) instinctive and (usually) directed activities: the simplest example being that of the amoeba, which sticks out its pseudopia in (admittedly undirected) ways. Insofar as animals move, they are sensitive and aware (awareness is a trait characterized not only by having a nervous system, but by having a capacity for motility). There are, of course, 'blind' evolutionary 'alleys'; such as arthropods with their exoskeletons, 'caged up' life.

With human life, the question of formed energy is rather different. Animals are, in relation to their instinctive motion, *fixed*: they are directed forms of energy, and their organs are natural tools. Human life is characterized by a tendency towards intellect (formal, relational knowledge), foresight, as well as concentrated and variable motion (especially in the use of hands). Human beings invent tools and even tools for making tools, therefore enjoying greater potential for motion (even including space flight), using organic *and* inorganic energy, inventing new needs for themselves, and new emotions in themselves. This particular way of living depends on the human nervous system, the gap between problem and answer (and the desire to bridge it), and the utility of language. Therefore, Bergson develops a definition of *human* life as life with *freedom to act*. In human life, life *recognizes itself as having creative power* (Bergson develops both a theory of life and an epistemology).

Bergson and Plessner revisited

Returning to Plessner's critique of Bergson, one can see that his interpretation is somewhat correct: Bergson does indeed identify circular arguments in Spencer; but this does not seem to be Bergson's main point. Plessner uses notions of space and states of being to imagine different forms of life and ways of differentiating it from matter. These include wholeness, shape instead of becoming (as Simmel had already done previously [1918, 12f.]), borders as inner/outer relations, and *positionality* as an active/passive counterrelation between individual and environment. He searches for 'vital categories' (like Bergson), but with a greater emphasis on the difference between the common features of living things (which arise from the relationship between individual and environment – *Umwelt;* this relation is a variation by Jakob von Uexküll of Darwin's notion of *adaptation*). Bergson develops the relationship between individual and environment in a more active sense (motion/consciousness), while Plessner thinks of it in notions of counterbalance. He does not seem to be interested in questions of descent or ascent, as he discusses theories of *individual* evolution (embryology). Perhaps mainly *because* of Bergson, Plessner felt the need to invent his own way. Bergson paved that way: expounding a theory of life which could be called 'vitalistic' in the sense of taking evolution seriously, in relation to an adequate analysis of the human being.

Despite Plessner's disagreements with Bergson, both share an abiding interest in the search for a notion of human beings as living *and* knowing

beings, deserving a special position among other forms of life. Bergson and Plessner both emphasize that *philosophy* has to formulate differences within life. In these differences they find compatible formulations. For example, they present plants as 'open' and thereby as 'less impulsive' forms of life (Plessner with respect to their open relation to their environment, Bergson with respect to their immobility and therefore diminished affectivity). They both conceive animals as 'closed' forms. Hence for Bergson and Plessner, organs are forms of *complexity* within animals, and relatedly, Bergson and Plessner have similar notions regarding animals' spontaneity of motion. According to an increasingly central sensory-motoric system, and to a *less fixed* form of action, animal life expends increasing amounts of energy within a rapidly shortening time frame. Bergson and Plessner both expound plausible theories of what is means to be human. Finally, Plessner and Bergson both speak of *unforeseeable* forms of *human* life. Extraterrestrial human beings are possible. For Plessner, being "human is bound to no fixed gestalt, and in this regard could as well take place under many kinds of gestalt that do not match the one familiar to us. […] The character of humans is bound only to the central organizational form which provides the basis for their eccentricity" (Plessner 1975, 293). And for Bergson, it is "probable that life goes on on other planets, in other solar systems also, under forms of which we have no idea, in physical conditions to which it [life] seems to us, from the point of view of our physiology, to be absolutely opposed" (Bergson 1944, 279).

Life has an open-ended quality in both Plessner and Bergson. In sociological anthropology, this leads to a theory of the ever-evolving human being, with potential for ever-new social inventions and institutions. Since we live in 'biological ages' (Illies 2006) the relevance of these non-mechanistic philosophies of life (allowing an analysis of the human being which grasps the human self-image as non-determined or 'free') is evident. Therefore, after some deep ruptures arising from the exposition of an often-misunderstood Bergsonism, there is currently some international resonance between Deleuze and Canguilhem and the aspirations to revive Bergson's work (Worms 2009, 567ff.). As a consequence, there is also a renewed interest in Plessner. Bergson presents a new analysis of life, a (new) vitalistic approach, although Plessner refused to call him a vitalist (e.g. in comparison to Hans Driesch). This vitalism "is the expression of the confidence the living being has in life, of the self-identity of life within the living human being conscious of living" (Canguilhem 2008b, 62). Recent 'evolutionary developmental biology,' which is interested in *innovation* and *novelty*, might have some affinities with this Bergsonian account of life, by criticizing, as it

does, mechanism in biology (found in any Darwinian approach).[8] Plessner presents essentially the same analysis of the living being, but in a different way: in more spatial (than temporal) images, and in more realistic concepts (of power, and of constraint). Plessner's and Bergson's analysis support and affirm one another. Their convergence lies in the creative *natural artificiality* of human life, and ultimately in the *self-confidence of life* in human life. The relevance for *us*, if we seek any adequate analysis of life (and in particular *human* life) lies in a philosophy of evolution which is always in close contact with contemporary life-sciences and also critiques their (implied but unstated) misinterpretations and assumptions.

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8 Cf., for instance, Love 2003, Robert 2004, and Huxley 1953.

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4 Life, Concept and Subject

Plessner's Vital Turn in the Light of Kant and Bergson

Thomas Ebke

Overture: Plessner's reception of Kant's categories

At the beginning of the second chapter of *The Levels of Organic Being and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928], Helmuth Plessner gives a brief outline of what he will later characterize as "vital categories":

> In the language of philosophy, category means a form which experience complies with but which doesn't spring from experience; a form whose scope doesn't come to an end with the sphere of subjective acts but rather spills over to the sphere of the objects, which is why not only the experience we have of things, but also the things themselves are subordinate to that form. Thus, categories are forms which belong neither to the subject nor to the object alone but make them come together in virtue of their neutrality. They are conditions of possibility of agreement and concord between two essentially different and independent entities so that these are neither separated by an insurmountable gap nor influence one another directly (Plessner 1975, 65).

It can hardly be doubted that the gist of Plessner's "re-creation of philosophy" in *The Levels of Organic Being and Man* consists of his attempt to bring about a new Copernican revolution. Plessner's deep bond with Kant is a well-known area of research, even though the status of his dissertation on Kant, *The Crisis of Transcendental Truth in Its Origin* [*Die Krisis der transzendentalen Wahrheit im Anfange*, 1918], has not been thoroughly explored at all. By all means, the third chapter of Plessner's magnum opus revolves around the claim to accomplish a deduction of the so-called "constitutive qualities of the organic." In fact, it would be difficult to fully seize the punch line of Plessner's philosophy of the organic if one chooses to neglect the transcendental drive of his train of thought.

Strangely enough though, it seems that literally anyone who has dealt with this particular aspect in Plessner's book is not concerned with the question of whether or not what Plessner puts forward here is justifiably called a deduction. As it is hard to picture Plessner as anything but a transcendental

thinker, it has become commonplace to take for granted that his philosophy of life is shaped from within by a philosophical operation that can lay full claim to being a deduction in the Kantian sense. However, the above quote is far from being a neat piece of evidence for the transcendentalist stance. At the very least one might be accused of overinterpretation when trying to defend the idea that Kant would have readily subscribed to a thesis such as this: "Thus, categories are forms which belong neither to the subject nor to the object alone but make them come together in virtue of their neutrality" (ibid.).

The speculation that I would like to dwell on a little in this chapter is that Plessner did achieve no such thing as a deduction of the categories of the organic. Furthermore, my impression is that Plessner had a tough time inscribing a transcendental fabric into his argument. Certainly, a transcendental turn governs the way Plessner poses the problem of life. In fact, it is key for grasping the difficulty of eccentric positionality. Nonetheless, this turn is spoiled by another project or strategy which is at work underneath the official story. As far as I can see, this project appealed to Plessner on par with the one emanating from the transcendental paradigm. His enthusiasm can be read between the lines of what Plessner explicitly says. Yet, this subtext was discarded as a systematic answer to the question how knowledge of life can be transmitted. Plessner's vital turn indeed became a transcendental turn. However, in his theory we can catch a glimpse of an altogether different vital turn, a turn which, if Plessner had chosen to think it through to the end, would have presented itself as knowledge of life that sloughs the role of the subject.

To elucidate this context a bit further, I would first like to clarify what exactly is meant by a 'vital turn' in Plessner's argument. My focus in this first step will be to show that Plessner's effort to conceive this vital turn as a transcendental turn is unconvincing, because Plessner felt the force of a different denouement which he implied, but aborted. Secondly, I would like to disclose a similar constellation in the case of Henri Bergson. In a brief epilogue, I will raise the question of how this moment of ambiguity in Plessner's philosophy can be assessed in the interplay between life, concept and subject.

Preliminarily, it might also be relevant to note that there is a dominating view in the literature dedicated to Plessner which claims that he actually succeeded in constructing a systematic and demanding adaptation of Kant.[1] This consensus seems to affirm the image created by Plessner himself, an

1 For examples, see Pietrowicz 1992, Beaufort 2000, Fischer 2000, Breun 2006, Krüger 1999, Krüger 2001, and Mitscherlich 2007.

image that suggests a seamless overall project which smoothly integrates transcendentalism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, philosophy of life and the scientific scenery of the period. Slightly deviating from the main current, I would like to abet the idea that Plessner's philosophy sometimes leaves the impression of an eclectic building that harbours quite a few heterogeneous elements without necessarily finding inner unity at all times.

Plessner's deduction of the vital categories as his vital turn

It is interesting to call to mind why Plessner deemed it necessary to provide a deduction of the categories of the vital in the first place. Having started out with a phenomenological analysis of things as they appear, Plessner had been able to point out that a living thing looks as if it realized its own border. But looks can be deceptive, there can be false friends. It is precisely this distinction between appearance and being, between an indication and a constitution that leads Plessner henceforth to alter his philosophical procedure. If we wish to find a key to the problem of life, we must rule out the case of an entity that pretends to be alive without actually being alive. Let us note that Plessner indeed shares a very obvious motive with Kant in this respect.

Above all, it is the word "constitution" that we ought to pay close attention to. Summarizing the way that Plessner constructs his argument initially, it doesn't seem too far-fetched to predict that Plessner might go on to use the term "constitution" in a conventional phenomenological sense. Following that trail would boil down to an investigation of the ways in which consciousness constitutes phenomena as correlatives to its own intentional acts. If Plessner championed this method, he would be able to convert his "turn towards the object" into a phenomenological exploration of consciousness.

Astonishingly, this classical direction of phenomenology is clearly not the direction Plessner pushes his own analysis towards. On the contrary, Plessner seeks to argue that the conditions of possibility for determining an object's vital "border" are rooted in the peculiar constitution of the object itself rather than in the consciousness of a subject. Thus, the term constitution refers to a mode of composition that is inherently entrenched in life. Olivia Mitscherlich has fleshed out the twofold aim that Plessner pursued in his deduction of the vital categories. According to Mitscherlich, Plessner does not wish to deduce the biological functions of the living from his phenomenological starting point, namely the hypothesis of border realiza-

tion (Mitscherlich 2007, 106). By doing so, Plessner would only retroactively gather biological evidence for an arbitrary conception of the living. Opposed to this view, Mitscherlich believes that Plessner wanted his strategy to work in both ways: It is true that what we naively, and from the mere appearance of things, would describe as border realization begs for biological features of the living that testify to the reality of our hypothesis (ibid., 106). Yet at the same time, and inversely, we might just as well say that the capacity of the living to realize its own borders relies on certain irreducible modes of life (ibid., 105). In this light, we may conclude that Plessner implements the structure of a Kantian deduction without resorting to a unilateral point of departure for deduction.

What we have here in a nutshell, is Plessner's conversed transcendentalism. Objects are able to appear to subjects because both these poles exhibit a correlation with one other by means of a "condition of possibility of agreement" (ibid., 65). Yet this third alternative that has both sides "come together" and guarantees their interaction is a link that eludes both sides at a time. One may illuminate this as follows: The intuition (*Anschauung*) of things must of course be identified as an intuition related to a subject (or a consciousness, for that matter) which, to the extent that it relates to things, indeed constitutes these things. The subject charts transcendental presuppositions, forms of order without which the distinct unity of a thing would not even set itself apart from the diversity of sensual data. But what is intuited – and this represents the very point of Plessner's argument – is the constitution of things in themselves, a constitution that can in no way be charged to the account of the subject performing the intuition. Beyond the scope of sheer conditions of knowledge which are transcendentally deduced on the part of the subject, Plessner understands categories to be object conditions, modalities that can only be elucidated if one asks what a thing constitutively *is*. Thus, the categories, as defined by Plessner, bring about a disjunction "between heterogeneous spheres, between thought and intuition as well as between subject and object" (ibid., 116). Subject and object are related to one another only by way of a rupture that divides them.

This means that in Plessner's approach, the transcendental capacities to constitute things are embraced by the ontic constitution of the things themselves; the "basic issue" (ibid., 115) which had been phenomenologically isolated in a first step and suggested that vividness is a process of border realization must now, in a second step, be authenticated through "laws of connection between the living and its environment […], i.e. materially aprioric laws" (ibid., 65). What is at stake in Plessner's approach is precisely this reciprocal relationship, this inversion between subjectively constituted

views of (living) reality and the qualitative constitution of (living) reality (cf. Grünewald 1993). If, following Jan Beaufort, one may speak of a theory of constitution (*Konstitutionstheorie*) to be at the heart of Plessner's project (Beaufort 2000, 52), it has to be added that in such a theory, the conditions of the object and the conditions of the knowledge of the object intertwine.

It is indispensable to discuss a bit further the precise consequences that flow from this construction. Right from the start, any identification of objects, including living objects, is possible only within the limits of a hermeneutic relation. Plessner's theory of the object is interlinked with a "theory of observation and a theory of interpretation" (Lindemann 2005, 85), whose a priori is not at all supplied as a matter of course. This is why the recovery of the a priori, as finally achieved by Plessner at the end of *The Levels of Organic Being and Man*, does not get lost on the idealistic track that would return to transcendental subjectivity. All along, one has to recall two points to keep a clear eye on the foundations of Plessner's knowledge of life: On the one hand, this type of knowledge is antecedent to the "narrow methodical controls of the empirical sciences" (ibid.). The latter ignore the qualitative aspects of their objects, leading them to ignore the very practice that underlies their own operations. On the other hand, this knowledge eludes the rational force of an a priori that would be anchored in the subject. Plessner registered "this new standing of the a priori in its relation to the a posteriori" (Plessner 1981, 165) above all in *Macht und menschliche Natur* (*Power and Human Nature*) as the revolutionary trove of philosophical anthropology, with Dilthey as the decisive pioneer.

Let us make one thing plain: As matters stand, Plessner deviates from Kant in a crucial respect. One extraordinary point Plessner insists on all throughout is that categories can be understood as "forms of concordance between heterogeneous spheres, between thoughts and intuitions as well as between subject and object" (Plessner 1975, 116). It is a sign of Plessner's dazzling skills as a writer that this passage presents itself not so much as a bold transformation, but rather as an immanent reading of Kant's original text. Quite allusively and implicitly, Plessner tries to get across his statement that "the transcendental unity of self-consciousness may be the central point of all categories, but not the point of their deduction, the principle and source of their differentiation" (ibid., 113).

Having said that, we should now be able to grasp the deviance between Plessner and Kant. For Kant, it would have been unacceptable to sever the bond that links the categories with the transcendental unity of self-consciousness. Of course we are moving in the realm of the subject as a synthetic center when we have to account for the origin of the categories.

According to Kant, the categories do not float between subject and object; they depend emphatically upon the synthesis of the subject. From a strict Kantian point of view, Plessner falls short of the philosophical standards a deduction would have to embrace. Plessner, on the other hand, envisages a creative process which in itself is irreducible, but not transcendentally imprinted in self-consciousness. The a priori that makes the experience of phenomena possible for a subject: that a priori is a process that takes place in between the poles of subject and object. Moreover, it is a process that brings about the opposition between subject and object while at the same time entangling one with the other.

We are now standing at the threshold of what I would like to call the vital turn within Plessner's mindset. This vital turn is only a turn away from both Kant and Husserl because, as mentioned above, Plessner argues that the specific feature which we ascribe to living entities does not derive from an a priori within "us," i.e. the subjects. Instead, this feature is intrinsic to the constitution of the objects themselves. But we ought to move one step ahead: What we'd have to beware of is the fact that our ability as subjects to experience an environment of objects is the result of something which we do because we *live*. Whereas Kant thought that the condition of possibility that allows us to experience objects is grounded in the synthetic operations of our intellect, Plessner encourages us to trace back this condition to a vital performance that is carried out both by ourselves *and* by the objects we experience. If we as human beings are able to conceive of living things *as* living things, then this is not due to a unique cognitive performance, but to a performance we share with the very objects we are confronted with. And this performance is the performance of life in its own right – the realization of the boundary.

Thus, the shift conducted by Plessner is a vital turn because we have already performed the movement of life ourselves when we describe things as living things. And as we have just seen, Plessner develops this argument in view of the constitution, i.e. the reality of the living. However, it would be a severe misapprehension of Plessner's intentions to abandon the interpretation at this juncture. It is not the be all and end all of Plessner's philosophical anthropology to tell us that human subjectivity can be fully dissolved *into* and rewritten *under* the conditions of life. What makes Plessner's approach so complex is the fact that even though *that* may very well be his main discovery, the transcendental perspective is still built into his conception of life.

The important thing is that the transcendental question takes on a new shape in Plessner's framework. He clings on to it and keeps it alive instead

of simply inscribing it into life. To my mind, this particular twist reveals itself when we investigate the relationship between man and life under the circumstances of eccentric positionality. Couldn't we say that the tension that occurs in eccentric positionality hints at a point of view, a perspective or a look at the world that is no longer attached to any specific organic shape? The categories in which man's knowledge of life proceeds do indeed turn out to be the constituents of the objects themselves. But a living being that is able to objectify its proper constitution is "once more related" (ibid., 288) to that very constitution and hence "no longer bound by it" (ibid., 291). If the structure which carries and characterizes the living becomes transparent, it does so only from a point of view that breaks away from the immanence of life: "Man is placed into his own border and hence way beyond it, which confines him, the living thing" (ibid., 292). We might even put it like this: Man does not only perform the movement of life, he is confronted with the fact and the results *of* and the alternatives *to* his performance. If an animal realizes its border, it spontaneously generates the horizon under which things can appear to and vanish from its eyes. In sharp contrast, man is driven into the experience that his horizon can only be socially construed. It changes historically and it is continuously open for interpretation.

In other words, Plessner finally surpasses his own vital turn by arguing that our ability to understand the constitution of life cannot, for once, be traced back to having the constitution of life. Plessner's philosophy, as we see it, wavers between the discovery of life as an a priori and a transcendental motive, which rejects the idea of an aprioric constitution within the material reality of objects. In the following section of my argument, I would like to zero in on a quite similar rupture conveyed by Henri Bergson's philosophy of life. Just like Plessner, Bergson was caught in the struggle between a transcendental analysis and the insight into the material a priori of life.

From *Matière et Mémoire* to *La Pensée et Le Mouvant*: Henri Bergson's vital turn[2]

Bergson's early work *Matter and Memory* [*Matière et Mémoire*, 1896] (translated into English in 1911), tackles the question on how it is possible that we

2 It needs to be underscored that the reading of Bergson proposed in this paper is essentially inspired by Georges Canguilhem's critique of Bergson in his 1994 essay "Le concept et la vie." (Canguilhem 1994). In an attempt to reveal the relationship between life and concept as a recurrent motif in the history of philosophy, Canguilhem juxtaposes Hegel and Aristotle on one side

perceive similarities among the objects of our sensual experience. By all means, the systematic topic that creates the background of Bergson's text concerns the immaterial character of memories. Guided by this problem, Bergson is finally faced with the reason why we ascribe generality and similarity to phenomena that are nevertheless present to us only as concrete, sensual data. In summary, Bergson starts out to explain the formation of concepts as instruments that help us treat realities as something general, as something we can cope with efficiently and habitually.

For our present purpose, it is paramount to state that Bergson develops his solution of the problem of generality by objecting, first and foremost, to a classical postulate harboured by nominalists and conceptualists alike. Strongly opposed to these two paradigms, Bergson dismisses the assumption that our sensual perception immediately brings us into touch with individualities. Our senses do not refer to distinct and delimited objects. If anything, we find our way through our environment with the help of a vague feeling rather than a sharp sense of difference. I would like to quote Bergson on this subject:

> But this will be more clearly evident if we go back to the purely utilitarian origins of our perception of things. That which interests us in a given situation, that which we are likely to rasp in it first, is the side by which it can respond to a tendency or a need. But a need goes straight to the resemblance or quality; it cares little for individual differences. To this discernment of the useful we may surmise that the perception of animals is, in most cases, confined. It is grass in general which attracts the herbivorous animal: the color and the smell of grass, felt and experienced as forces [...] are the sole immediate data of its external perception (Bergson 1911, 206).

of the dividing line with Kant and Bergson on the other side. From Canguilhem's point of view, Hegel and Aristotle came closer to the solution of this crucial relationship because they went beyond the idea of the subject as the origin of conceptual knowledge. Aristotle argued that the soul (*psyche*) of the living is precisely that principle which renders the living its definite being (*ousia*) while at the same time representing the reference point for our conceptual knowledge (*logos*) of the living. Hegel defined life as the immediate unity of a concept with its own reality, i.e. as a phenomenon which, in everything it produces, reproduces itself. Differing from this type of theory, as represented by Aristotle and Hegel, Canguilhem stages Kant and Bergson as thinkers who could not accept the idea of a substantiality of life that would no longer depend on a transcendental perspective. However, both in Kant's and Bergson's writings Canguilhem finds the traces of an implicit "material a priori." Both were on the verge of acknowledging the objective unity of life and concept, but failed to express this unity as both remained loyal to a philosophy centered on the subject. My suggestion in this paper is to inscribe Plessner's philosophy of life into the pattern and the divisions mentioned by Canguilhem in "Le concept et la vie."

A few paragraphs later, Bergson draws the following conclusion:

> In short, we can follow from the mineral to the plant, from the plant to the simplest conscious beings, from the animal to man the progress of the operation by which things and beings seize from out their surroundings that which attracts them, that which interests them practically, without needing any effort of abstraction, simply because the rest of their surroundings takes no hold upon them: this similarity of reaction following actions superficially different is the germ which the human consciousness develops into general ideas (Ibid., 207f.).

All we need to know for that matter is that Bergson employs a utilitarian theory of perception to explain the formation of general concepts. Humans, just like any other living beings, perceive and treat objects in the light of their organic needs. The stimuli that stream in on us from the environment may be varied and diffuse. However, they produce identical reactions on our part, reactions that gradually become a habit. In this vein, the process of generalizing, of dealing with objects as exemplars of a species is a vital habit that panders to our survival. I would like to underscore that Bergson, arguing as he does, links the knowledge of life to a philosophy of the subject. Even though the problem of knowledge is no longer bound to Kant's transcendental subjectivity, it is indicative of a vital subjectivity that desires to know in order to live more successfully.

However, there are two faces of Bergson as a philosopher of life. While it is sound to say that he remained within the paradigm of the subject as far as *Matter and Memory* is concerned, it is equally true that Bergson altered his approach in *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* [*La Pensée et Le Mouvant*, 1934; English translation 1946; quotes here are taken from the 1992 edition]. In this text we find to use the phrase that has been guiding us so far – his 'vital turn.'

In the context we are presently occupied with, we can only pinpoint out the most evident divergence that opposes Bergson's new attitude to the one he had expressed in *Matière et Mémoire*. It is true that Bergson arrives at his new argument by repeating the point he had made previously. Our use of general concepts for phenomena that are in themselves contingent and sensual goes back to the fact that we isolate features which matter to us in a vital and immediate way. According to Bergson, this interpretation implies an idea that needs to be taken seriously – the idea that similarities are not at all arbitrarily construed, but already suggested to us by experience. What remains to be analyzed is "why experience presents us with

resemblances which we have only to translate into generalities. Among these resemblances there are some, naturally, which go the fundamental root of things" (Bergson 1992, 56). The concepts of life habitually used by an organic subject refer to objects that already display a conceptual order. In this situation, Bergson points out that the important issue to consider is "what one might call objective generalities, inherent in reality itself" (ibid.). As a matter of fact, one might say, life is subdivided, diversified, dispersed and specified in its material manifestations. There are inherently rational differences in life that are in no way invented by man, but antecedent to him.

In an interesting reversal of Kant, Bergson goes on to say that there is a specific class of

> resemblances [which] are biological in essence: they would have it that life should work as if life itself had general ideas, those of genus and species, as if it followed a certain limited number of structural plans, as if it had instituted general properties of life, finally and above all as if [...] it had wished to arrange the living in a hierarchical series, along a scale where the resemblances between individuals are more numerous the higher one goes. [...] In principle it is always in reality itself that our subdivisions into species, genera, etc. – generalities which we translate into general ideas – will be based (Ibid., 56f.).

Kant advised us to look at nature as if it followed concepts that we as humans are able to think of, but he emphasized that this is only a subjective maxim regulating our knowledge. Bergson on the other hand, seems to say that life operates as if reproducing an objective conceptual order, a universal kind of information that communicates itself to us at any moment. Hence, Bergson's vital turn is a turn away from the transcendental position of the subject towards a material a priori: To know life is to be capable of reading the code that is inherent to life. With this image in mind, I would now like to close the loop with a little epilogue that will carry us back to Plessner.

Epilogue

My brief digression from Plessner to Bergson was supposed to show that both thinkers have incorporated something into their philosophies, which I would like to describe as a *vital turn*. In a nutshell, this turn implies that life itself dictates the concepts we employ to understand what life is. This

is the crucial discovery that emerges as a subtext in both Bergson's and Plessner's conceptions. *As* a subtext, this insight necessarily runs up against other intentions that are equally at work, both in Plessner's and in Bergson's case. However, it is not just a coincidence that Bergson's philosophical route seems to be an exact inversion of the trajectory taken by Plessner. Plessner comes to the realization that our capacity to know life is a capacity that springs from life. Yet, he plays out this idea against a transcendental mindset. The condition of possibility which allows us to experience life as a whole is not our immanence in life, but the hiatus which sets us apart from it. Compared to that, Bergson begins, in *Matière et Mémoire*, with an understanding of life as seen from the utilitarian perspective of an organic subject. In *La Pensée et Le Mouvant*, he goes on to revise this philosophy of the subject in favour of a biological structuralism. By doing so, Bergson pays tribute to the idea that the knowledge of life needs to be devised irrespective of a transcendental or phenomenological agent.

Would it be unfair to think that Plessner detected the very conclusion that Bergson had exposed himself to, albeit in a different type of philosophy? If we reconsider Plessner's strange definition of transcendentalism while also bearing in mind that eccentric positionality evokes the paradox of a subjectivity without a subject, can one easily get the impression that Plessner tacitly acknowledged the immanence of life? Furthermore, does it seem like he refused to work out this problem to cover all its implications? After all, Plessner's approach brings forward two lines at a time, two disparate projects that just cannot have evolved simultaneously and that cannot coexist side by side. One is certainly not wrong in thinking that Bergson amplified something we usually call vitalism when he obliterated the agency of the subject from the conceptualization of life. And one is certainly entitled to ask if Plessner seriously left no stone unturned to silence the voice of the vitalism inside his own project.

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5 Bodily Experience and Experiencing One's Body

Maarten Coolen

The world from a bodily perspective

What makes my own body so different from the things around me? When Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, turns to the question of how to describe the specific spatiality of one's own body, he starts with an everyday example of someone sitting at a table. "If my arm is resting on the table, I should never think of saying that it is *beside* the ash-tray in the way in which the ash-tray is beside the telephone" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 112). This seemingly simple observation already suffices to effectively demonstrate how seriously Merleau-Ponty takes the bodily perspective on the world in his phenomenological account of human existence. Clearly, I do not perceive my own body, or a part of it, merely as a thing that is located somewhere in space, as I do with other things. On the contrary, without my body there is no space at all for me through which it would make sense to speak of things that are lying next to each other on the table. My pre-reflexive familiarity with the world depends on my so-called body schema, i.e. my body's ability to project its motor intentions into the world it inhabits. But this body schema is not an image or a representation in which my body's empirically determinable motor habits and capabilities are simply summed up. My body is polarized by its tasks, "it *exists* towards its *tasks*," and consequently the term 'body schema' expresses "that my body is in the world (*est au monde*)" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 115).

In an earlier part of his book, Merleau-Ponty carefully presents his objections against the empiricist and rationalist (or "intellectualist," which is the term he uses) theories of human perception and action which were most prevalent amongst his contemporaries. These objections are still valid when applied to today's versions of this kind of theories, e.g. in mainstream cognitivistic sciences, which depart from two basic assumptions. First, it is assumed that knowledge of the world is obtained by analyzing it in terms of detachable and isolated elements, and placing these elements in some systematic order, by which a universe is constructed that serves as a rational representation of the world. Secondly, one presupposes that humans take action in their world by manipulating this representation,

according to the rules of 'calculative reason.' In the cognitivist view, human knowledge consists in processing data that are stored in a representation of the world. This representationalism is indeed the dominant contemporary manifestation of that stance towards the world that Husserl identified as the "general positing which characterizes the natural attitude" (1982, 57), and Merleau-Ponty called the "prejudice in favour of the objective world" (2002, 7). On the basis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, one can indeed make a convincing case for the claim that these presuppositions prohibit the possibility of a full understanding of human existence. He also shows in great detail how one can acquire a comprehensive perspective on man's openness towards the world in a phenomenology that starts from the primacy of the "bodily point of view" – to use a phrase introduced by Taylor Carman (2008, 93f.).

But, on the other hand, humans have the capability of distancing themselves from the world they inhabit, and of adopting an attitude in which they can distinguish objective features in their surroundings. Moreover, they are able to objectify their bodily capabilities into stable functional structures through which they act on the external world outside of them. From the phenomenological perspective on human perception and skilful action one cannot stress enough how this reflection and objectification is only possible because the human body is maintaining its grip on the world in the background (cf. Dreyfus 2007, 363). In my view, this is indeed a necessary condition of the possibility for humans to reflect and objectify. However, is it sufficient? What kind of experience would force humans to give up their being absorbed in responding to solicitations that stem from affordances they come across in their world?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to develop a phenomenological account in which one, while holding on to the primacy of embodied intentionality, tries to describe the kind of situations in which humans actually experience that they are forced to give up their unreflective coping with the world, and also tries to show how they actually manage to make the turn to reflection and objectification. One of the elements of such an account, I will argue, would be a description of how the body can have a relation to itself and become part of the external world in the very process of being geared into the world it inhabits. To achieve this, I could have chosen to try finding an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology that allows for an answer to my problem. Instead, I opted for a different approach, namely to look at his phenomenology from the viewpoint of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology.

Phenomenology and philosophical anthropology

In everyday life, we don't need explicit mental representations of what we want to see or do, or of how our bodies are situated in the world we are familiar with. When we want to look at something, we tend to move around until we have found the right distance from which we can take in both the thing as a whole and its details that are relevant to us in the particular situation. "For each object," Merleau-Ponty says, "as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself; at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 351).

Without any doubt, Merleau-Ponty gives an apt description of what is presented to us in our perceptual field, when we have found the optimal view of the painting. But he does not mention at all that here we might also have some kind of experience in which we sense that our body is indeed located at the right place after moving around in the art gallery. And when we are reaching out for things we need in order to perform a certain task, e.g. preparing food in the kitchen, we tend to get a grasp of them that is optimal for fulfilling the task we are involved in. As Merleau-Ponty says elsewhere in the *Phenomenology of Perception*: "My body is geared into the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they expect from the world" (ibid., 291). He clearly points out how we get things done without having to make representations of what we are aiming at. The body is solicited by the situation to find an optimal equilibrium for what has to be get done. But in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of skilful coping, the body itself seems to 'vanish' when it perceives something or puts itself into action, in favour of the world that is opened by it. It gets, so to speak, swallowed up in its being attuned to the world.[1] It cannot at the same time be experienced as something that is located in the perceived world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "I am aware of my body *via* the world, [...] and I am aware of the world through the medium of my body" (2002, 94-95).[2]

One can fully subscribe to the primacy of the bodily point of view, and at the same time feel forced to consider the question whether humans, exactly on the basis of their bodily coping with the world, can also have a pre-reflective

1 In a very different context, Shusterman (2005) presents similar observations.

2 The translation is slightly changed: 'aware' instead of 'conscious.'

sensitivity towards the phenomenon that they, as human beings, always have to occupy, as living bodies, a place on their own behalf, and that this is a place which in one way or another may also be present to them *as* a place – whatever this place may actually be. For Plessner, the issue that humans are positioned in their world through their bodies stands at the centre of his philosophical anthropology. One should take into account, he says, "that man does not have a univocal, but an equivocal relation to his own body, that his existence imposes on him this ambiguity of being an 'embodied' (*leibhaften*) creature and a creature 'in the body' (*im Körper*)" (1970, 32). Regardless of whether humans move about and do something, or quietly take in the perceived world, the condition of their existence is marked by this double aspectivity.

Plessner warns against misunderstanding this twofold perspective as a dualistic theory in which the inner is conceived of as a purely mental person who is operating his outer body, which is nothing more than a physical thing. This is in accordance with Merleau-Ponty. Man *is* his living body (*Leib*), insofar as it serves him as a centre of his incarnated intentionality; and he *has* his body (*Körper*), insofar as it is a thing that locates him amidst of other things, or a thing he can use in action. "A human being always and conjointly *is* a living body [...] and *has* this living body as this physical body" (1970, 34). Neither do I coincide with being my body, as if I could find the right distance to see a painting without any awareness of the place where I am standing, nor do I just have my body at my disposal, as if I could move it around as a purely external object without any motor intentionality to be fulfilled. I must accept two orders, one related to my embodied intentionality, and another one related to my body's place in an external world. So, taking up the example of looking at a painting in an art gallery once more: when I bump with my back into a wall while trying to find the optimal distance to look at the painting, I do not only experience that I fail to get the optimal view of it, I also sense that I fail to put my body in the right place, and this in turn makes me aware of my body as a thing that is positioned amidst other things.

Human bodily existence is characterized by the following threefold structure: the living creature is its body, it has its body as a thing, and it continuously actualizes the relation between being its body and having its body. Man must come to terms with the fact that he exists as a living body in a physical thing (*als Leib im Körper*). In any situation he must meet the demand for a settlement for the relation between being his body and having it. But this reconciliation cannot but be a momentaneous one. Moreover, man will never be able to penetrate into the nature of this relation that constitutes his existence. Plessner's expression *eccentric positionality* captures this fundamental trait of the human condition very adequately.

Additionally, an individual living being whose position is structured in this threefold manner, Plessner calls a *person*.[3]

There are not many passages in Plessner's work, in which he explicitly refers to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as another example of an account in which corporeality has a central place in understanding what it is to be a human being. He does mention Merleau-Ponty, however, towards the end of the preface to the second edition of *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, which appeared in 1965. Because one can find phrases in Merleau-Ponty which show a striking similarity to his own, Plessner wonders whether Merleau-Ponty had known his book after all. He dismisses this conjecture, explaining that not all convergences in thought have to be based upon influence. The same happened to him with respect to Hegel, he admits. He would have had to refer to Hegel's writings, had the right passages been known to him. He then expresses this phenomenon in the following words: "In the world more thinking is going on, than one thinks."[4]

In *Laughing and Crying*, Plessner criticizes a philosophical attitude that appears to have all the traits of 'pure' existential phenomenology, although he does not give it this title. Here, Plessner must have been attacking Heidegger's position rather than Merleau-Ponty's. He describes this attitude as one that is opposed to Cartesianism in a manner that evades the problem of being a body and having it as a thing altogether, by "going back to an allegedly unproblematic primordial level of existence." Thereby all forms of human behavior are characterized right from the start in such a way that "the cleft between 'inner' and 'outer' does not appear at all" (1970, 30-31). They are, of course, exactly the phenomena of laughing and crying that demonstrate the inadequacy of this philosophical position. We laugh or cry whenever we are unable to respond as a person to meaningful affordances of the situation we find ourselves in. Plessner explains that this is where we let our body take over the task of answering. Laughter occurs when the person's normal behavior is blocked by an irreducible ambiguity, which is a typical trait of the comic situation. We burst into tears when we are overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness, because we fail to come to terms with the fact that we lack control over the circumstances we happen to find ourselves in. When the body takes over the answer from us as a person, it

3 This is my interpretation of a passage from Plessner's *Stufen* 1975, 293, first paragraph.

4 His reference to Hegel is interesting in itself. One can indeed recognize the use of certain oppositions in Plessner's arguments, but the terms in the oppositions are not lifted to a higher level, in which they are assimilated or reconciled (*aufgehoben*) with each other, as is structurally the case in Hegel's dialectics. The higher level is a new stage of life. But that is a different subject, on which I will not dwell now.

expresses exactly that we do not know which position we should take in that situation. By doing so, it takes 'our stand.'

To what extent does Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology take into account this ambiguity, or rather this double aspectivity, of man being both an embodied creature and a creature in a body? As mentioned before, in his account the body remains inconspicuous, completely on the side of the perceiver, it does not appear as something in the field that is perceived. So if there is something wrong with our body, this is not directly noticed by us, but seems to become apparent to us only through the resulting distortion or loss of our world. If one subscribes to Plessner's principle of eccentric positionality, this cannot be the whole story. Using Plessner's distinction, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology seems to show an inclination to overemphasize the living body (*Leib*) at the cost of the body as a thing (*Körper*). As a consequence Merleau-Ponty's account leaves little room for Plessner's notion of the person, since what makes us a person depends on how we actually deal with the relation between being our living body and having our body as a thing.

Body and world

How, then, do humans deal with being a living body in a body-thing? Plessner specifies the necessary fundamental possibilities that humans have at their disposal when coping with all kinds of situations in their lives in terms of three basic "anthropological laws": the laws of natural artificiality, mediated immediacy and utopian standpoint (Plessner 1975, 309ff.). These laws explain how eccentric positionality manifests itself in human conduct, by specifying three typical oppositions humans have to struggle with as they try to lead their lives.

Again, my aim in this article is to demonstrate how Plessner's philosophical anthropology can provide a line of thought which allows us to reconcile the following two approaches to human embodiment. I endorse the phenomenological position that our openness towards the world, as in perception and in action, is grounded in our bodily existence, but I want to find a way to combine this view with an account of how our own body can be experienced as 'something' amidst other things in the world that is perceived by us and in which our conduct takes place.

In my opinion, a discussion of the second anthropological law has the most to offer in this respect, which I therefore choose as my starting point. It would be a mistake to think that the principle of mediated immediacy implies that humans have two different but parallel kinds of connections

to their world: an immediate one in as far as they are open to what the world has to offer, and a mediated one in as far as humans reflect upon the world. Given its dualistic character, such a way of thinking would be reminiscent of Cartesianism. In the *Stufen*, Plessner gives a very precise description of what he means by a relationship between two terms that is governed by mediated immediacy. In an immediate relation, the terms are connected without any intervening terms; in a mediated relation, the terms are linked to each other through one or more intervening terms. A mediated-immediate relation is "that form of binding [...] in which *the mediating intervening term is necessary in* order to establish or ensure the immediacy of the connection" (Plessner 1975, 324).[5]

Both human and animal life are organized in accordance with this principle of mediated immediacy. For Plessner, this is a consequence of the specific way in which a living body realizes its boundary between itself and its surroundings. He discusses the notion of 'boundary' extensively in an earlier chapter of the *Stufen*. In order to avoid having to deal with complications that are irrelevant for our purposes, let us restrict ourselves to higher forms of life, i.e. animals and humans. We never actually look at a thing from all of the possible different angles and distances. Yet, while only one particular aspect of it is directly perceived by us, in each aspect the perceived thing is nevertheless given as a whole.[6] We see an 'exterior' that cannot exist without indicating the 'interior' of the thing, i.e. its substantial core. Conversely, the 'interior' of the thing is perceptually present to us even if we only see its 'exterior.' Our perception of specific spatial characteristics of a thing would not be possible without this double aspectivity in which the thing's exterior and interior are bi-directionally linked. Due to this structure of perception, we see things delineated from their surroundings by a contour or boundary.

All perception is governed by this principle of double aspectivity, whether the things in our perceptual field are inanimate or alive. But in the case of living beings, the perceived distinction between exterior and interior emerges *as a proper characteristic of* the mode of being of the living thing itself. This is demonstrated by the fact that living beings have to be capable of preserving themselves as a self-sustaining entities by distinguishing themselves from their environment (the 'inward' aspect) in order to stay

5 The translation is mine, as of all of Plessner's texts in German of which there did not already exist an English translation.

6 This is in concordance with Husserl's account of perception, according to which things are only given to us in adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), e.g. Husserl 1982, 9.

alive, which they can only manage by realizing a specific openness towards their environment (the 'outward' aspect). Thus, we perceive that living things realize their own delineations or boundaries, as opposed to when we look at inanimate objects, which borrow their distinctions amongst themselves from our act of perception. In Plessner's own words: "When in the intuition (*Anschauung*) of a corporeal thing a fundamentally divergent relation between outer and inner appears as belonging objectively to its [the thing's] being, it is called *living*" (Plessner 1975, 89 and 98). The boundary is part of the living body itself (ibid., 127), and therefore it is also the body that marks off what is its other, i.e. its environment, with which it is in immediate contact across its boundary. It positions itself in its environment by living both beyond and within its boundary, "beyond itself" (*über ihm hinaus*) and "into itself" (*in ihn hinein*) (ibid., 129). When the living body actually realizes its boundary itself, it follows that the mediating term that secures the immediate relationship between the organism and its environment, is not a separate third entity, but the body itself.

What I have said until now about the law of mediated immediacy holds for animal and human life alike. Yet, according to Plessner, both forms of life differ qua mode of being fundamentally from each other. An animal only *performs* the mediation of its immediate relationship with its environment, e.g. by noticing something or setting its body into action. An animal oscillates between coinciding with its body and operating with it, but it remains totally submerged in this alternation. For humans, this relationship is also present *as* a relationship which always needs to be actualized in one way or another. The animal is placed at the point where the mediation is performed in such a way that it cannot break out of its absolute nearness to itself (ibid., 238-239); or, using an expression of Plessner's himself, animal life is characterized by a "centric positionality." Only man lives eccentrically, meaning that he, "as the living thing, that is placed in the middle of his existence, knows about this centre, experiences (*erlebt*) it, and therefore is beyond it" (ibid., 291). Again we see that eccentric positionality entails that man, in contrast to animals, has *a relation to* his (mediated-immediate) connection with his environment. For Plessner it is obvious that this should not be misconstrued in a Cartesian fashion as if there were a separate mind that is reflecting upon the movements of a mediating body. It must be man as an embodied being, who establishes this relation.

But what does that imply for human corporeality? First, insofar as man is a living body (*Leib*), he mediates his (immediate) contact with the world by getting his physical body (*Körper*) to do things. In this respect, animal and human life are similar. Secondly, while the animal's 'instrumental use of the

body' is wholly bound to the momentary situation in which the animal is active, man experiences or perceives that he puts his own body into action when he uses it *as* an instrument in order to mediate his immediate contact with the world. The term 'perception' here is not meant to refer to some kind of scientific observation, but rather to the everyday perception that takes place when we are finding ways to cope with the things in the world. This would be in concordance with how Merleau-Ponty understands perception, with the exception that he would not accept that there are situations in which one does not only perceive one's body as it "makes itself explicit in the language of external perception" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 239), but one *also* – to some extent – experiences one's own body as a thing present in a perceptual field, while one perceives other things when one is in the process of responding to solicitations of affordances that emanate from the perceived world.

So the human body is an embodied subject, *experiencing* the relationship between both aspects of the body, namely the living body he is (that is open to an environment) and the physical body he has (that can be used instrumentally). Moreover, man also experiences this relationship as being performed by himself when he realizes his openness to affordances in the world. Plessner uses the terms 'object' and 'instrument' without much hesitation. His phrasings must seem rather objectivistic to someone who is accustomed to Merleau-Ponty's style of language. But, in my opinion, one should not interpret Plessner as if he would imply that an instrumental use of something would require a representation of what has to be done. The use of the body he has in mind is of a practical kind, like when one uses one's arms to pull oneself upwards. So when the body aims at fulfilling a task, it mediates its movements with which it accomplishes the task.

Let us now turn our attention to the first anthropological law, which states that human life should be understood from the standpoint of natural artificiality. It would be fallacious to assume that human features can be divided into two distinct and opposing categories, natural and artificial. Rather, artificiality belongs to man's very nature, i.e. to his mode of existence. What does this mean? As we have seen, the human living body must actualize a relationship to itself as it realizes its connection with its environment. This requires that the living thing is in control of its own body, which is indeed the case, because the living creature is its body and has it as something that can be put into motion.

Both animals and humans meet this requirement. However, an animal cannot detach itself from its connection with the particular occasion in which its body notices and affects its surroundings while responding to solicitations of affordances. Only man has the capacity to use his body

explicitly at his disposal. Having the inherent instrumental nature of the own corporeality disclosed to oneself is a privilege that is restricted to humans (cf. e.g. GS VIII, 321). Consequently humans are the only creatures confronted with the fact that their bodies can suffer from certain shortcomings when they are in the process of performing a task. They have to create artificial means with which they supplement their 'naturally grown' bodies in order to have a full corporeal existence. Furthermore, they have to transform things they come across in their surroundings into artifacts in order to fully satisfy their needs. Man can live only insofar as he *leads* his life in a specific manner and only insofar as he succeeds in turning himself into what he is, but not only into that what he already is. Artificial by nature, humans make use of technical artifacts and lead their lives in a cultural context (cf. Plessner 1975, 309-310; GS VIII, 192; GS VIII, 321).

Thus, man is not simply at home in and with his body in the way animals are. Nor is his body an external thing he can own or appropriate. On the basis of his specific eccentric positionality, his body has to appear to him as something that is both familiar and strange to him. In human embodiment, familiarity with and alienness to oneself are intertwined.

I shall only briefly discuss the third anthropological law, as it only marginally relates to the issue at hand. Eccentricity forces man to accept that he can never find a position in the world that is definitely secure, but at the same time it demands from him that he, nevertheless, always takes a stand. "Eccentrically positioned, he stands there where he stands, and at the same time he does not stand there where he stands" (Plessner 1975, 342). It is not given to man to know for certain where he stands and what his world is like. Having to take a stand without being able to find a secure footing anywhere, he perpetually longs for an absolute grounding of his world. Yet, if he wants to be true to his eccentric existence, he must doubt any conception that appears to fulfill this longing definitively.

One may wonder why I am spelling all this out in such detail. In my opinion, we have arrived here – on a very low level, so to speak – at the point where a fundamental difference arises between Merleau-Ponty's and Plessner's understanding of human embodiment. In Merleau-Ponty's account of human corporeality in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body is exclusively described as being on the side of who is perceiving; it does not also turn up as a thing in the perceptual field into which the perceiving body is geared. That my body is in pain, for example, only has significance insofar as this affects my openness to the world. The painful body doesn't become an annoyance to me at all. Yet, in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, my body can always become a burden I have to carry. This possibility is even a necessity, on the

basis of man's eccentric positionality. Along the example of pain, I would like to quote Frederick Buytendijk, who, very much in agreement with Plessner, writes: "The essence of pain we have now learned to understand as man being stricken in his utmost intimate unity, his psycho-physical naturalness, through which the ego comes in conflict with its own body, whereas it nevertheless remains bound to the body in all its painfulness" (Buytendijk 1943, 170).[7]

This is a vivid example of how the tension between being one's body and having it (as a thing, and being *in* it) can cast a shadow over human life. In Plessner's line of thought, one might say that the body (I have) mediates my immediate co-existing (as the body I am) with the things in the world. Perhaps this merges the two philosophical vocabularies a little too far into one another. I chose this expression to emphasize that one should not take Plessner's characterization of the human condition in terms of eccentric positionality as being in conflict with Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the human being-in-the-world primarily in terms of motor intentionality. In my interpretation, the mediation of the immediate can be seen as a complementary principle in which the body-thing (*Körper*) is introduced in addition to the living body (*Leib*), while the concept of the living body ultimately undergoes changes as well.

The body is not only familiar with the world, but also alien to itself

What bearing does Plessner's view on human corporeality have on Hubert Dreyfus's well-known phenomenological account of skilful action, of which he has offered an increasingly more comprehensive exposition throughout the years (cf. e.g. Dreyfus 2008; Dreyfus 2002; Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986)? Most notably, it challenges the cognitivistic model of human expertise, according to which human intelligent behavior depends on knowing facts and following rules. This assumption is made by researchers in a field called knowledge engineering. They claim that it is possible to build computer-based expert systems, which, within a well-delineated domain, could perform equally well as human experts. A good example here is a computer system that can diagnose a disease on the basis of a set of objectified data thought to represent the patient's condition. For such a system to display the same intelligent behavior as a human doctor, one allegedly only needs to be able to analyze the situations that are relevant for the specific domain in terms of objective, context-free features, subsequently create

7 Original in Dutch; my translation.

formal systems which relate these features to one another, and finally define explicit rules for determining actions on the basis of these systems, which are considered to represent the situations in which the competent performance is expected.

But such systems have consistently failed to exhibit expertise. This failure, Dreyfus argues, shows that the cognitivist conception of human skills is not at all supported by empirical evidence. More importantly, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment, Dreyfus develops a phenomenological description of how adult humans acquire a new skill when being delivered explicit instructions (cf. 2002, 368f.). This is different from how skills are acquired by trial and error or by imitation, the predominant modes for learning at early age. Such a learning process would typically start with an instructor telling us which specific objective features of the task environment we have to pay attention to and which rules we have to follow in order to act on the basis of these features, much like a computer following a program. This means that it requires us to step back from the immediately experienced situation, reflect upon which movements we have to make, and explicitly monitor our actions as we are performing them. But we can only be an expert at a skill if we can let go of this monitoring and allow ourselves to be drawn into an absorbed coping in which our bodies respond to solicitations of affordances present in the situation.

Dreyfus raises a similar concern in his debate with John McDowell, deliberating on how our openness to the world should be understood (cf. McDowell 2007, Dreyfus 2007). Dreyfus interprets the difference between their positions as follows. For McDowell, the world we have direct access to consists of propositionally structured knowledge of facts about what affords what. We know, e.g. that apples can be eaten. Dreyfus, on the other hand, understands the world to which we are directly open as a multitude of solicitations of affordances. When I am hungry, I am attracted to the apple without having explicit knowledge about its properties. According to Dreyfus, McDowell holds the view, that a key characteristic of our openness to the world is our "capacity to step back and criticize any particular proposition about what is the case and any reason for one's actions." Dreyfus himself takes the view that this openness is brought into practice by our "capacity to let ourselves […] respond to some particular constellation of attractions and repulsions" (cf. Dreyfus 2007, e.g. 357).[8] One could say that to a beginner, the specific world with respect to which he is learning a new skill may look like McDowell describes it. Once he has become an expert

8 Dreyfus refers to McDowell 2006.

in the skill, he simply knows how to act in response to what the situation demands of him.

In this debate, I personally endorse Dreyfus's side. However, the issue I want to address here is a different one. As Dreyfus acknowledges, humans have the capacity to step back and reflect, and, as I would add, to observe their surroundings and their own actions in an objectifying manner. But we can only notice objective features and explicit reasons on the basis of our "everyday absorbed coping"; and even then, this coping must go on in the background, if we are to have a stable world we can step back from and reflect upon (2007, 363). Although I agree with Dreyfus on this point, it nevertheless seems necessary to pose the question what it is that makes us move from absorbed coping with our situation to reflecting upon our environment. Dreyfus is also aware of this problem: "[T]he existential phenomenologist also has his problems. He owes an account of how our absorbed, situated experience comes to be transformed, so that we can experience context-free […] substances with detachable properties" (Dreyfus 2007, 364).

I would like to emphasize the phenomenological nature of this task: we need a description of the kind of experience we must live through, before we give up our absorbed coping. But why would we ever want to do that? Or why must we? Why don't we just go on coping, continuously changing from one task to another, without ever having to face a breakdown that would force us to step back and reflect? How do we differ from animals, which never 'revert' to reflecting, but just go on responding to solicitations?

We have to find an answer to these questions without falling prey to the fallacy of taking humans as animals whose essential feature is a mental capacity to reflect. We are in need of a philosophical account of how human embodiment differs radically from the animal way of being embodied. This is a key objective of Plessner's philosophical anthropology. An animal puts its body into action in order to respond to what is afforded to it by its environment, and by doing so its body mediates its immediate contact with the environment which it depends on. But an animal coping with its environment in such a way does not *experience* that its body plays a mediating role in this process. To the animal, its own body is never present as such; it vanishes as it performs its mediating role. Humans and animals alike cannot cope with their environment without the mediating aid from their bodies. But in my understanding, Plessner distances himself from Merleau-Ponty when he clarifies that the characteristic human mode of being in the world connected with eccentric positionality forbids us from

leading a life in which we experience our own body "only in its mediality, in its mediating role" (GS VIII, 291).[9]

Animals are superior to humans in that they are able to be totally absorbed in the flow of doing things through their bodies, while humans are denied any such possibility. Humans, on the other hand, are always capable of getting their bodies to develop completely new skills, as many examples of mastering new athletic disciplines demonstrate. This presupposes that humans are able to take their living bodies as things that can serve as an instrument, or to put it differently, that they can have an objectifying stance towards their bodies. But the objectification that is involved here is not of the theoretical kind, as is realized in the modern natural sciences through abstraction and representation. Quite to the contrary, it is a practical objectification materialized in the form of an actual intervention in the forms of mediality that the body already possessed when it entered into the flow of doing something (GS VIII, 291-292). That is why we can be taken by surprise when our body is hindered in its movements by an unexpected external obstacle or when it suddenly loses one of its functionalities.

Our specific eccentric openness to the world forbids our body to merge fully with its role of mediated coping. Therefore, we can always be thrown out of the flow of our absorbed coping, thus being forced to step back and reflect. We do not only know about this by taking a theoretical attitude towards ourselves, it is also an unavoidable part of our experience of the way we do things in our lives. By virtue of his eccentric positionality man always is also capable of looking at himself from an outside perspective, in which his body is presented to him as a thing external to himself in contrast with the lived body that allows him to be in direct contact with the world around him. In this specific sense one can say that his body is something alien to him. We do not experience ourselves as a thing, because there are things around us; it is the other way round: because of our capability of an outer perspective on ourselves, we can make sense of what it means to be part of a world of external things. Of course, we cannot actually be concerned with other things without their de facto existence, but the latter is not the basis upon which the *capability* of this concern rests. So, according to Plessner, the

9 Martin Heinze (2009, 122) states the opposite: he thinks that Plessner holds "that 'eccentric positionality' means, amongst other things, 'to live and experience one's own body only through its mediality or in its mediating role'" (GS VIII, 291). This misinterpretation is most likely caused by a faulty translation of Plessner's words on the mentioned page: "was ich als das Charakteristische menschlichen In-der-Welt-Seins zu fassen versucht habe, mit der exzentrischen Postionalität, die uns verbietet, den eigenen Leib nur in seiner Medialität, in seiner vermittelnden Rolle zu leben und zu erleben."

world of external things, or outer world (*Außenwelt*), has to be understood as the form in which man understands his own bodily position as located in the realm of organic and physical things (cf. 1975, 293f.), or in Plessner's own words: "[man as t]his positional whole stands [...] in the outer world as do all the other things" (Plessner 1975, 294).[10]

Anybody who tries to acquire the motor skills that are needed to become proficient in a new athletic discipline will have to train specific movements that are initially unfamiliar to his body, and in most cases this also involves the handling of external objects, e.g. in speed skating. How does one learn to get the body to make the right movements? Here the description of the body responding to solicitations of affordances has to be supplemented by a description of how the body is put into motion. In acquiring a skill like skating, the body is both the body-subject which moves and the body-thing that is moved or has to be moved. But, of course, my body cannot be an object that is moved insofar as it itself is moving objects. As Merleau-Ponty rightly points out, "[w]hat prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' [here he refers to Husserl's *Ideas II*], is that it is that by which there are objects" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 105). In the context in which Merleau-Ponty makes his remark, he is only concerned with the permanency of one's own body that perceives the world, not at all with the possibility of experiencing one's own body as a thing one has to deal with. When I try to learn skating, I can be receptive to the experience that my body does not always comply with what I would like it to do. For my body to acquire the habit of speed skating, it may be necessary but not sufficient to follow given instructions to help me determine which movements my body should undergo, treating it like nothing but a passive object completely under my control. I would soon learn from this experience that sometimes my body does not obey my practical attempt to make it move in a specific way. Acknowledging this failure is even essential for improving my skating skills. As the habitual living body I am, my body lets me be familiar with the world I live in; but I also experience my body, insofar as it is an instrument that mediates my immediate coping, as something that resists being absorbed in my body schema, as a thing that retains a certain alienness with respect to me.

In order to elucidate my point a little further, I will make some short remarks about why eccentric positionality entails that humans have technical artifacts at their disposal. Humans, as the law of natural artificiality explains, have to supplement their bodies with artificial artifacts, which not

10 This is parallel with his *Mitwelt*, see Plessner 1975, 302.

only enhance the motorial functionality of their bodies, but also augment their openness to the world. The simplest examples of technical artifacts are tools we use with our hands. In our time, the artificial objects with which we can improve our body's capacities have become increasingly more sophisticated. Yet in principle, at least insofar as I am concerned here, the argument remains the same. What makes it possible for us to employ external objects as instruments? If one goes along with Plessner's philosophical anthropology, one must answer: the basis of this capacity is that our eccentric embodiment allows us to make instrumental use of our own bodies. On the basis of the anthropological law of mediated immediacy, it can be explained why it is not significantly different whether a 'part' of the body or a thing in the outside world is involved in the performance of a skill. From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's motor intentionality, one can conclude that the enhancement of the body with an external object will only succeed when this alien object is incorporated into the motorial scheme of the coping body. In accordance with Dreyfus's account of skill acquisition, it follows that the more proficient someone is, the less he notices to which extent the tool contributes to the greater capabilities of his body. But we should bear in mind that the immediacy which is attained in the expert handling of the tool is mediated by the body using a thing that is alien to it – which it can do because the body is alien to itself.

When I directly respond to solicitations that stem from what is afforded by my surroundings, then, according to Dreyfus, I don't experience my body as *mine*, I only experience my ongoing coping (Dreyfus 2007, 356). On this point he is only partly right. Indeed, insofar as I am simply in the flow of doing something, i.e. insofar as my body's absorbed coping is going on quietly in the background, the double aspectivity of my body may remain hidden from my view. But even then my eccentric bodily existence prevents me from coinciding with the lived body I am. My body appears to exhibit some kind of resistance against being swallowed up in its mediating role as I open up to the world. A human being differs from an animal in that he has to experience his body *as his*, whatever his body is involved in.[11] Eccentric positionality constitutes both the possibility and the necessity of experiencing a distinction between what is internal and what external to the body. When someone experiences his body as his, he is aware that it is both familiar with the world, insofar as it is attuned to its world, and alien to

11 We can even experience this alienness in the environment created by some works of installation art. Cf. my article (2008). There I argue that these works give us the opportunity to experience that our reflexive relation to ourselves has an origin in human corporeality.

itself, insofar as it is a thing amidst other things. On the basis of this peculiar alienness that adheres to their bodies, humans are capable of stepping back from the world of solicitations to which they immediately respond, allowing them to reflect on it and take an objectifying stance towards it. This enables them to conceive the preconceptual world of affordances they are attuned to as a universe of detachable features.

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6 Plessner and the Mathematical-Physical Perspective

The Prescientific Objectivity of the Human Body

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Two interpretations of Plessner's concept of the physical body

One of the aims of Plessner's *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928][1] is to base natural science on a concept of human life. Plessner considers man's bodily existence as both the foundation and origin of the perspectives of physics and biology, but the human body can only play this role if it is itself understood primarily in a non-scientific way. However, some passages in Plessner's *Levels* seem to conflict with this primacy of everyday experience: the human body seems to be defined from a mathematical-physical point of view.

In one of the crucial passages in the *Levels* (GS IV, 365-368), Plessner bases the mathematical-physical perspective on his concept of the human body as physical body (*Körper*) as opposed to the living body (*Leib*).[2] The passage raises suspicions about the concept of the physical body not merely "lead[ing] to" the mathematical-physical perspective (GS IV, 367), but is rather defined by that perspective from the outset. Plessner describes the physical body as "a thing among things," in a "continuum in which directions are relative (*ein richtungsrelatives Kontinuum*)" (GS IV, 367). In the space of physical bodies, according to Plessner, there are no orientations like above, below, left and right. When interpreting this passage, we have to take into account that in everyday life, we always experience space as organized by directions, like above and below. From a mathematical-physical perspective, orientations like above, below, left and right, are merely relative. So Plessner's concept of the physical body refers to an object in the mathematical-physical rather than to bodily experience in of everyday life sense. The scientific objectivity of our bodies seems to acquire a fundamental status within the concept of

1 Plessner 1981; hereafter referred to as *Levels*.

2 The translations of these terms, *Körper* and *Leib*, are borrowed from James Spencer Churchill and Marjorie Grene's translation of Plessner's *Lachen und Weinen* (Plessner 1970), e.g. 34. Unless specified, translations in this article are mine.

man, which would mean that Plessner undercuts his own aim of descending to a prescientific level of human existence, so that it may constitute a *ground* for scientific perspective.

However, the following alternative on how to interpret Plessner is more attractive for several reasons.[3] Here, man's physical body is indeed an *object*, but not primarily in the mathematical-physical sense. The objectivity of the body is primarily *pre*scientific. As such, it is not defined from within the mathematical-physical perspective. It renders possible this perspective in the first place. Mathematics and physics are then secondary to everyday experience. In this chapter, I develop the second interpretation of Plessner by using the first as a stepping-stone. I take this detour in order to further our understanding of the passages mentioned, as their degree of difficulty may easily lead to misunderstandings.[4]

Before I start, let me say something about how I use the words "subject" and "object." When interpreting Plessner, in what sense can we legitimately speak of human beings as subjects? Although Plessner uses "personhood" to describe the eccentric position, this notion does not make the concept of subjectivity superfluous. In the section on the second anthropological principle (GS IV, 396-418), Plessner frequently uses the terms "subject" and "subjectivity" to express his own thought. When applied to human beings, these notions should not be confused with the "centric positionality" of the animal: contrary to animal subjectivity, human subjectivity has an eccentric structure, viz. a form of "mediated immediacy" that gives man's world the double structure of immanence and transcendence. Subjectivity is man's first distance to his body, which is modified by the second distance (the eccentric position). This is also the position from which man *has* his body. All these concepts will be further clarified below.

Plessner uses the word "object," both in reference to the scientific subject-object opposition and in a prescientific sense (e.g. GS IV, 405). I will follow Plessner in this. At the same time, I will deviate slightly from Plessner's usage of this term. Although Plessner speaks of the human body (*Körper*) as a thing (*Ding*), he does not call it an "object." In order to highlight a certain dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity, I prefer the word "object" to "thing" as a signifier of the human body as *Ding* – even when the body is not the object of perception, consciousness or action. The systematic argument for this choice is that something that can, in principle, appear

3 The second reading is influenced by Coolen's contribution to this volume.

4 In fact, I leaned towards the first interpretation myself for some time and presented this as a hypothesis at the IVth International Plessner Conference, to which this book is dedicated.

as an object to a subject, must in some sense already be an object before it appears as such. This principle also holds for the human body. The fact that in the English language, the words "object" and "objectivity" have a broader meaning than their German equivalents – object is also *Gegenstand* – may allow me to swerve away a little from Plessner's vocabulary.

In the next section I will situate "physical body" and "lived body" within Plessner's anthropology. This is a preparation for the more elaborate description of the problem in the third section. With the term "physical body" (*Körper*), Plessner tries to capture an aspect of our body that encompasses the properties it has in common with non-living things. For example, a bag of cement weighing 75 kilograms has the same effect on a scale as my own body does. My body is also subordinate to gravitation in the same fashion as is the bag of cement. This trivial example illustrates that man's physical body concerns his body's objectivity or "thingness" in the strong sense of interchangeability with non-living things. For this reason it is interesting to compare Plessner's conception of the physical body with his phenomenology of the thing at the beginning of the *Levels*. I shall discuss this further in the subsequent section.

The phenomenology of the thing departs from a criticism of the Cartesian *res extensa*. In Plessner's view, the essential difference between phenomenal thing and *res extensa* is that the former is *given* to a subject of experience, whereas the latter remains divorced from the *res cogitans*. I argue that this difference implies another difference concerning space: while phenomenal space is structured by directions like above and below, the space of *res extensa* cannot be assigned such directions. This inference, which I hold to be valid, can cause us to suspect a contradiction between Plessner's conception of the physical body and his understanding of the phenomenal thing. The physical body that exists in the continuum "in which directions are relative," one might reason, resembles not so much the phenomenal thing, but rather Descartes's *res extensa*. In the last section, I will show that, upon closer inspection, there is no such contradiction within Plessner's view. Although it is true that my own physical body is not phenomenal, we have to acknowledge that it does not fit in the concept of *res extensa* either.

Physical body and living body

In order to situate the body as both physical body (*Körper*) and living body (*Leib*) within Plessner's anthropology, we need to understand Plessner's three-step approach. Firstly, the distinction Plessner makes between the

organic and the inorganic prepares his conception of human life as emerging from the organic. Secondly, his comparison within the realm of the organic between man and animal guides us to the place of the body within human existence. Thirdly, we need to understand Plessner's division of the concept of world into three worlds – external, inner and social world – in order to see where the distinction between physical body and living body fits in. Let us first turn to the distinction between the organic and the inorganic.

Plessner bases his concept of human life on a philosophy of organic life. This philosophy, in turn, is based on the distinction between living and non-living things. Living beings, according to Plessner, are characterized by the fact that the boundary separating them from their surrounding belongs to the living being itself. In other words, the living thing autonomously realizes this boundary. Living things not only *have* a place, Plessner says, they *take* the place they have. This is called "positionality." Contrary to plants, animals are characterized by "centric positionality." The "centre" in "centric positionality" refers to the distance the animal has to its own body, which means that it not only *is*, but also *has* its body. This renders possible that the animal can use its body as an instrument, for instance to hunt for prey. Man also *is* and *has* his body, but, in addition, he relates to both this *being* and *having* the body. He not only operates from the centre that is at a distance from the body: he is "eccentric" in that he lives at a distance even to this distance itself, so that a double distance to the body is realized. This is man's "eccentric positionality": "the living is body, in the body (as inner life or soul) and exterior to the body as the point of view from which he is both. An individual that is positionally characterized in these three ways is called *person*" (GS IV, 365).

According to Plessner, the world we live in has a triple structure (GS IV, 365-382). Plessner regards what we generally refer to as "world" as a constellation of *three* worlds: the external world (*Außenwelt*), the inner world (*Innenwelt*) and the sociocultural world (*Mitwelt*). Each of these worlds is the correlate of one of the three moments of our being. The external world correlates with us *being* our body, the inner world with us *having* our body (the "soul" that is also the subject of having the body), and the social world with our eccentric position. Plessner uses the word "double aspect" to denote the relationship between body and soul, i.e. between external and inner world. However, "double aspect" is used differently on other occasions. When Plessner focuses solely on the external world and the way our bodies are part of it, the double aspect at stake is that between physical body (*Körper*) and living body (*Leib*). Consequently, we should regard this double aspect as a further differentiation within the more general double aspect of body and soul. Let us look at this differentiation a bit closer.

According to Plessner, we are both "[i]n the world and against the world ([i]n der Welt und gegen die Welt)" (GS IV, 379). With a slight variation on that formulation, we can clarify the double aspect of body and soul by distinguishing between two meanings of "being in the world." On the one hand, man is in the world in the sense of placed or positioned in that world – as body or "object" in the broad meaning of the word. On the other hand, he is in the world in the sense of being open to the world: as a subject. Since subjectivity can only be realized in a living body, we are dealing with a "living-body-subject" (*Leibsubjekt*), or, to use a more ordinary term, an embodied subject. In addition, man relates to both these aspects of his situation. The standpoint from which he does this is the eccentric position. In the critical passage regarding this topic (GS IV, 365-368), the difference between physical body and living body is a double aspect *within* the aspect of the objective human body in its entirety. The soul-aspect is only addressed after that passage (GS IV, 368-373), which is not until the section on mediated immediacy (GS IV, 396-418), the soul-aspect is transformed into the concept of subjectivity, i.e. of true openness to the world. Consequently, Plessner must be using "living body" (*Leib*) in two ways. When the double aspect of physical body and lived body is discussed, the notion "living body" cannot yet refer to the embodied *subject*.

Let us broaden our perspective to Plessner's *Laughing and Crying: Inquiries to the Boundaries of Human Behavior* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung nach den Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941]. Here (GS VII, 239-242), the emphasis lies on the double aspect of being a living body (*Leib-sein*) and having a physical body (*Körper-haben*). This distinction suggests that our body, insofar as we *have* it, is only the physical body, whereas the same body, insofar as we *are* it, is the living body and nothing else. The living body, then, is the embodied subject (*Leibsubjekt*) that has the physical body. As noted, the physical aspect of the body refers mainly to the possibility of its being used as an instrument. However, the instrumentalized body cannot always be identified *only* with the human body insofar as it is interchangeable with non-living things. When I use my hand to grab a pencil, I am using my body as an *organic* unity. The point is that Plessner's use of words should not be taken as placing the physical body univocally on the object-side, and the living body on the subject-side of having the body.

Instead, Plessner's terminology points to a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity, whereby "higher" forms of objectivity (here: the body as instrument) include "lower" forms of subjectivity (here: the living body, not the embodied subject). In other words, physical body and living body are used in both a narrow and wide sense. In both *Laughing and Crying* and in

the final part of the *Levels* (i.e. after the discussion of the external world), the term "physical body" (*Körper*) can be understood broadly or narrowly. In the narrow sense, it is used to signify the body that we *have*. But as the example of grabbing a pencil shows, the organic aspect is already part of the body that is used in instrumental action. So the body that we have, is the *Körper* in the broad sense of the word: the unity of both the physical body (in the narrow sense) and the living body (in the narrow sense). Therefore, Plessner calls the body that we have not only "physical body" (*Körper*) but also "physical lived body" (*Körperleib*). The same holds for the body that we *are*: the embodied subject that *has* the physical lived body is itself a living body (*Leib*) in the broad sense, i.e. not the organic aspect as distinct from the physical aspect, but the unity of both. It includes the physical body insofar as this renders possible subjectivity. This is why Plessner also uses the term "physical lived body" (*Körperleib*) for the body that we *are*. Consequently, it is the physical lived body that has the physical lived body. Plessner uses spatial terms to express this: "*as* physical lived body – *in* the physical lived body" (Plessner 1970, 36; in the original: "*als Körperleib – im Körperleib*" [GS VII, 240]).

Is the organic aspect of the human body not already some kind of subject? After all, the living body is distinguished from the physical body because it is not merely a thing among other things, but rather an organism in a surrounding (*Umfeld*) which is organized in terms of directions like above and below. If the living body would be a subject of some sort, how can we insist that it differs from the embodied subject? Plessner wants to arrive at the double aspect of body and soul, which is mediated by the eccentric position. He starts from the way the human body is part of the external world. This means that, in this phase, he prepares the concept of the embodied subject without explicitly thematizing subjectivity in its fully developed form. Within the framework of a philosophy of nature, discussing subjectivity straight away would amount to neglecting it being rooted in the objectivity of the body. In other words, the question Plessner answers at this point is: how does the double aspect of being "positioned in the world" (object) and being "open to the world" (subject) announce itself within the sole aspect of being "positioned in the world" (object)?

When Plessner discusses the organic aspect of the body, he refers to "man" as a "lived body (*Leib*) in the middle of a sphere, that, in accordance with his empirical form, has an absolute above, below" (GS IV, 367). At this stage of thought, the "sphere" is not yet described as a "world," and the "above" and "below" of the sphere are not yet conceived of as projections by a subject, but as the mere correlates of the "empirical form" of the subject's body. By

"empirical form," Plessner does not mean an appearance only accessible to empirical science. Rather, he is referring to properties which are relatively contingent albeit pointing to an entity's essential way of being.[5] Let us look at a situation in which man seems almost completely reduced to his empirical form: a patient who is under narcosis before an operation. The doctor who operates on the patient is, at that very moment, not concerned with him as a subject (or person) but rather with the body as an organic thing. Nonetheless, the distinctively human appearance of the body alludes to the subjectivity for which it is the natural precondition. In this situation, the patient's face is not the boundary through which he is directed at his world, but to the doctor it remains a tacit empirical indication that the "thing" on the table is a human subject. The human body has a top and a bottom, regardless of the position of the body in space. (Think of the expression "He looked at me from head to toe.") The fact that a human body has an "above" and "below" differs essentially from the fact that a non-living object has, for us, such directions. In the case of the human body, these directions point to the possibility of projecting such orientations into the world *from within the body itself*. They refer to subjectivity. But when we focus on the technical manipulation of organic tissue, we do not see this subjectivity at work. We see a living body and the way its empirical form prefigures subjectivity. Only later, when the patient awakes from his narcosis, do we see the projection of spatial orientations being realized: following the patient's gaze through the room, we experience his presence as an openness to the world to which we can immediately relate. We no longer see his face as a mere token of subjectivity; we see perception and expression at work. We have thus made a change of perspective: we have moved from the experience of the lived body (*Leib*) to that of the embodied subject (*Leibsubjekt*).

In other words, the specific "empirical form" of the human body – it having a face and an above and below – is the objective-organic prefiguration of subjectivity. This is how subjectivity announces itself within the aspect of the objectivity of human existence. So the notion "body as object" can refer to two things: a) the physical aspect of the human body, i.e. its thingness in the sense of interchangeability with non-living objects, and b) the organic aspect, i.e. the thingness of the body as the objective-organic prefiguration of subjectivity. The "pre-" in "prefiguration" has of course a logical, not a temporal, meaning.

5 I interpret the "empirical form" of the human body in terms of "indicatory essential properties" (*indikatorische Wesensmerkmale*) (GS IV, 166-171).

The problem

According to Plessner, physical body and lived body (each taken in the narrow sense discussed above) constitute a "double aspect," which forms the basis for two scientific world views: the mathematical-physical and the organological world view. The problem I want to address concerns the relationship between physical body and the mathematical-physical perspective.

Let us look a bit closer at this double aspect. In general, the term "double aspect" means that two poles of a being are united, not through synthesis, but through being both connected to the eccentric position. With regard to physical body and lived body, Plessner puts it as follows: "With the eccentricity of the structure of the living being corresponds the eccentricity of the situation, or the irreconcilable double aspect of his existence as physical body [Körper] and lived body [Leib], as thing among things in arbitrary places within the one spatiotemporal continuum and as a system that is concentrically closed around an absolute middle in a space and in a time of absolute directions" (GS IV, 367).

The "spatiotemporal continuum" is the "emptiness" in which objects appear to us, i.e. their being surrounded by "nothing" (GS IV, 367). The human physical body is our body insofar as this is part of that same continuum. In other words, the human body is physical insofar as it is interchangeable with *non-living* things. Contrary to non-living things, the human physical body is "materially" (GS IV, 367) at the same time a living body in a "surrounding field" (*Umfeld*) which is structured by an above, below et cetera. We cannot separate physical and living body from another, as they constitute one and the same entity. And yet we can never entirely make sense of this, because there is no transition between the two aspects: they are "*nicht überführbar*" (GS IV, 367). "Both aspects exist next to one another, mediated merely in the point of eccentricity, in the unobjectifiable I" (GS IV, 368). In the following passage (partly quoted above), Plessner states that the division into two aspects leads to two separate world views:

> This is why both aspects of the world are necessary, man as lived body [Leib] in the middle of a sphere, that, in accordance with its empirical form, has an absolute above, below, before, behind, right, left, earlier and later, an aspect that serves as the basis of the organological world view, and man as a physical thing [Körperding] in an arbitrary place within a continuum of possible events, in which directions are relative, an aspect that leads to the mathematical-physical conception (GS IV, 367).

While the organic aspect of the body forms the basis for the organological world view, its physical aspect "leads to" the mathematical-physical perspective. The problem we need to address concerns the latter relationship. Plessner suggests that the physical aspect of our body has the fundamental status of a foundation for the mathematical-physical perspective, but he also describes the physical body as already part of "a continuum of possible events, in which directions are relative." The form of the lived body mirrors spatial directions. In the space of the physical body as such, there are no orientations like above, below, left and right, or these orientations are interchangeable. I think that, in everyday life we always experience space as organized by directions such as above and below, whereas in mathematical space, these directions are relative and interchangeable. So the physical body, the way Plessner conceives it, appears to be an object in mathematical-physical space rather than a thing as we experience it. Is Plessner's description of the human physical body fundamentally determined by the mathematical-physical perspective? If it is, how can it constitute the foundation of that perspective?

These questions give cause to a comparison between Plessner's description of the physical body and his phenomenology of the thing at the beginning of the *Levels* (GS IV, 128-133). Here, Plessner develops his concept of the phenomenal thing as an alternative to Descartes's *res extensa*. In Plessner's view, the difference between phenomenal thing and *res extensa* is that the first is given to a subject who is positioned in the same space as the thing, whereas the second – according to its idea – fills a purely objective space. I argue that this difference implies a second disparity: while phenomenal space is structured by directions like above and below and left and right, the *res extensa* is without any such directions. This difference forms the basis of the comparison of man's physical body with both phenomenon and *res extensa*: why does the physical body, the way Plessner understands it, seem to show greater similarity with the *res extensa* than with the phenomenal thing?

Physical body and *res extensa*

Plessner's phenomenology of the thing fulfils the aim of recovering the thing, and through the thing the external, natural world as a whole, from Cartesian dualism. What is at stake is the precedence of philosophy of nature over natural science: "In the identification of physicality (*Körperlichkeit*) and extension, and the equation of extension and measurability implied

therein, the alternative-principle *res cogitans – res extensa* certainly entails the postulation of mathematical natural science as fundamental" (GS IV, 79).

Plessner's criticism of Descartes addresses certain discrepancies between our everyday experience of the thing and the Cartesian, mathematical-physical approach. The *res extensa* is extended matter in a mathematical space, abiding to laws of nature. The properties that according to our perceptual experience are qualities of the thing, can only be understood "mechanically," by "dissolving" them "into quantities" (GS IV, 80). The Cartesian alternative to treating qualities as "objective" quantities, is to consider them as "contents and products of our interiority" (GS IV, 80). The attempt to make properties objective by quantifying them, turns into its subjectivist counterpart. As a result, the properties of a thing are located either in the *res extensa* or in the *res cogitans*, and "appearance as such remains inconceivable" (GS IV, 81).

Plessner's answer to Cartesian dualism is his phenomenology of the thing. The properties of a thing can neither be the product of the *res cogitans*, nor can they be mere quantities, says Plessner: they are given *as* properties *in* their unity with the thing as a whole. "Every thing that is perceived in its full nature as thing, appears, according to its spatial limitation, as a unity of properties organized around a core" (GS IV, 128). Only some of these properties appear, while others remain hidden. The properties that appear are called "aspects" (in a different sense than above) and "adumbrations." Despite only some properties appearing, the 'thing' appears as a unity, so there must be intrinsic, immediate relationships between all the properties of the thing. Furthermore, this coherence logically presupposes a core-substance, i.e. the core of the thing, which is the "bearer" of all its properties. The given properties not only refer to each other and to the hidden properties, but also to the core-substance of the thing. This multidimensional "referring to," Plessner calls "transgredience" (GS IV, 130).

The language in this section of the *Levels* is reminiscent of Husserl. Plessner indeed draws on Husserl's phenomenology, but he rejects the idealistic tendencies in it, as well as later idealistic interpretations of Husserl's philosophy (GS IV, 131; cf. Krüger 2006, 204-206). An idealistic phenomenology of perception will equate aspectivity with subjectivity: the sides of the object that appear are considered contents within my own consciousness. Plessner does not accept such immanentization of the perceived: "Aspectivity, therefore, is not yet subjectivity at all; it is only the possibility, guaranteed from the part of the appearance, of its being opposed to a subject" (GS IV, 131). Plessner's point is not that the nature of the thing be conceivable without the tacit assumption of subjectivity. Some of the thing's properties

show themselves while others remain hidden. This is due to the fact that the thing appears to "something" which occupies a specific position within the same space. This something is man as the subject of perception. In other words, aspectivity is the objective correlate of subjective perception. The very concept of aspectivity evokes the idea of subjectivity, its counterpart.

On the basis of this interpretation of Plessner, we can draw certain conclusions with regard to the nature of the *space* in which the phenomenon appears. The question of which properties show themselves and which remain hidden depends on the position of the subject. For example, if I stand in front of an object rather than behind it, certain properties are revealed and others are hidden from my perspective. I am not hovering above it, nor am I looking up to it. The presence of the subject within the same space as the thing is what defines the space as one with fixed directions, like above, below, left, right, et cetera. Since the notion of phenomenal space implies a subject that is positioned in it, that space is inconceivable without spatial orientations. The space in which a thing appears is by definition organized in terms of directions like above and below.

Now let us return to the human body as a unity of physical and living body, and focus on these aspects in terms of space. Insofar as the body is living, it is positioned in a surrounding field (*Umfeld*) that is characterized by "an absolute above, below, before, behind, right, left, earlier and later" (GS IV, 367). Insofar as the body is physical, it is part of "the spatiotemporal totality in which directions are relative" (GS IV, 366). The latter definition of space seems to apply to space as an absolute objectivity, i.e. the mathematical space from which the subject is expelled. That is the space of the *res extensa*, in which there are no blind spots because there is literally nobody that would bring these along. Since there is no subject in this space, the object has neither front nor back; it is solely characterized by absolute transparency and absolute relativity of directions. Comparing the physical aspect of the human body with either the phenomenal, as signified by the spatiotemporal totality in which directions are relative, determine a situation that answers strictly to the position of the eccentric organism. Just as this is outside of its natural place, outside of itself, object or the *res extensa*, the physical body appears to have more in common with the *res extensa* than with the appearing thing. How can Plessner define the space of the physical body as "the spatiotemporal totality in which directions are relative" and at the same time reject Descartes's *res extensa*? Is this a contradiction in Plessner, or is it a faulty interpretation?

In the very passage where the description of the physical body resembles Descartes's *res extensa*, the eccentric position is thematized in a way

that reminds us of the *res cogitans*: "Things in a homogeneous sphere of movements which are arbitrarily possible non-spatial, atemporal, placed nowhere, placed in nothing, in the nothing of its boundary, the physical thing [*Körperding*] of the environment is 'in' the 'emptiness' of relative places and moments in time. And the organism, in virtue of its eccentricity, is to itself merely such a physical thing" (GS IV, 366f.).

The eccentric organism, which is "outside of its natural place, outside of itself, non-spatial, atemporal, placed nowhere, placed in nothing" seems to be a "subject" that does not participate in the world. It seems to stand above objective space, without creating any blind spots in it that would render its gaze a finite one. This appears to make it very similar to Descartes's *res cogitans*.

We should, of course, always keep in mind that the physical body is only one of two aspects of the human body, with the other aspect being the living body, which is the objective-organic prefiguration of man's openness to the world from within. The correlation between physical body and eccentric position is part of something much richer. Therefore, there is no reason to claim – not even hypothetically – that Plessner remains within the Cartesian framework. If criticism would be justified, then it would concern the way Plessner transcends the framework created by Descartes. The crux would be that Plessner tries to overcome Cartesian dualism by *integrating* it into a larger whole. This is the hypothesis we have been exploring: Plessner's concept of the physical body answers to Descartes's definition of the *res extensa*, and the mathematical-physical definition of reality is thus given fundamental anthropological status.

Physical body and object

One of the premises of the hypothesis is that Plessner defines the eccentric position as a position in "nothing." Plessner thus seems to envisage a Cartesian pure mind, divorced from the external world. However, upon closer inspection, Plessner's description of the eccentric position suggests a different reading. In the passage being discussed here, Plessner indeed states that the "eccentric organism [...] stands in nothing," but he adds that it is placed "in the nothing of its *boundary*" (italics mine). Hereafter, the boundary is specified as one "which can only be approximated asymptotically" (GS IV, 368). This addition implies that according to Plessner, we, as eccentric beings, do not fall together with "nothing"; our position is always at some distance from this negativity. In Plessner's view, the double distance that

man has to his own body never enables him to fully detach himself from it. The distance is always also an achievement of the body itself that he is.

If we zoom in on the two aspects of that body again, we see that in this regard the relationship between the physical and the organic aspect is not symmetrical. The passage quoted in the previous section purported that, just as the eccentric organism is "placed in nothing," the physical things, among which our own bodies, are placed "'in' the 'emptiness' of relative places and moments in time." Plessner considers these physical bodies the most radical antipole of the eccentric position. It is not man's organic body that fulfils this role. We could say that the organic aspect is a *Zwischenschicht*: an intermediate layer in between, on the one hand, the eccentric position with its boundary in nothing, and on the other hand, the reality of physical things. The soul, the embodied subject who has the physical lived body, and even the eccentric position itself insofar as it is an organism or a constellation of subjectivity and objectivity, are all intermediate layers between the interior boundary of eccentricity and the human physical body as a thing among things in directionless space. As living human beings, we are always in between these two poles; philosophical reflection springs from this intermediate position as well.

Precisely because the physical body and the boundary of eccentricity are each other's antipoles, they have something important in common. The passage that introduces the concept of an asymptotic approximation makes this clear. The "aspects" mentioned are still physical body and living body: "Both aspects exist next to one another, mediated merely in the point of eccentricity, in the unobjectifiable I. Just as this [unobjectifiable I], 'behind' physical body and lived body, constitutes the vanishing point of one's own interiority, of one's own being oneself, i.e. the boundary which can only be approximated asymptotically, the thing in the external world, as the appearance of an inexhaustible being, as the constellation of rind and core, shows the very same structure" (GS IV, 368).

The idea of an asymptotic approximation applies to the boundary of the eccentric position, which here is called the "vanishing point of our own interiority." Regarding the reality of physical bodies, we read that "the thing in the external world [...] shows the very same structure." The "same structure" refers to the principle of asymptotic approximation. So this principle also holds for the objective *correlate* of interiority: the physical body in the external world – be it my own body or an object simple – can also only be approximated asymptotically.

My interpretation scrutinizes every element in Plessner's formulations, since Plessner himself does not go any deeper into the matter. He does not

explicitly argue why we are unable to get a full grasp of either boundary. I think the reasons slightly differ depending on which boundary we focus on. The boundary of interiority is the negativity of the eccentric position, the "nothing" in which we stand. According to my interpretation, this "nothing" can be approximated merely asymptotically, because we remain bound to the external world, the extreme limit constituted by the world of interchangeable, non-living things. We are never univocally nothing: we are always in between the negativity of a pure mind and radical externality. Life, subjectivity and interiority are the modes of this "between." Logic suggests that any movement in the opposite direction, from "nothing" towards physical bodies, can be specified analogically: our approximation of the objective world of non-living things is necessarily asymptotic, because we remain bound to the limit of interiority, the "nothing" of our eccentric position.[6]

How do we approximate the reality of physical bodies? I think we first need to differentiate between the physical body that is my own body (which, materially, falls together with the living body) and the physical bodies as simply all non-living things surrounding me. For the sake of simplicity, I leave out the physical aspect of the bodies of other subjects than myself and only deal with the non-living things surrounding my own body. How, and to what extent, are they accessible to me?

There appears to be a tension between two elements in the passage quoted above. Although Plessner is still concerned with the physical reality of non-living things – "the thing in the external world" – he also describes the thing as a phenomenon with a "rind" of appearing properties and a "core." My comparison between physical body and phenomenal thing led to the conclusion that the physical body cannot be a phenomenon, because this assumption produces a contradiction between the two concepts of space involved: the space of the physical body is without directions like left and right whereas the space of the phenomenon is *organized* by such directions. However, there must be a connection between the phenomenal world and the non-living things that surround my own body within physical reality.

I think the quoted passage actually helps us understand this relationship. Plessner suggests that the thing's "rind" is the same as its "appearance," and that the "core" is equal to its "inexhaustible being." I interpret this as follows. The inexhaustible being of the thing is the thing itself, which precedes its

6 I am leaving out that, in the final sections of the *Stufen*, Plessner explains the eccentric position in terms of the social world. My perspective here is limited to the relationship between the human body and the external world.

own appearance to a subject: this is the thing as part of physical reality. We can only speak of the transcendence of a thing, which is nonetheless somehow given to us; we cannot separate appearance from being itself. Such ambiguity is what generally characterizes Plessner's use of the word "double aspect." Therefore, I propose that we interpret the relationship between physical reality and phenomenal world as itself a double aspect: the thing is part of physical reality insofar as it precedes and transcends its appearance to a subject. To that extent, space is not organized in terms of an above, below, left or right.

I want to introduce another notion in order to clarify the relationship between thing in itself and appearance: I propose that the thing itself is the *transcendent* condition for the possibility of the phenomenon. The notion of a transcendent possibility condition complements that of transcendent*al* conditions: a subject is needed for the thing to appear, but at the same time appearing to a subject is also a possibility of the thing itself. Moreover, we *need* the thing itself for the appearance to occur. The thing in itself is the transcendent condition for the possibility of the experience of the external world. In terms of space: although the objective space of non-living objects, insofar as it precedes our experience, is in itself not organized by fixed directions, its nature does render possible the experience of directions. The interdependency between subject and object is not symmetrical, but it *is* reciprocal. Whenever appearance is realized, the thing shows some of its properties while others remain hidden: aspectivity implies subjectivity *and* a space in which directions are unavoidably given, because they are relative to a positioned subject.

Consequently, if we want to conceive of the physical "world" as such, we need to bracket off aspectivity, subjectivity and the space that is organized by an above, below, left and right. Then, it occurs to us that physical reality is not a world in any familiar sense: "Strictly speaking, the term 'external' is not applicable to the world of physical things (*Körperdinge*) as such. Only the surrounding field (*Umfeld*), that has become a world, that has integrated itself into it, the environment (*Umwelt*), is external world" (GS IV, 368).

According to Plessner, the physical world is not external until the lived world, the environment of the organism, is integrated into it. However, if the predicate "external" does not apply to the world of physical things, then the term "world" itself becomes problematic as well. It is for this reason why I think we should refrain from saying "physical world," but rather limit ourselves to "physical aspect of the external world" or "physical reality." Plessner calls into question the externality of this reality, because he has bracketed off living body, subjectivity, aspectivity, and phenomenality. Only

a thing that *appears* can be external as opposed to internal. Consequently, it is impossible to experience, imagine or depict physical reality as such. We could, for instance, imagine a landscape that consists exclusively of non-living matter: sand, rocks, water and air, but this conception would not be true to the nature of physical reality. Imagination shares with perception the phenomenological principle that aspectivity implies subjectivity. Although nothing in the imagined landscape is alive, it does appear as "something" which occupies a specific position in the same imagined space. This living being, the subject, projects an above, below, left and right into that space.

Nonetheless, our own body must be part of this reality of non-living things. This is precisely what we have been calling the physical aspect of the human body. Plessner's formulation that, within physical reality, "directions are relative" should not be taken as saying that a space without directions simply exists. This proposition would amount to a univocal affirmation of absolute objectivity, of the *res extensa*. Instead, the physical aspect of our bodies purports that they "already" occupy space "before" they organize that space: directions are as yet inconceivable and irrelevant. This is how we should understand Plessner's formulation that the physical aspect "leads to" the mathematical-physical perspective. The physical aspect of our being in the world is not defined by that perspective from the outset. The physical body primarily renders possible everyday experience, and secondarily the various scientific perspectives that spring from such experiences. It is our body insofar as it is not yet subject and insofar as it does not yet reach out for a world that transcends it, even insofar as it is not yet organic. This "not yet" is not temporal; it refers to an a priori logic.[7] We deduce the necessity of physical reality from the transcendental structures of experience, but we have no experiential access to it. This is the reason why our approximation of physical reality is at best asymptotic.

In everyday life, we know about certain properties of our bodies, which it shares with non-living things. We constantly take these properties into account, for instance when we decide that we are too heavy to get into the elevator together, or simply when we make room for each other on the sidewalk. This always concerns a "technical" moment of our behavior: we try to avoid doing something that goes against the limitations of what is technically possible, according to the mechanical constitution of reality.

7 This is not an *idealistic* a priori logic, but rather a hermeneutic approach which springs from experience itself and explores, from within, the preconditions that render that experience possible.

This is how our knowledge connects with the mechanical nature of non-living things. At the same time, our knowledge of the causality of everyday life is embedded in that life. For example, the information about my weight and spatial dimensions constitute a *reason* (not a cause) for me not to enter the elevator. The information is thereby integrated in my experience of the space in which I recognize an above, below, left and right. A direct experience of matter in directionless space is impossible.

At the same time, I can only be open to the external world because my own organism and subjectivity are rooted in the same physical reality as the appearing thing. The physical aspect of my body is a condition that renders possible my experience of the world, but the condition is neither transcendental nor transcendent. It is not transcendent because *I am* this physical body. Only the physical reality of the non-living things surrounding me could constitute a transcendent condition. However, the physical aspect of my body cannot be a *transcendental* condition for my openness to the world either, because only a condition that is immanent to experience, that can be analyzed from within this openness, can be called transcendental.[8] We are rather concerned with a condition that can only be established by logical deduction from such transcendental conditions – a sub-immanent condition for the possibility of experience.

What does this mean for the mathematical-physical perspective, and the way it is based on the physical aspect of the human body? There is much to say about this. I will limit myself to a few remarks, referring only to mechanics and three-dimensional space. Insofar as mathematics and physics include living things in their field of research, they carry out a phenomenological reduction of the living to the non-living (and of artifacts to natural objects). Physics always has one foot in the everyday world of phenomenal experience, if only because the first step of reduction is carried

8 I mean "transcendental" not exactly in a Kantian but rather in a hermeneutical sense. The hermeneutical exploration of conditions for the possibility of experience not only *focuses* on our factual, finite experience of the world but also *springs from* that experience. Although it takes a step back from experience, it always remains bound to its natural and historical determinations. (I cannot go into the discussion here about whether this makes all transcendental truth merely relative; I think it does not.) Transcendental philosophy is thus part of a hermeneutical circle (cf. De Boer 1983, x-xi and 32). The phenomenological moment of philosophy renders the circle an open rather than a closed one, since phenomenology gives it a content that is not merely produced in the process of interpretation (Ricoeur 1975). I think this is in accordance with Plessner's understanding of philosophy. I agree with Krüger, who explains that Plessner explores the conditions for the possibility of experience but he does not locate these conditions in "an original self-conception" (Krüger 2001, 93).

out within the phenomenal world.[9] I want to focus on the position of the other foot: the abstract reconstruction of that phenomenal world, which really marks the difference between exact science and everyday experience and knowledge.

That other foot steps into an even more radical reduction of the living to the non-living. As noted above, the phenomenal world implicitly refers to the subject, which is a living thing. Physics therefore seeks to reconstruct the physical aspect of reality by separating it completely from its possibility of appearing to a subject. The reconstruction of the world is not its phenomenal recreation but rather a world picture in which things just *are*, objectively, without appearing to a subject. Although this view derives its truth value from the fact that it is based on data from the phenomenal world, it negates the essential conditions for the possibility of the appearance of that world to a subject. The mathematical-physical perspective is secondary to everyday phenomenal experience of the external world. It starts from that experience, only to bracket off subjectivity as it proceeds. This is not a strategy for an asymptotic approximation of physical reality; rather it is done in the confidence that, within the domain of its abstract models, this parenthesization can be carried out in full. This relative alienation from the phenomenal world renders necessary that the formal laws and quantitative data are constantly reintegrated into that world. This task is partly fulfilled by physics itself, insofar as it still refers to things and events we know from our prescientific, everyday lives.

The falling of an object, for instance, is explained on the basis of the theory of gravitational force, which remains unspecified with respect to our normal experience of above and below. A drawing of the earth and the falling object held up side down, so that the object seems to fall upward towards the earth, works just as well for the physicist as the same picture without flipping it. While everyday perception takes into account that the experience of an object, in virtue of the aspectivity of the phenomenon, implies subjectivity, physics reconstructs space as a *res extensa* in which the subject has no place. The reconstructed object is in principle fully transparent: it has neither core nor inner depth. Everyday reflection immediately integrates knowledge of physical bodies into phenomenal space with its fixed directions like above and below. By contrast, scientific models *preserve* the relativity of directions that characterizes the primordial space of physical bodies. Insofar as we use representations of this reconstructed space,

9 For the sake of simplicity, I am leaving out social interaction as also constitutive of scientific practice.

we project directions like above and below into the representations, but this projection is scientifically irrelevant. Insofar as such representations of space contain data about objects and formal relations between them, we might feel inclined to say this space is "directionless," but in fact it is, to this extent, not a space at all. This illustrates that the bracketing off of subjectivity can never be carried out fully.

Direct experience of physical reality is impossible, because experience belongs to the intermediate layers of the organic, the living body and subjectivity. The concept of physical reality is not empty: knowledge about it is possible, but this knowledge is either *abstract*, as in the case of science, or it is *deduced* from the transcendental structures of the experience we analyze from within that experience. Our knowledge of physical reality is of a kind that cannot be "internalized": although I know that it exists and that its space is without directions, I cannot teach myself to experience or imagine such space. Nonetheless, perceptive experience remains essential to our understanding of physical reality. Whenever we think of reality "itself," we mean *that* reality out there, unfolding before our eyes, of which we are part of and to which we are open towards. That is why the attempt to conceive of it is not like a game of chess the mind plays with itself. It is a double movement: by bracketing off all of its worldly aspects, approximating the boundary of interior "nothing," 'the thinking I' reaches out to reality beyond appearance.

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7 The Body Exploited

Torture and the Destruction of Selfhood

Janna van Grunsven

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul.
– Walt Whitman

Torture and the destruction of selfhood

In *At the Mind's Limits*, philosopher and holocaust survivor Jean Améry recounts his experience of torture at the hands of the Nazis. Having encountered a fellow human being as an absolute "antiman" who treated the boundaries of his skin and the experience of his pain as meaningless, Améry suffered from what he calls an irrecoverable destruction of his sense of self. He writes:

> The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. […] The other person […] with whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his corporeality on me […] and thereby destroys me. […] The tortured person never ceases to be amazed that (what) one may […] call his soul […] or his identity, […] is destroyed when there is that cracking and splintering in the shoulder joints (Améry 1980, 28, 40).

Searching for the proper language to express what exactly it means to have one's identity destroyed, Améry alludes to the idea of having lost his "human dignity," only to quickly brush this aside for being too vague a notion: "I must confess that I don't exactly know what that is: human dignity" (ibid., 27). What he does know is that, having been tortured, he "stayed tortured" and that staying tortured meant two things. Firstly, it meant living with a permanent loss of trust in the world:

> As an element of trust in the world, and in our context what is solely relevant, is the certainty that by reason of written or unwritten social contracts the other person […] will respect my physical, and with it also my

> metaphysical being. […] Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. […] That one's fellow man was experienced as the antiman […] blocks the view into a world in which the principle of hope rules (Ibid., 28, 40).

Secondly, staying tortured meant living with a permanent loss of trust in *himself*.[1] Like countless of other victims of torture but also of rape, Améry specifies that this is importantly tied to how his very own tortured body turned against him, how it was "(*his*) *own body weight* (that) caused luxation" – thus betraying him during the event (ibid., 32, my italics). Susan Brison makes this though even more explicit in *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, where she recounts her violent subjection to rape: "My body was now perceived as an enemy, having betrayed my […] trust and interest in it" (Brison 2002, 44).

Améry's testimony provokes some important thoughts about the conditions constitutive of human selfhood. Not surprisingly, our modern philosophical tradition, with its Cartesian-Kantian heritage, has delivered very few accounts that stand up to the task of conceptually accommodating Améry's experience. After all, a self predominantly understood as fundamentally a 'thinking substance' or a 'rationally self-determining will,' who in his deepest or most 'dignified' core is pictured as undetermined by others and by bodily experience, cannot be permanently undone as the result of a violent attack by another on his body. To take the testimony of Améry's suffering philosophically serious is to work towards a conception of human selfhood as recognitively constituted and bodily mediated.[2] The aim of this paper is to make some headway towards such a conception by offering an account of human corporeity that can conceptually underpin Améry's experience. More specifically, what I try to account for is how my very own body, which, in Améry's words makes up not only "my physical, (but) with it also my metaphysical being" can simultaneously figure as the most direct expression of myself as an agent – opening me up to a world of familiarity that I effortlessly feel at home in through my ongoing worldly projects – *and* how it can be encountered as a kind of alien force that turns itself against me.

1 In addition to Améry's account, see also Honneth 1995, 132, and Brison 2002.

2 Jay M. Bernstein is currently finishing up his latest book in which he argues that modern moral philosophy has trouble capturing the widely and rightly held intuition that torture and rape are paradigmatic cases of *moral* harm – where, in turn, the notion of moral harm requires an embodied recognitive conception of human selfhood. This essay grew directly out of Bernstein's graduate seminar "Torture and Dignity," taught in the spring of 2008 at the New School for Social Research.

To this end, I will begin by looking at David Sussman's illuminating essay titled "What's Wrong with Torture?" (Sussman 2005). There, Sussman argues that the specificity of torture's moral harm lies in the purposive exploitation of it's victim's body such that he is forced to *involuntarily*, yet *actively*, participate in his own abuse, ensuing in potentially irrecoverable feelings of self-betrayal. While Sussman accurately depicts the victim's self-experience, I argue that his commitment to a Kantian framework prevents him from conceptually underpinning his descriptive insights. Sussman characterizes the self-betrayal that victims of torture are forced to undergo in terms of their "*agency* (turning) against itself" (ibid., 30). There are, I argue, two problems with this characterization. Firstly, as a Kantian Sussman is unable to ascribe a fundamental role to the body within his conception of agency. Secondly, a conception of the self qua agent is insufficient to account for the possibility of *involuntary* yet *active* participation in one's own abuse and the encounter of one's very own body as enemy. What we need is an account of the self that distinguishes between my body as lived, as something that I *am*; something through which I am open to a world that I am invested, and my body as a kind of thing; as something I *have* such that I can encounter it as a kind of alien object that is nevertheless *me*.

That human corporeity is marked by this double structure is the central insight of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. In Plessner's words, "Man has, not a univocal, but an equivocal relation to his body, [...] his existence imposes on him the ambiguity of being an 'embodied' (*leibhaften*) creature and a creature 'in the body' (*im Körper*), an ambiguity that means an actual break in his way of existing" (Plessner1970, 32). It is this ambiguous relationship as lived body to our body as thing that is exploited in torture and that enables the feelings of self-betrayal that are astutely registered but conceptually misunderstood by Sussman. Furthermore, we will see that the notion of *boundary* (also translatable as *border*) plays a key role in Plessner's account of how this ambiguous relationship between the body as lived and the body as thing is enacted. This will allow us to be more specific about Améry's testimony of how the violation of his "skin surface as *border*" was able to irredeemably "destroy" him.

Forced self-betrayal as the distinctive element of torture's moral harm

As I mentioned, Sussman presents his penetrating account of torture's specific moral harm from within a Kantian framework. At the core of

Kant's moral system lies the view that through an innate possession of free will and rationality, human beings are capable of acting as autonomous agents. The capacity to freely choose our own ends and act as self-determining autonomous agents endows humanity with an intrinsic value, the respect for which should be upheld in all our actions. This is something that takes effort for our will is largely driven by personal inclinations and desires in determining the ends that motivate our actions. By doing so we not only fail to exercise our capacity for self-determined autonomous action, but we also run the risk of treating others as mere means in order to satisfy our own subjectively desired ends. In Kant's view this is immoral, since we would thereby fail to respect the intrinsically valuable autonomy of others, who, as beings capable of determining their own ends could not rationally subscribe to being treated as a mere means in the pursuit of another person's end. The only way to avoid treating others as mere means to our ends and instead respect them as ends in themselves, is by stripping our will of any object of desire as a reason for action and making a purely rational law, which conforms with the intrinsic value of the autonomy of all rational beings, as the guiding principle of morality. This purely formal principle is expressed in the categorical imperative, which in its most general formula holds that "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (Kant 2002, 4: 402). Kantian morality is thus geared towards the intersubjective promotion of and respect for each other's ability to act as autonomous agents – where, crucially, autonomous agency is characterized in terms of the will's capacity to act in accordance with the formal law.

Thus, according to the orthodox Kantian view, torture's moral harm lies in the intense disrespect that the torturer portrays with regard to its victim's autonomy by "using someone as a mere means to purposes she does not or could not reasonably share" (Sussman 2005, 13-14). Sussman holds that, for the traditional Kantian, there is some room to incorporate the specific moral wrongness of pain infliction, by understanding pain as something that obstructs autonomous agency. As Sussman puts it:

> Pain characteristically compromises or undermines the very capacities constitutive of autonomous agency itself [...] when sufficiently intense pain becomes a person's entire universe and his entire self, crowding out every other aspect of his mental life. Unlike other harms, pain takes its victim's agency apart 'from the inside,' such that the agent may never be able to reconstitute himself fully (Sussman 2005, 14).

Although I am sympathetic to the attention Sussman draws to the victim's relation to his own pain and the possibility for this to destroy a person's self-relation "from the inside" it seems to me that Sussman moves too quickly here. Without an elaboration on the relation between the Kantian notion of autonomous agency, understood as the rational exercise of free will, and that which suffers the pain, that is, the body, it seems to me that it remains unclear what this 'inside' is for the Kantian. Moreover, since the body itself is not the locus of agency for Kantians, it seems impossible to understand how the Kantian agent can be *permanently* damaged as a result of having been tortured *once the immediate pain has disappeared*. In order to make the claim that torture can *permanently* affect its victim's agency, a traditional Kantian, understanding autonomous agency as essentially our capacity to act on purely formal reasons, would have to show how torture no longer enables its victims to act on the categorical imperative. It seems wrong to say that victims of torture lose their ability to be autonomous in the Kantian sense of the word. Moreover, this doesn't capture what makes the after effects of torture so particularly tragic, namely the loss of trust in oneself and the world.

Although Sussman does not fully engage with these difficulties for the Kantian model, he does see the need to expand the orthodox Kantian view by offering a more detailed phenomenology of what pain is and how it relates to our agency in order to account for the specific moral harm of torture. What motivates Sussman to do so is that the orthodox Kantian can draw no significant distinction between the obstruction of agency through pain on the one hand and other forms of agency obstruction (e.g. through pleasure) on the other hand. Sussman sees that, "If torture is morally distinctive in the ways that our intuitions suggest, there must be something about what pain is, and about its special relation to our own agency, that makes some important moral difference" (Sussman 2005, 19). In other words, he wants to expand the explanatory power of Kant's moral system by showing that there is "some significant moral difference between being used as a mere means in general, and being used as such a means through one's own distressing affects and bodily responses" (Sussman 2005, 19). In order to show how this works Sussman offers the following phenomenology of pain:

> Pain has a peculiar quality. On the one hand, we experience it as not a part of ourselves. […] It is something that just happens to us, neither immediately evoked nor eliminated by any decisions or judgments we may make. On the other hand, pain is also a primitive, unmediated aspect of our *agency*. Pain is not something wholly alien to our *wills* but something

> in which we find ourselves actively, if reluctantly, participating. My pain is, after all, *my* pain (Sussman 2005, 20).

There is a certain hesitance in Sussman's characterization of pain as *a primitive aspect of our agency.* Sussman acknowledges that "understood as a kind of expressive voice, my pain is not unproblematically an exercise of my agency (the way my reflectively adopted commitments might be)" (Sussman 2005, 21). But as a Kantian it seems he cannot place this "kind of expressive voice" that is both intimately me and experienced as something working against me, anywhere else but within the bounds of agency. As such, Sussman ultimately settles for the conclusion that although pain is "not unproblematically an exercise of agency," it is "neither [...] something fully distinct from such agency," adding that human agency is thus marked by a "*peculiar duality* that the torturer sets out to exploit" (Sussman 2005, 21, my italics). He offers the following account of this exploitation:

> What the torturer does is to take his victim's pain, and through it his victim's body, and make it begin to express the torturer's will. The resisting victim is committed to remain silent, but he now experiences within himself something quite intimate and familiar that speaks for the torturer, something that pleads a case or provides an excuse for giving in. My suffering is experienced as not just something the torturer inflicts on me, but as something I do to myself, as a kind of self-betrayal worked through my body and its feelings (Sussman 2005, 21).

Methods for inducing this experience of self-betrayal are not just limited to pain-infliction, but also include other ways of exploiting what Sussman calls "the most intimate aspects of (our) agency" (Sussman 2005, 23). Prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, for example, have reportedly been forced to soil themselves and to masturbate before the eyes of others. The shame and humiliation we are prone to experience even in ordinary intersubjective settings when we exhibit such involuntary bodily reactions at the wrong moment, indicates that relating to ourselves as autonomous agents requires that we have some control over when and where we portray such bodily reactions. What torture establishes, Sussman suggests, is "a deliberate perversion of that very value (of oneself as a rational self-governing agent), turning our dignity (as self-governing agents) against itself in a way that must be especially offensive to any morality that fundamentally honors it" (Sussman 2005, 19). And he sees that this "especially offensive perversion" of our self-relation as autonomous agents is brought about by "the body (being) touched in ways that make

the most personal and intense feelings manifest themselves publicly and *involuntarily* (e.g. in erection, lubrication, sweat, shivering, urination, defecation, and centrally, spontaneous cries)" (Sussman 2005, 23).

While clearly sensitive to the fundamental role that the specific exploitation of the victim's embodiment plays in the involuntary induction of her self-betrayal, the problem with Sussman's account is his characterization of the involuntary dimensions of our embodiment as "a primitive, unmediated aspect of our *agency*" (Sussman 2005, 27). There are several issues to be distinguished regarding this conceptually awkward characterization. Firstly, it is not clear what exactly it would mean for sensations of pain and involuntary movements and reactions of the body to be 'unmediated aspects of our agency.' Specifying this would require a developed account of how the body has a place within a Kantian notion of agency, understood as the will's ability to act on the categorical imperative. Secondly, even if we grant that Sussman could make room for a notion of embodied agency, my claim is that this is not enough to make sense of the phenomenon Sussman describes, in accordance with Améry and Brison. What we need is an account of how I, as an embodied agent, can also experience my body as a thing or object that is still, nevertheless, me. This experience of alienness within myself cannot be understood merely from an account of embodied agency. To clarify this point, I will briefly digress to a discussion of embodied agency as sketched out within the phenomenological tradition; a tradition, which has done more significant philosophical work than any other school towards bringing the phenomenon of embodied agency in view.

According to the phenomenological view, to experience oneself as an autonomous agent in the most primordial sense of the word is not – as the Kantian has it – a matter of rationally subscribing to the categorical imperative. Rather, it is to experience oneself as the initiator of one's actions in the form of a very minimal "thin, pre-reflective awareness of what I am doing as I am doing it" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 158). This thin pre-reflexive awareness is the experiential sense of agency that we have when we execute much of our everyday actions. We tend to, for example, effortlessly ride a bike through heavy traffic, walk up the stairs, or take up an appropriate distance from other people while conversing with them without having to reflect on ourselves or on the objects and people we are dealing with during these actions. Although we do not need to reflect on ourselves qua agents while performing these actions, we do have a minimal sense of ourselves as their self-moving initiators.

What makes this pre-reflective agential self and world relation possible, according to phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty, is that the body is

not just a mechanistic object amongst other objects that requires explicit mental guidance in order to be brought to action, but that it is instead *lived*. The lived, or agential body, can be understood as a nexus of perceptual and motor skills that we are born with and continue to integrate throughout our lives and through which we are always already meaningfully engaged with our environment, an environment which is in turn shaped through our embodied relation to it. It is because I have learned how to ride a bicycle that I can immediately, and pre-reflectively perceive a situation as best responded to by jumping on my bike, and as such my bodily skills correlate with the meaning that the world has for me. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the lived body, engaged with the world through action and perception is "a system which is open on to the world, and correlative with it," (Merleau-Ponty 2012,526, n115) and as such it "guarantees our vital communication with the world (and) makes it present as a familiar setting of our life" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 53).

The lived or agential body thus anchors us to the world; it forms our perspective onto it. Rather than being the object of experience it is its source. As such, it is characteristic of lived or embodied agency to remain pervasively in the background while we skillfully execute our everyday activities and tend to be thematically directed at other things. While an account of embodied agency or the body as lived seems vital for beginning to make sense of the mutually implicated collapse of self and world that torture brings about it cannot by itself explain the peculiar experience with which we have been preoccupied, namely the encounter with our own body as simultaneously alien to me and intimately me, as something that can involuntarily turn against me while still being me.[3] Maarten Coolen raises this as a concern in his contribution to this volume when he writes that:

> He [Merleau-Ponty] clearly points out how we get things done without having to make representations of what we are aiming at. But in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of skilful coping the body itself seems to 'vanish' when it is in action, in favour of the world that is opened by it. It gets, so to speak, swallowed up in its being attuned to the world (Maarten Coolen, this volume, 113).

What we need in order to bring the specificity of our relation to our own body as object into view is an account like Plessner's that highlights the dual

3 For a compelling account of the mutually dependent collapse of self and world brought about through torture that draws on the phenomenological tradition, see Scarry 1985.

aspect of our corporeal being in the world, reminding us of our ambiguous self-relation "of being an 'embodied' (*leibhaften*) creature and a creature 'in the body' (*im Körper*)" (Plessner 1970, 32) For a Kantian, who holds that you are an autonomous human self insofar as you are a willing agent, and for whom something can only be *mine* if it is part of this agency, this dual bodily relationship that constitutes human existence cannot be adequately brought in view. Nevertheless, Sussman makes strides in understanding the role that the victim's corporeity plays in the self-relation that torture destroys. And although conceptually flawed, we will see that his description of human agency in terms of a "peculiar duality" is intuitively close to Plessner's approach to human selfhood. It is to this account that I turn now.

Eccentric positionality: The continuous task of being and having a body

I started this paper with a citation from Améry, who experienced how "the other person […] with whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface *as border* forces his corporeality on me […] and thereby destroys me." We have been exploring how this destruction of the self resulting from this crossing of our skin surface as border is partly possible because our body, which we *are*, can at the same time be experienced as something alien to us – something that works against us, thereby corroborating in our destruction. The objective of this section is to show that Plessner allows us to better conceptualize this.

A helpful avenue into Plessner's conception of human corporeity is via the notion of *boundary*, which plays a central role in his philosophical anthropology. To this end, I will offer a few general remarks about Plessner's overall project, which is to articulate the distinction between living things and inanimate objects. Whereas inanimate objects are separated from one another by contours that do not belong to either object but are simply located in between them, living things, Plessner urges, *have* their own boundary. This boundary, which guarantees simultaneously a living thing's autonomy within and openness towards its environment *just is* a living thing's body. Plessner writes: "The boundary belongs to the body itself, the body *is* the boundary of his self" (Plessner 1975, 127).[4]

4 My translation. Original text: "Die Grenze gehört dem Körper selbst an, der Körper ist die Grenze seiner selbst" (Plessner 1975, 127).

As bodily beings that actively realize the boundary between themselves and their environment, human and non-human animals take up a position in their environment.[5] This fundamental characteristic of human and non-human corporeity is expressed in Plessner's term "positionality" (Plessner 1975). Plessner goes on to analyze the difference between human beings and animals in terms of the similarities and differences in the nature of their positionality. A fundamental commonality between the positionality of humans and animals is that they both actively realize the boundary between themselves and their environment through their motility. What makes this possible is that the structure of their corporeity is characterized by a fundamental ambiguity, or, to use Sussman's term a "peculiar duality." Both humans and animals *are* their (living) body, while simultaneously *having* access to this body as something they can insert in order to achieve something. Living as body in a body thing is what makes the self-moving lives of humans and animals possible. As Plessner puts it, "no movement, no leap [...] would be possible without it. The animal too must put its body into action, employ it according to a given situation; otherwise it does not reach its goal" (Plessner 1970, 37-38).

Plessner holds that, because both human and non-human animals *have* and *are* their body, they have a body-center, or as he also calls it, a *self*, through which they can initiate interactions with their environment.[6] This means that the notion of selfhood on Plessner's view entails being an autonomous, self-moving perspective onto a certain environment or world, but it equally means that the contours of selfhood are moveable, malleable and transformable by one's environment or world. Characteristic of non-human 'selfhood' is that the being and having a body through which the animal sustains itself in relation to and in separation from its environment is instinctively performed. The positionality of non-human animals is, as Plessner puts it, "centric," meaning that they do not experience themselves *as* a self positioned in an environment: "Insofar as an animal is a self it is absorbed in the 'here-now,' [...] Animals live from their center, within their center, but they do not live *as* center. [...] It forms a reflexive system, an itself, but it does not experience itself (as self)" [7] (Plessner 1975, 288, my italics).

5 Since it is not relevant for my paper I will leave aside Plessner's discussion of plants.

6 Plessner also characterizes the notion of body-centre in terms of '*Mitte*,' '*Kerne*,' or '*Zentrum*.'

7 My translation. Original text: "Insoweit das Tier *selbst* ist, geht es im Hier-Jetzt auf. [...] Das Tier lebt aus seiner Mitte heraus, in seine Mitte hinein, aber es lebt nicht *als Mitte.* [...] Es bildet ein auf es selber rückbezügliches System, ein Sich, *aber es erlebt nicht – Sich*" (Plessner 1975, 288, my italics).

As such, living through the 'peculiar duality' of their embodiment doesn't emerge as a problem for animals.

This is different for human positionality, which is marked by what Plessner calls an "eccentric" structure. Although we always remain tied to our body as center, we are fundamentally aware of our body *as center*, which simultaneously expels us from it.[8] As such, we are never instinctively absorbed in our environment in an unproblematic way, but are condemned to constantly establish our position within it. This constitutes the aforementioned "break" or "brokenness" that fundamentally determines human existence. Because we not only *have* and *are* our body but also have a relationship to this "peculiar duality," the establishment of the boundary between ourselves and our environment emerges as an explicit task for us. Plessner writes,

> Even if man can come to no decision between these two orders (of his corporeity), the one related to a center and the other not, he must nevertheless find a relation to them. For he is totally merged in neither. Neither *is* he just living body, nor does he just *have* a body. Every requirement of physical existence demands a reconciliation between being and having (Plessner 1970, 36-37).

To be a human self, for Plessner, then, is to continuously reestablish the boundary between oneself and one's environment by coming to terms with one's having and being a body – where this is not performed instinctively, but can emerge as an explicit, normative task for us. Two ways in which we establish our bodily mediated relation to our environment is by using our body as *instrument* and through the body's own *expressivity*. Most of the responses we give to our environment are established by instrumentally employing our body to initiate actions. In these situations, which we can call expressions of embodied agency, we routinely catch a ball that someone throws at us or ride a bicycle without having to reflect explicitly on what we are doing. Although human beings always have to live out the relationship of *having* and *being* a body, this doesn't occur as an explicit problem during these instances. We do not experience the body as thing but as lived. We simply act, skillfully yet effortlessly, while enjoying an experiential sense of autonomous agency. As Plessner writes,

> Usually, in unequivocal situations which can be unequivocally answered and controlled, man responds as a person and makes use of his body

8 My translation. Original text: "Er ist in seine Grenze gesetzt und deshalb über sie hinaus" (Plessner 1975, 292).

> for that purpose: as an instrument of speech, as a grasping, thrusting, supporting, and conveying organ, as a means of locomotion, as a means of signaling, as the sounding board of his emotions. He controls his body, or learns to control it (Plessner 1970, 34).

In Plessner's account, eccentric positionality thus makes embodied agency possible. It is precisely because we both are and have our body, that we are able to acquire and continuously enrich our lived relation to the world as described by phenomenologists. As Plessner puts it: "From the day of his birth on, everyone must come to terms with (the) [...] double role (of his corporeity). Every kind of learning, e.g. grasping and the correlation of its effects with visual distance, standing, running, and so on, takes place on the basis and within the framework of this double role" (Plessner 1970, 34). In other words, on Plessner's account, to have acquired a certain bodily skill such as walking, balancing ourselves, or riding a bicycle just means "that the reconciliation between having a body and being one [...] take(s) place readily and quickly" (Plessner 1970, 37). The 'peculiar duality' of our corporeity may not emerge as an explicit task in these everyday actions, but it is nevertheless what makes them possible. Plessner's notion of eccentric positionality reminds us that our bodily mediated selves gain an increasingly effortless hold on the world in a gradual manner. And because our grip on the world is acquired and sustained through the body, the body is equally a locus of fundamental vulnerability, making it a constitutive aspect of human existence to just as easily lose our grip on the world.

There are numerous ways (both desired and undesired) in which our sense of embodied agency and our effortless, familiar connection to the world gets disrupted as our body announces itself as a kind of thing and responds for us, often in spite of us. Plessner explores this primarily via the notion of the body's own expressivity, which, "like the instrumentality of the body [...] corresponds to that tension and entwinement which we are always having to adjust between being a body and having a body" (Plessner 1970, 43). Whereas our everyday responses to our environment tend to be characterized by the effortless control of our body as an instrument, allowing for a general experiential sense of agency, our body's expressivity has the capacity to 'take over' and respond for us when we are no longer able to respond as agent. I take this to be the insight Sussman wanted to highlight when he characterized pain as "a kind of *expressive* voice, (that is) [...] not unproblematically an exercise of my agency (the way my reflectively adopted commitments might be)" (Sussman 2005, 21, my italics). Plessner notes that it is under more equivocal circumstances, "involving (for example)

shame, anxiety, terror, repugnance, and disgust," that the body's expressivity becomes "largely removed from (the individual's) voluntary influences," and portrays involuntary reactions such as "blushing, turning pale, sweating, vomiting, coughing, and sneezing" (Plessner 1970, 33). These involuntary bodily reactions, the significance of which Sussman registered but could not conceptually account for, can now be understood as a fundamental aspect of our eccentric positionality; of how we are placed in the world and respond to our environment. We are beings who both are and have our body and who have to continuously settle this ambiguity that marks our existence. We can learn to control our body to such an extent that in univocal situations we are able to respond effortlessly as embodied agents without our ambiguous situatedness in the world emerging as an explicit task, but the possibility for us to encounter our body as alien to us, as something out of our control, as something that can respond for us in spite of us to unequivocal situations is always given as a possibility with our existence. [9]

Plessner's philosophical anthropology, which locates human selfhood in the structure of human corporeality and the manner in which this forces us to continuously establish our own boundary. Because being a human self, for Plessner, *just is* being caught up in this continuous task, involuntary bodily reactions are just as much a way of establishing our bounded selves as the intentional actions of embodied agency. The difference is, however, that when we respond by using our body as an instrument, we respond as autonomous agents. In contrast, when our response to a situation is determined by involuntary reactions, our usually pervasive body takes over and interrupts our autonomous control over it. There are countless circumstances under which this 'taking over' of the involuntary regions of the body is precisely what we are after. Think, for example, of the various ways in which our body takes over to make possible the pleasure of consensual sex or of how

9 The phenomena of laughing and crying are the most telling here, because unlike blushing, sweating or burping – i.e. bodily reactions that I experience as disruptive of my ability to respond to a situation as fully 'me' – when we laugh and cry we respond to a situation as fully ourselves precisely by having our body take over and do the responding for us, thus stressing the possibility, given with our human corporeity that our body is expressive of *me* precisely by taking over and responding for me: "Laughing and crying make their appearance as uncontrolled and unformed eruptions of the body, which acts, as it were, autonomously. Man falls into their power, he breaks out laughing, and lets himself break into tears. He responds to something by laughing and crying, but not with a form of expression which could be appropriately compared with verbal utterance, expressive movement, gesture, or action. He responds – with his body as body, as if from the impossibility of being able to find an answer himself. And in the loss of control over himself and his body, he reveals himself at the same time as a more than bodily being who lives in a state of tension to his physical existence yet is wholly and completely bound to it" (Plessner 1970, 31).

it responds to a comic scene with a joyous burst of laughter. But because our body can respond for us beyond the reach of our control it is also the involuntary regions of our corporeity that make us deeply vulnerable to others, who can induce our involuntary bodily expressions despite our consent.

As Sussman perceptively registered, this is precisely what happens to victims of torture who experience themselves as "simultaneously powerless and yet actively complicit in (their) own abuse" (Sussman 2005, 4). Plessner's framework now allows us to make sense of this experience conceptually. Even though the victim is rendered completely defenseless at the mercy of another subject as she is obstructed in her autonomous control of her body, her eccentric positionality makes it impossible for her not to take up a position. It is precisely because we are condemned to always take up a position, and because we do this even when we have no autonomous control over our body, that through the purposive exploitation of the victim's body, torture can turn the victim's body against herself, causing within the victim a permanent distrust not just towards the world, but towards herself.

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8 Plessner's Theory of Eccentricity

A Contribution to the Philosophy of Medicine

Oreste Tolone

Although Plessner did not directly deal with medical anthropology or the philosophy of medicine, aside from some essays written during his youth, his ideas have certainly had significant influence on these two disciplines. His definition of man as a positional and eccentric being actually includes the concept of health, disease and the doctor-patient relationship, which has certainly contributed to the controversy in contemporary medical anthropology, influencing writers such as Gadamer, Jonas and Habermas.[1]

Being a body, having a body: The lack of equilibrium in human nature

In his most important work, *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928] (Plessner 1975), but also in *Laughing and Crying* [*Lachen und Weinen*, 1941] (Plessner 1982), Plessner stated the idea of human nature as composite, characterized by man's complex relationship with his own body. From birth, man is called upon to harmonize this contraposition between being a body and having a body as a physical object (*Leib-sein* and *Körper-haben*); between being in agreement with his own corporeality, like all the other animals, while at the same time never being completely in agreement with it, allowing a certain degree of external and internal distance. Indeed, thanks to a particular characteristic in his limit (*Grenze*), man is simultaneously "a body," "in the body" and "outside the body" (Plessner 1975, 293). He is eccentric, which means that "he is confronted with his own existence as something he controls or expels, which he uses as a means or an instrument: he is within it and, to a certain extent, coincides with it. To man, corporeal existence is therefore a *relationship*, not univocal but twofold, between him and himself" (GS VII, 67).

1 Cf. Gadamer 1993, Jonas 1985, and Habermas 2001. We have consulted the original work by Plessner and Weizsäcker. Therefore all quotations in the text have been translated from German into English by the author. The bibliografic references relate to German works.

This means that man can prove to be both, an object and the inside of this very object (GS VII, 75); not only a part of the outer world, but also that, which the outer world appears as; as a body as well as within the body. Certain human phenomena like laughing and crying attest strong emancipation in a person's bodily processes and thus the precarious nature of this union. Nevertheless, man is like an animal that is bound to its physical existence, despite the conflict. "In man's relationship with his body, this conflict is more frequently the basis of his existence; it is the source but also the limit of his strength" (GS VII, 63).

Struggling with this conflict is something that makes man completely different from other animals, as they cannot experience their interiority, and are not aware of their closure from the world; thus they do not need to overcome any conflict within or with the outer world. The animals' being and having a body coincides. Their sense of being a body in the world is closed off entirely. It is not possible for them to perform something for which the instincts are not equipped and that could place them in a difficult situation. As Plessner stated: "donkeys do not venture on ice" (GS VII, 61), while man is constantly called upon to *achieve* his own oneness, to reconcile his being and having a body, what he is and what he wants to be, all of which he can never fully achieve.[2] But it would be wrong to think that man must choose between these two aspects of his existence. As tempting as it may be to accept this dichotomy, the specificity of human life consists precisely in finding a harmonious balance between being a body and having a body:

> If man cannot make a decision between the two aspects, that is, whether or not to relate to one centre, he must in any case find a relationship with both. But this relationship is not fully achieved in either position. Man is not just a body, nor does he just have a body. Every requirement in physical existence demands harmony between being and having; between within and without (GS VII, 69).

Downgrading to the animal level or upgrading to the level of angels are not practicable hypotheses. The compound nature of man does not allow him to reject or to embrace just one of the two poles, relating to one centre while ignoring the other one. This leads man to the constant search for his own identity, precariously balanced between being a part of nature or being outside of it; he is destined to expressivity intended as the original way in which he makes up for the fact that he never totally coincides with

2 If not in the definitivum of religion (cf. Plessner 1975, 364).

himself. Thus, expressivity does not only represent man's way of making up for his deficiency, but also the fundamental motion produced by history, creating a new cultural world, thanks to which nature discovers its true meaning. His constitutional lack of balance, and his needy, fragmented, exposed being, forces him to transcend towards another homeland, where his artificial and cultural actions finally allow this natural being to be in harmony with himself (Plessner 1975, 339).

The three anthropological laws: health and illness

Plessner's three anthropological laws clearly express this natural composition that man must deal with, highlighting the human condition is characterized by natural artificiality, mediated immediacy and a utopian standpoint (GS VII, 63). All of these concepts try to underline the work and tension that nature subjects man to. Such a characteristic is the source of all great cultural constructions, the origin of perennial 'transcendence' and the basis of all human evolution, but it is also man's intrinsic instability and precariousness, his groundlessness and structural alienation – even in his look (GS VIII, 93) – his being without a homeland (*Heimatlos*) and based on nothing. The two opposing poles immediately become dangerous and negative, should either of them be regarded as something absolute. To be wholly natural or wholly artificial, immediate or mediated, rooted or eradicated, any of these radical endpoints are bad for man's health. It is as if the balance he is entitled to as a human and eccentric animal were substituted by a balance he has no right to – that is, the animal balance completely absorbed by itself and its own environment, the pneumatic one, completely detached from its own body. "He cannot be entitled to unlimited openness to the world. This is only possible for one who were incorporeal or having a pneumatic body, like the angels described in medieval religion" (GS VIII, 187).

Partial openness therefore assures mental health and humanity in that it does not rule out reconsideration of one's own world, stopping man from disintegrating and from being held hostage by an unbearable opening. The third anthropological law, in particular, gives us a glimpse of the possibility of eradication of the utopian (or atopic) standpoint, which may somehow result in behavioural disorders. This law represents, more so than the other two, man's vulnerability, and his innate dangerousness, which consists precisely in total absorption in his centrality (or rootedness) or total loss of centrality (or eradication).

Taking man's structure, as we can deduce it from Plessner's anthropology, we can hypothesize not only man's ideal structure and health, but also his pathological predisposition and the type of vulnerability he is subjected to.

We could even state that the idea of health can play an important role in the understanding of man's anthropological statute. Health thus becomes a criterion of the human condition: this does not mean that eccentricity in itself is synonymous with pathology. If that were the case, we should claim that man as such is pathological. Instead, it is the typically human way of being vulnerable to disease and health that is closely bound to his eccentricity. Being able to exist outside of his centre gives way to new forms of imbalance and new ways of experiencing and managing such an alteration.

A healthy way to deal with one's body and the world would therefore be to manage how to balance the tension between the two poles, allowing both to coexist. A healthy man is he who accepts the "game" of life (Krüger 2000, 289-317) and manages to stay in balance between naturality and artificiality, mediacy and immediacy, rootedness and utopia, without thinking he can find salvation by suppressing one of the two poles. The same applies to Romano Guardini's "polar opposition" and Simmel's "axial rotation of life" [*Achsendrehung des Lebens*], whose concepts Klages (Fischer 2008, 87-88) found he could compare to Plessner's eccentricity. This does not mean there is a universal standard for health: the balance between opposing poles can change according to each individual, his age, evolutionary phases, but even according to historical context. As Martin Buber (Buber 1947) pointed out, periods in history alternate: there are periods in which a sense of rootedness, of coincidence and of setting up a home prevail and periods, which may be open to risk but are also more creative, in which a sense of non-coincidence with the self and eradication prevail; such eradication can reach an extent that man experiences his relationship with himself, his body, his mind and the world around him in an unnatural, painful and unhealthy way. Indeed, health is not a statistic average between the two extremes, but rather the balance which comes from feeling well, and in this balance, as Gadamer said "we are resourceful, open to knowledge, forgetful of ourselves, and hardly feel overwork and stress" (Gadamer 1994, 122).

Thus, health is like a condition of intrinsic adequacy and agreement with oneself, which is truly only present when it is absent, that is, unnoticed. It is the feeling of immediate coincidence with the self, despite our mediacy; of naturality despite our artificiality; of transcendence despite our rootedness. In this state of mercy, our body does not send us messages; ideas are no longer cumbersome and the world does not appear hostile, but actually quite friendly.

In conclusion, being healthy can be understood as mastering the dual situation of being a body and having a body without any major conflicts, to the point where we may even forget about the dichotomy. To conclude in Gadamer's words, it's like learning "to ride a bicycle" (Gadamer 1994, 170), a sudden establishment of balance, that hides, however, the constant effort it takes to reconcile opposing tensions.

On the other hand, disease awakes us from our peaceful co-existence with the world. When we are ill, the dichotomy is suddenly present and the previously evolved union between the self and body ceases. It is as if eccentricity, normally able to recognize the *Körper* and *Leib* as identical or united, weakened and allowed the two poles to become separated. The person's wholeness becomes fragmented. This occurs mainly in psychiatric illnesses; it is as if man were unable to maintain a balance between his *animalitas* and his utopian spirit, his eccentricity and his centrality. Man is temporarily defeated in his attempt to fit into the world through his dual nature. Dialectic in the three anthropological laws is temporarily suspended in favour of a spectrum ranging from a proliferation of possibilities to decrease in the distance from the self. This decrease in eccentric distance determines relative autonomy in the being body and the having body, which compromises man's connection with the world. The ill body and ill mind are different means of disturbing their peaceful co-existence. Through physical pain and suffering, man's ill body and mind draw attention to the self until man is completely absorbed and goes back to coinciding with them. The "being a body" can expand until it coincides with the entire world, thus becoming the only experience one can sensibly talk about. In this case, it is the healthy counterbalance of the "having a body" that ceases. In the opposite case, it is the healthy counterbalance of the rootedness in a body that ceases (GS VIII, 213).

According to Plessner, disease in an eccentric animal is not just the analytical assessment of an alteration, that is, the measurement of diversity coming from the outside, but rather the deterioration of eccentricity, the interruption of "spontaneous" identity, the disappearance of balance, which can no longer be neglected. While laughter and tears represent temporary interruption linked to external events, sickness and pain reveal structural vulnerability within the eccentric being (Gadamer 1994, 62-63). There is a disturbing element, a symptom that makes us aware of our bodies and our minds, to such an extent as to make them inconvenient or troublesome. The reconciliation between being-a-body and having-a-body becomes a critical endeavour. Such a loss of integrity disrupts the normal ability to react and relate to the world; the entire concept of being-in-the-world is changed.

The common result is retrocession of one's existence, a mutilation of future prospects. In any case, however strong the division and the tendency to be re-absorbed into one of the two dichotomies or to lose total union may appear, the ill person still maintains a part of his eccentricity, that is, a residual ability to distance himself from his own illness. In case of physical illness, the person tends to refuse his illness, making it foreign rather than recognizing it as his own, feeling as if "something were inhabiting him" (Spinsanti 1991, 79). He must free himself from it. In the case of mental illness, one's distance from the illness becomes indispensable for the patient to recover, so that he does not identify himself totally with his psychic world. Just like man's humanity allows him to distance himself from himself and thus become mentally disoriented, this human condition also assures that this disorientation is not definite or total. That which allows man to go mad also allows him to regain his sanity. This is one of the main assumptions in anthropological psychiatry.[3]

The limits of medical intervention: Habermas

Apart from the actual use Plessner derived from the concepts of eccentricity, being and having a body, and the three anthropological laws, they are all useful tools at the disposal of medical anthropology. More specifically, they seem to throw light on such controversial ethical issues, such as the doctor-patient relationship and the new frontiers of genetics.

The role of doctors and medicine is to guarantee harmony between being-a-body and having-a-body, to preserve the balance between each of the three spectrums: mediacy-immediacy, naturality-artificiality, and rootedness-eradication. Overlooking this means raising a number of ethical questions regarding the limits of medical intervention. Current questions regarding man's ability to manipulate the human genome without compromising the patient's dignity, arise precisely at the same moment when man himself becomes an object of manipulation. The absolute power of science to intervene on the corporeal aspect of life (to reduce man to his *Körper*) makes us forget that the artificial must be in agreement with the natural. In other words, that with which we are provided artificially (and which will be

3 Psychiatric anthropology originates as criticism of the notion of complete insanity. Supporters of this tradition besides Philippe Pinel are well-known scholars like Eugen Bleuler, Jakob Wyrsch, and John Strauss. Pinel who all support the notions of "nosodromic" and "partiality of insanity."

an integral part of what makes us human) must enhance and not obstruct the immediate and natural being-a-body. When the body is modified genetically or with prostheses, it shouldn't stop health from withdrawing into the background, or forbid artificiality to be natural. As Jürgen Habermas pointed out, "[i]nsofar as man's body is part of this sought-after intervention, the old phenomenological distinction by Helmuth Plessner, 'being a body' (*Leib-sein*) and 'having a body' (*Körper-haben*) becomes extraordinarily present-day. The previous distinction between the nature we are and the organic features we acquire vanishes" (Habermas 2002, 15).

In other words, today we can acquire genetic features (*Körper*) that can change the basis of our future harmony between being-a-body (*Körper*) and having-a-body (*Leib*) and thereby limit our immediacy. We would then be in the presence of absolute supremacy over any potential artificiality (prostheses, genetic manipulation), which, becoming a natural part of man, would impose the conditions of balance in the future. In other words, in the future, ordinary human balance will be the result of the prosthesis or eugenics employed. Mediated artificiality will then determine the natural immediacy and therefore the limits of compatibility.

Despite that, Plessner asserts that man is an "[e]ccentric being, with no balance, no time or place, eternally exposed to nothing, constitutively out of his element, having to become something in order to find balance; he can only find it with the help of extra-natural things which derive from his creation" (Plessner 1975, 334).

In any case, it should not be forgotten that the ultimate aim of the supernatural is achievement of harmony, existing in a second nature, "tranquillity in a second innocence" (Plessner 1975, 334). If the objective is withdrawal from unbearable eccentricity, then any technical support should not assume the characteristics of what is merely produced by man, but what is discovered, that is, "the right move" (Plessner 1975, 345), allowing man to be in tune with himself and his world, giving way to new innocence. "His existing *beyond* must guarantee the vital immediacy between self and the surrounding field" (Plessner 1975, 350) deep down. The right move is the one in which reality, represented even by the human body, is not "submitted to the subject, conditioned by his own observations, experiences and calculations" (Plessner 1975, 358). It isn't the counterimage of his possibilities, but the compromise – well known to doctors – between personal centre and reality itself.[4] The move is creative and successful when "it manages to

4 Authentic self-realization is based solely on the unity of anticipation and adaptation.

adapt specifically to the objective world" (Plessner 1975, 345). This is also expressed in the law of mediated-immediacy.

Thanks to Plessner's assumption, the doctor traces those limits (to self-exploitation) beyond which the intervention is no longer ameliorative for the person, but becomes instrumental and arbitrary instead. These limits protect what Habermas called the "unreceptive and inviolable" nature of man (Habermas 2002, 23). If the critical phenomenon is the disappearance of the boundary between we are naturally and the organic features we give to ourselves, Plessner helps us understand that there is a limit we should not cross. In summary, we can say that we are the features we give to ourselves, but we give to ourselves the features that are in line with our nature. No intervention should be allowed to undermine the future possibility of an eccentric relationship, which is balanced between being-a-body and having-a-body; in such a relationship, the complexity of the body should not be perceived and health should somehow return in the background. This could be the case for all of preventative gene therapy approaches, and invasive therapies or prostheses. Such an assumption is also in line with the awareness of medical anthropology, which, since Weizsäcker (1986), has been trying to save the relationship between doctor and patient from the subject/object type of model.[5]

The doctor-patient relationship

The fact that medicine has progressively made man the object of technology (*Technisieerung der Menschennatur*) (Habermas 2002, 43) is evidence of an imbalance towards mediacy and artificiality, to the detriment of unity. This has had repercussions on the role of medicine, specifically for the role doctors play.[6] Medical science tends to be undermined and absorbed by processes that make technology autonomous: the procedures employed when applying technique to the practice of medicine make any intervention and personal evaluation, in which the doctor and patient take part entirely, superfluous. Thus, it is technique itself that imposes the conditions to its application, freeing both the doctor and the patient from having to take part. Therefore, in the relationship between doctor and patient, an ontic or positivistic approach prevails, guaranteeing a scientific approach, but at

5 Refer to the four possible ways of interpreting the issue of the patient's welfare covered by Pellegrino and Thomasma 1988.

6 Refer to the need for doctors to reconsider their notion of death in Jonas 1985, 120.

the same time reducing the patient to being merely an "object to be studied" (Jaspers 1991, 16-42). This approach confirms the notion that medical science tries to dominate and regulate nature and its course rather than re-establish health in a patient or restore his balance. Using depersonalizing technological equipment, introducing a single case in the general case history, reducing the individual to a species or just a bureaucratic file, etc., all these practices represent a gradual detachment in the doctor-patient relationship taking place in today's society. Such a detachment conjectures disease as a quantitative alteration, health as *restitutio ad integrum*, the patient as an object of study and the doctor as a cognitive subject. This unbalanced medical practice makes such detachment necessary and even desirable so that any interference deriving from the doctor-patient relationship may be minimized. Weizsäcker regarded such a practice as negative, defining it as "therapeutic nihilism" (Henkelmann 1991, 17-75) in that, such an effect generates a "paternalistic" relationship model in which only the patient's body is treated and the patient obeys, by behaving as is asked of him, putting his own personal unity aside [7]. Reducing the patient to only being-a-body, in turn, brings the doctor's sentient unity to a cognizant and objectifying aspect. The doctor only limits himself to treating the patient's corporeal dimension.

According to this model, Plessner expressed the need for an epistemological change in the doctor's approach to the patient and to life *tout court*. During his youth, he dealt with this issue indirectly in two essays dedicated to Driesch's theory on vitalism.

Sources of medical knowledge

Between 1922 and 1923, Helmuth Plessner and medical doctor Viktor von Weizsäcker exchanged opinions on the pages of the journal *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*. Helmuth Plessner was then 30 years old and a *Privatdozent* (unsalaried university lecturer) at the University of Köln and Viktor von Weizsäcker was head of the Neurology Department at the Heidelberg Medical Clinic. The discussion was based on the debate on vitalism[8] and

7 Cf. Paper of Bernhard Casper, "Anthropologie der dialogischen Verantvortung," at the conference *Neue Medizin und neues Denken. Medizinische Anthropologie im Kontext jüdischer Denktradition*, 23 October 2003, Wittenberg.

8 Both had Hans Driesch as professor. Plessner continued with him and Max Scheler to achieve his degree when he meet Weizsäcker personally; he was his professor at Heidelberg.

included reasoning over the different cognitive meanings of *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. Plessner's categories and language were different from those used in anthropological philosophy. Nevertheless, these two essays have provided useful information that has helped us to better understand how Plessner's ideas have contributed to medical philosophy. In fact, their subject of discussion soon moved towards medical theory and its sources of knowledge. Both aimed at understanding, above all, how vitalism and its subsequent rejection of mechanistic reductionism modified a doctor's aims and work. The fundamental idea expressed in *Vitalism and Medical Thinking* [*Vitalismus und ärztiches Denken*, 1922] and in *On the Knowledge Source of Doctors* [*Über die Erkenntnisquelle der Arztes*, 1923][9] is that the acceptance of several fundamental principles related to vitalism (recovery of the body as a total entity (*Ganzheit*) rather than the sum of its parts; the inability to accept the mechanistic theory according to present knowledge (GS IX, 18); return to the idea of individuality force us to radically change the basics of general pathology (GS IX, 7) and the way doctors relate to their patients.

According to Plessner, a body must be perceived by the doctor as a harmonious whole whose health cannot be restored simply by operating on his cells or on single parts.[10] Every body appears as an *individuum ineffabile* that can be perceived both in a physical and in an expressive dimension. But for this to happen, the doctor must also, as a whole, relate to the living unity before him without reducing it to a mere physical body. Only a whole person can perceive life from its creative (*das Schöpferische*), enigmatic, unpredictable and original aspect, from the way it interacts dynamically with the world.

"A personal life is not given to a conceptual being who is purely logical, or to a perceiving being, who is calculating. Involvement, sympathy for the life of others and understanding of the others' motivations, must already be part of the being so that personal life may seen" (GS IX, 50) and its expressions and symptoms may be identified. This requires the doctor to have certain key qualities. He must acquire information from his senses, but he also needs non-sensorial qualities like:

9 The essay "Vitalismus und ärztliches Denken" (Plessner 1922) received a comeback from Viktor von Weizsäcker, "Über Gesinnungsvitalismus" (1923), to which followed Plessner's rejoinder was "Über die Erkenntnisquelle der Arztes" (Plessner 1923).

10 Hence Plessner's inclination towards the works by Martius, Kretschmer, Koffka, Köhler, and Wertheimer, which were oriented towards establishing man's individuality: these works started out with a combinational explanation to reach a functional explanation.

> sympathy, intellectual and psychological understanding, and intuitive observation. [...] When illness is also affected by the mind, when the person as a whole is involved and the clinical picture shows a steady correlation between physical and psychological symptoms, then diagnosis as well as therapy must be carried out with the help of 'non-scientific observation.' 'Intelligence from the heart,' kindness towards men, tactfulness, sensitivity, strength of character and the quintessence of his charismatic qualities are diagnostic and therapeutic tools and not a never-ending stop-gap in the eternal discrepancy between scientific evaluation and the actual situation (GS IX, 53-54).

Herein lies the fundamental reinstatement of the family doctor, whose role is to find the use of medical science for the specific needs of his patient. In the scientific context, which he is a steady part of, "[he] has his own spiritual centre in the art of knowing and treating people; it is on the strength of his tactfulness and general historic education that his service to man becomes important" (GS IX, 25).

The general practitioner should be able to intuitively understand his patients and treat them as objects of science and a subject of the spirit. This is why both science and intelligence of the heart are required. Thus Plessner believed that the approach to knowing a person could not be purely scientific, and the key to treating the complexity of the human being required the hermeneutic skill of a doctor's whole personality. We can thus state that the doctor's action must take into account the patient's being-a-body (*Körper*) as object of scientific investigation, and his having-a-body (*Leib*), as an incorporated living, sentient and proprioceptive subject.

These priorities are in conflict with what Plessner defined as double antinomy, which creates tension for the doctor, who must relate to his patient in his entirety while his field of labour continues to become extremely specialized. The first antinomy is based on "the immeasurable gap between life and science, standard procedure and theory, intuition and knowledge" (GS IX, 53). This is because science proves to be limited and concepts relate to life as a whole like a tangent to a circumference: it is always touched point by point, but it is never grasped as a whole. The second antinomy is divided into two definitions (GS IX, 53). The real antinomy, however, is the one between the objectifying character of knowledge and receptivity; comprehensive opening (*verstehende Aufgeschlossenheit*), thanks to which a "person," as such, first becomes visible and then easily influenced. Plessner seems to accept Weizsäcker's altered idea (Weizsäcker 1923, 31) that the philosophy of medicine originates in this irreconcilable situation, not from a

philosophical necessity, but rather from the doctor's duty to put the patients' needs first. Medical philosophy would be possible in the intrinsic antinomy that the doctor and patient are subject to, in their relationship.

Plessner did not cover this theme in an explicit way in his subsequent writings, but he did leave us some guidelines concerning the epistemological statute of medical science and the doctor-patient relationship, which I introduced in the first part of this essay. First of all he stressed that medical science should: 1. Reject a summing conception of the human body; 2. Favour collaboration among sciences (GS IX, 50); 3. Keep together laboratory activity and confidence in experimental research, knowing that there is an expressive dimension in life that goes beyond the laboratory; 4. Arouse interest in other methods and ways of operating and intervening therapeutically. For instance, characterology and typology (GS IX, 51)[11] investigate aspects of human beings that cannot be analyzed quantitatively but serve as experience; 5. Carry out research on the individual (Plessner was particularly in favour of the medical studies conducted by Conrad-Martius and Kretschmer.[12]); 6. Rediscover the importance of the general practitioner; 7. Appeal to that "intelligence of the heart," which was not really appreciated by Weizsäcker, to understand the whole phenomenon of that three-dimensional reality (body, corporeality, I) which we call person.

Conclusion

As we have seen, relationships among human beings, even therapeutic ones, must take into account the fact that man cannot be reduced to purely physical parameters. Here too, though with the use of vitalistic categories, it is confirmed that life cannot be enclosed within the limits of a body to be analyzed, but must be lived through constant involvement, decision-making and overcoming of difficulties, within the environment. This implies unpredictability and requires the setting in motion of medical knowledge and the wisdom rooted in a person's sensitivity. A person acts in an eristic manner to protect the complexity that has been defined as the mediate-immediate, natural-artificial way of relating to one's own life, to one's body and to one's world. The individual's constructive, free, utopian, mediate and artificial

11 They study the layers of human personality which are subject to experience, although impossible to analyze quantitatively (Kretschmer). See GS IX, 23.

12 From which emerged that even from the psychiatric point of view something in the individual remains unexplainable.

dimensions of life all contribute to his own development and decline, as they are natural and immediate. Medical doctors in today's society should therefore take into account how much the patient's personality contributes to his illness, and how much he himself contributes to his patient's recovery. This is why Weizsäcker concluded that disease must always also be seen as a biographical event. Through his vitalistic premise and his anthropological theory on eccentricity, Plessner implicitly contributed to the philosophy of medicine and to philosophical anthropology.

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9 The Duty of Personal Identity

Authenticity and Irony

Martino Enrico Boccignone

Personal and collective identity

The central topic of this paper concerns personal identity, understood broadly as the identity of a person through its changes over time. I wish to show that approaching this issue requires a special focus on the relationship between personal and collective identity. I will not, however, deal with the epistemological or psychological issues of personal continuity or the mind-body problem. I also do not intend to develop a systematic theory of the self or of self-consciousness. Instead, my starting point is the simple statement that everyone experiences himself or herself consciously as "someone," as a person, as an "I," no matter how this is defined or understood ontologically. In particular, I will refrain from dealing with the general criticism against identity, advanced by postmodern "difference"-thinkers as a critical trend against modern (especially idealistic) conceptions of identity. The identity I wish to describe is not a totality that swallows and annihilates every difference, but rather a "relative identity," an intersection made up of both identity and difference as its constitutive dimensions. Although I will not go any further into this topic, I would like to stress the fact that this is not an attempt of relaunching an old concept of absolute identity. In fact, postmodern philosophy has concentrated upon difference as opposed to identity, since the latter has been seen as a kind of metaphysical remainder of modernity. It is possible to agree with the need of refusing a static or essentialistic concept of identity, but this does not imply that the idea of personal identity as such has to be refused. As I will try to show, identity can be conceived as an open and dynamic structure where difference is also involved in the form of change and openness to self-correction and re-orientation.

The following reflections intend to apply to the individual human being in general, i.e. to everyone independently from his or her geographic and historical context. Of course I do not want to deny that there are cultural differences in the general understanding of personal identity and in the way it is affected by the social or cultural context. Nevertheless, I presuppose here that it is generally possible to deal with the issue of personal identity without

having to focus on a specific culture. However, the issue comes to have a special interest in the context of contemporary society, in which the general anthropological duty of understanding and shaping one's personal identity is somewhat sharpened. While the emerging phenomenon of globalization opens up individuals to new views and perspectives, it also makes it more difficult to let one's personal identity be shaped by traditional models and paradigms. Despite the weakening of some cultural bounds, it is still possible to react by observing substantial attempts to strengthen particular cultural or religious collective identities. These circumstances create a confusing tension between modernity and tradition, so that individuals feel more strongly about the challenge given by the need of an orientation in their own lives and by the interpretation and design of their own personal identity. Even if there are many conservative and reactionary cultural movements, people become increasingly more aware of the plurality of cultural options and paradigms. Living in multicultural societies, travelling and moving to other countries, contact with people from all over the world enabled by social media; all this makes it difficult, especially for new generations, to simply accept traditionally conveyed ways of life and sets of values. To put it very simply, the more freedom one has from social constraints and traditional religious or cultural influences, the more difficult it can be to find one's way and to understand, define and plan one's personal identity. From this point of view, the present situation represents a challenge, while at the same time enabling unexpected chances of personal self-planning and of self-determination of one's own identity. Reactions to this situation vary. Some might say that the present age is marked by the overcoming of closed cultural identities, while others identify it as the age of the return to strong collective identities. Both views are intertwined and characterize the present historical situation with its internal tensions and contradictions.

From this point of view, it is easy to see how the issue of personal identity is connected with the theme of collective or cultural identity. The problem is most clearly dealt with in the debate about the self between communitarians and liberals in Anglo-American philosophy. Against an oversimplified basic liberal point of view, which would see the individual as a solipsist determining itself independently from social context and historical rooting, communitarians claim that personal identity is tightly linked with collective identity assigned by a group or community: the "sources of the self" (Taylor 1989) are said to be found in the respective tradition and shared values.

Now of course it cannot be denied that each individual is born and bred in a social context which somehow affects their self-perception and view

of life. However, in my opinion it is necessary to point out that the very fundamental constitution of the human being makes it possible to critically distance oneself to some extent, from ones cultural and traditional origins. As a result, I would principally argue in favor of the openness of personal identity.

However, I will not simply accept the methodical solipsism or the unhistorical *tabula rasa* conception of a standard liberal theory of the human being. In order to advance my argument about personal identity, I would like to take the point of view of Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology, as it gives an interesting insight into the constitution of human nature, by taking into account both the embeddedness of the individual in a sociocultural context and the possibility of an emancipation from it.

Plessner's contribution to personal identity

In his writings on social theory, Plessner deals with questions concerning the relation between individual and social context. In his early work from 1924, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* [*Die Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (GS V, 7-133)], Plessner distances himself from any radical notion of "community" by distinguishing between an untouchable sphere of intimacy and a public mask that is required in order to let individuals meet on a common ground of "social" relationships. In his later works on sociology and social philosophy he often comes back to this theme by taking into account new theoretical elements and by deepening the divide between private and public through a theory of social roles. The dimension of the *individuum ineffabile*, i.e. the ineffable individual, is assured then by the distinction between social role and inviolable sphere of personal freedom. This means that individuals should not understand their own personal identity as if it would coincide with their social role: everyone is a "*Doppelgänger*" ("double"), i.e. everyone has both a private and a public dimension.[1] Concerning the relationship between individuals and their social context, Plessner uses the same viewpoint in order to criticize what he calls the "alienation theorem," which is based on the romantic idea that individuals have to be completely integrated in their own community. In this respect, Plessner claims that because of the fundamentally "broken" constitution of the human being, individuals are

1 See the essay from 1960: "Social Role and Human Nature" ["Soziale Rolle und menschliche Natur", (GS X, 227-240)].

more than just their social mask or social role. Here, the double structure is said to be a specific human feature rather than a sign of alienation caused by a particular form of society and its labour conditions.[2] Of course, such a polemic opinion against the Marxist-based social criticism of the Frankfurt School does not allow us to simply understand Plessner as an apologist of the political and social system or as a conservative thinker, though it is clear that he supports a liberal point of view. His approach can seen as a critical theory of society, though not explicitly leftist.[3]

With this in mind, I would now like to focus more closely on Plessner's anthropological work, rather than on his social theories. In his philosophical anthropology, Plessner investigates the definition of the human being in general instead of focusing on the definition of the individual. Therefore I will analyze some of his central notions and will then shift from the general anthropological dimension to the individual level. In Plessner's work, it is possible to find many important concepts and theories which can contribute in a fecund way to the issue, but in the following sections I will focus only on two main aspects, namely the inscrutability of human beings (§ 3) and their natural artificiality (§ 4).

In this regard, it is necessary to mention at least one very important distinction made by Plessner, especially in his later works. However, it is not possible to deal extensively with the distinction between world and environment ("*Welt*" and "*Umwelt*"), openness to the world and environmental attachment ("*Weltoffenheit*" and "*Umweltgebundenheit*"). This theme, which is already anticipated from a different angle in the early works, was developed more explicitly in the 1950s and 60s, where Plessner shows a larger interest for the biological constitution of man. Taking into account the theories of Jakob von Uexküll, Plessner deals with the relation of the human being to its environment and tries to develop an approach that bridges both the environmental bounds and the openness to the objective dimension of the "world."[4] Here it is important to note that Plessner criticizes Erich Rothacker's view, which conceives the different cultures in the same way as the closed and somewhat separated "environments" of the different species

2 See the essays "The Problem of the Public Sphere and the Idea of Alienation," ["Das Problem der Öffentlichkeit und die Idee der Entfremdung" (GS X, 212-226)] from 1960, and ("Self-Alienation, an Anthropological Theorem?" ["Selbstentfremdung, ein anthropologisches Theorem?" (GS X, 285-293)] from 1969.

3 For a "progressive" interpretation of Plessner's philosophy and social theory, see, for example, Dallmayr 1974 and Ehrl 2004.

4 See the section concerning this theme in *The Question of the Conditio Humana* [*Die Frage nach der Conditio humana* (GS VIII, 180-189)] from 1961.

of living beings. Plessner states that "cultures do come in touch with each other and they do not always simply decay, for example, through the contact of a primitive culture with a higher one. There rules also the relation of reciprocal fecundation and enrichment, of the continuity in the exchange of understanding, and this happens by virtue of a [shared, M.B.] human root which asserts itself again and again" (GS VIII, 189).

With regards to the question of personal identity, this means that individuals are not confined in their own cultural environment. On the contrary, they can participate and contribute to the intercultural discourse and mutual understanding. This circumstance constitutes a big chance for the personal development and cultural "enhancement" of every individual. Plessner's late view on the possibility of mutual fertilization between different cultures can be read as a strong and exciting intercultural approach *ante litteram* (see Dejung 2005).

Inscrutability: *Homo absconditus*

In many of his works, especially in the "political anthropology" exposed in his work from 1931, *Power and Human Nature: An Attempt at the Anthropology of the Historical Worldview* [*Macht und menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht* (GS V, 135-234)], Plessner points out that man is necessarily inscrutable (*unergründlich*). By means of reflections about Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of life and history, Plessner explains his principle of "inscrutability," by which human nature is necessarily indefinable: the human being is opaque, it cannot be thoroughly known, it is somehow hidden from itself and has to remain an open question. This very basic principle justifies the conception of man as a power that acts within the open historical process – or better: man is conceived as a power which "opens" history as such and it is therefore essentially a political being (GS V, 185-191). In some of his later works, Plessner refers to the hidden nature of the human being as using an expression, which was originally related to God from the point of view of a negative theology (*Deus absconditus*). In the essay "*Homo absconditus*" from 1969, Plessner states: "The boundlessness of the human being, which we can anchor anyhow in its specific life-structure, entitles one to speak of *Homo absconditus* [...]. Being open to itself and to the world, it is aware of its own concealment" (GS VIII, 357).

Now my point is that this general anthropological thesis also implies the inscrutability and opacity of personal identity on the level of the in-

dividual human being. The task of self-knowledge and self-interpretation, as expressed by the Delphic Motto "Know Thyself," has to face the limits given by the eccentric constitution of man. Human beings cannot see their personal identity isolated from their environment.

It is important to emphasize that, in Plessner's view, the principle of inscrutability does not just constitute a cognitive deficit, as if the "true" identity were just too difficult to grasp for our cognitive faculties, but is principally accessible through a sort of *intellectus archetypus*. Indeed, the inscrutability of both human nature and personal identity are both due to the fundamental structure of the human being, which is never completely fixed. As Plessner argues by examining the relationship humans have with their bodies, the specifically human "positional form" implies a fundamental brokenness as well as a constitutive indetermination.[5] Now these are not merely limiting conditions of human beings, because they also imply their special openness and potentiality when compared to other living beings. On the level of the individual, this means that there is never a given and fixed identity: the construction of personal identity represents a difficult challenge and is a never-ending task. Thus, the Motto "Know Thyself" does not simply represent the theoretical task of exploring one's personal nature, but it also has a practical meaning, as it implies the task of shaping one's individual identity.[6]

Artificiality: *Natürliche Künstlichkeit*

In order to strengthen the link between the theoretical and practical aspects of self-knowledge and self-design respectively, I will focus here on the "fundamental anthropological law" of natural artificiality, as developed by Plessner in his masterpiece, *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928].

5 Here it is neither possible nor necessary to explain in detail Plessner's attempt to a foundation of philosophical anthropology. See the next section for some short remarks about the specific positional form of the human being.

6 In the context of the relation between philosophical anthropology and politics Dallmayr makes some interesting reflections about theory and praxis which can be applied to the present issue as well: "human existence is not simply a fixed or pre-ordained destiny, but embedded in man's ongoing self-interrogation and self-interpretation; as an 'open question' human nature remains in principle inexhaustible. Self-interpretation, however, is not merely a theoretical or speculative but a practical undertaking" (Dallmayr 1974, 57).

By thoroughly analyzing the different "positional forms" of the various living beings, his work highlights human eccentricity as it represents a further development of the structural centrality of other animals. Indeed, in the special case of the human being, the centre of positionality has reached a distance from itself, so that the whole living system has become reflexive (GS IV, 362). At this level, the living being knows about itself and it has become an "I" (GS IV, 363). Now this means that the human being is both "in" its body (as it is the centre of the organism) and "outside" of it (as it is also the subjective perspective which allows the reflection process); it "is" its body and at the same time it "has" its body. It is broken and equivocal, it has a different relation to its own life and to its own body than other animals do; its particular structure can be described as a "fracture." The relation between "being a body" and "having a body" is more precisely examined in Plessner's popular book "*Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941], in which Plessner develops a theory of human expression based on the structural fracture present in the relation of the human being to its body.

Because of this particular complication in the existence of the human being, which experiences itself as an object as well as a subject, its form of life is not just given by nature: it has to be made (GS IV, 383). As Plessner says, "The human being lives only by leading a life" (GS IV, 384).[7] Of course, every form of life is a performance, an execution (*Vollzug*), but the specifically human form of life has to be understood as a special form of realization which has to be "lead" and "done" from the (eccentric) centre of its positionality. Because of this, it always remains an open-ended process: it cannot be the simple development of a preprogrammed core conceived as its nature or quintessence. Moreover, by virtue of their peculiar subjective dimension, humans are also aware of the impossibility of a direct and natural life, such as that of other animals.

Given this form of existence, man is said to be "artificial by nature": "natural artificiality" is the name of the first of the three fundamental anthropological laws formulated by Plessner in the last chapter of *Stages*. The eccentric being lacks balance. It is without place and time, stays on nothing, and is constitutively homeless. Thus, it has to "become something" in order to produce its own equilibrium (GS IV, 385). The law of natural artificiality, i.e. the fundamental need for compensation given by human eccentricity, is the theoretical basis, which allows us to explain the necessity of culture.

7 In German: "Der Mensch lebt nur, indem er ein Leben führt."

The artificial dimension of culture is a kind of "second nature": Plessner says that this artificial ground represents a second 'fatherland,' where man finds its homeland (*Heimat*) and its absolute rootedness (*Verwurzelung*), both of which are not provided by its 'first' nature (GS IV, 391). Here, man is said to be the "apostate of nature," since it must exit the natural condition by creating and setting up a new cultural world (GS IV, 395).[8]

Up to this point, Plessner's analysis indicates that the artificial roots given by the cultural 'second nature' allow the human being to nullify and overcome the void of natural rootedness due to eccentricity. He says, for example: "Artificiality in acting, thinking and dreaming is the inner medium through which the human being as a living natural being stays in harmony with itself" (GS IV, 391). Yet, Plessner points out that this compulsion to perform (*Vollzugszwang*) does not operate within a single stroke. This cannot simply happen once and for all, as if after reaching the balance of a second nature eccentricity were definitively overcome: human beings have to perform recklessly and develop continuously towards new horizons and achievements. In order to reach their (temporary) balance, they will always have to strive for something new, surpassing their own deeds in an eternal process (GS IV, 395). My interpretation here is that man is not only the apostate of nature, but also the apostate of culture. What I mean is not the apostate of culture as such, since humans have to live in an artificial cultural environment, but rather the apostate of every particular culture that was provisorily established in history as a second nature or absolute ground for human existence. Due to their natural artificiality, human beings have to perpetually redesign themselves into new forms within an open and unpredictable historical process.

The openness of the historical situation and its connection with the political dimension of the human being are most extensively dealt with in *Power and Human Nature*. In my opinion, though, the political theory exposed in this work is not satisfactory and it represents a sort of conservative slip in Plessner's thinking, since it strongly links the individual to the collective identity it is meant to belong to, i.e. to a given cultural, political and historical situation. Curiously enough, the very work in which he develops his concept of inscrutability and openness of the human nature ends with the thesis that ties the individual to its nation or *Volk* (GS V, 228-234). Here the openness of the human nature somehow turns out to be the justification of its opposite for what concerns the individual, which is

8 In the essay "Mensch und Tier" ("Man and Animal") from 1946 Plessner uses the effective expression "emigrant of nature" (GS VIII, 64).

closed and confined into the contingent political horizon of its particular nation, seen as a homogeneous cultural unity. In other words, in this work the critical potential of the principle of inscrutability is inverted, meaning the conservative acceptance of the contingent political situation. This is particularly striking because he wrote it in Germany just two years before the takeover of the Nazi Party (NSDAP). For biographical and political reasons, Plessner develops some critical analysis about the political and moral responsibility of philosophical anthropology in his later works and expresses a far more sceptical position towards the contingent political situation. There he does not show any rhetoric of 'power' or 'belonging,' but rather points out the need of protecting human dignity in every single individual from social and political oppression.[9]

Returning to the idea of human openness, I would like to shift from the general anthropological perspective to the level of individual human beings who have to cope with their own lives. In my opinion, the fundamental openness and rootlessness of the human being generally applies to the individuals as well, who have to lead and perform their lives in their own personal way. Just like human nature cannot be rigidly determined once and for all, but individual identity is not a "thing" or static essence either. It is a rather open project, a work in progress and at the same time the most comprehensive and difficult duty of every single human being, since it comprehends habits, beliefs, moral principles, axiological standards, long-term plans and existential goals, as well as single decisions in difficult isolated situations. Also due to the fundamental human openness and rootlessness, the individual identity is neither fixed by nature nor completely determined by its social or cultural context (in other words, by its particular and contingent "second nature"). The law of natural artificiality, i.e. the principle of "performance" and "agency," the reckless need for always achieving new accomplishments, the nomadic compulsion to surpass every balance towards new horizons: all of this also applies to each single personal individuality; even a "conservative" lifestyle based on repetitive actions and on closed and static opinions needs the continuous affirmation and endorsement of some basic behavioral patterns vis-à-vis new situations.

9 See, for example, the essays "Die Aufgabe der Philosophischen Anthropologie" ("The Task of Philosophical Anthropology," GS VIII, 33-51) from 1937 and "Über einige Motive der Philosophischen Anthropologie" ("About Some Motives of Philosophical Anthropology," GS VIII, 117-135) from 1956. For a study of the critical and normative potential of the human inscrutability, see Kämpf 2005.

One may compare personal identity to an inimitable musical performance that was spontaneously composed while playing. Personal identity is a sort of lifelong improvisation, sometimes as a solo, sometimes in a more or less consonant jam session within a social context. It may be possible to determine the key or the tonality and the instruments the piece begins with, but it is not possible to foresee whether it is going to change key, how it develops, if some other instruments and clang colours coming from different cultural landscapes will enrich the sound, if it will often change in tempo or not, if there will be a harmony between the parts or if it is going to be completely experimental with noises and cacophonies, and – finally – when and how it is going to come to an end. Both a highly experimental piece and a rigorous contrapuntal work will require a continuous composition and simultaneous performance. I have deliberately chosen the metaphor of music for three reasons. First of all, the musical world is a perfect example for the mutual influences which have been taking place and which are still taking place nowadays between the different cultures (for what concerns composition rules, expressive forms, instruments, etc.). Secondly, a piece of music, even if composed, must be performed with proper timing and is an artificial process which develops by continuously exploring new ways of combining acoustic sounds. Finally, a piece of music is a continuum made up of all of its parts, even if they cannot be simultaneously present because of its processual character; the preceding parts may influence the following ones, but they do not determine them completely. The coherence of the parts among themselves and the iteration of variations based on a fundamental theme is only one out of many possibilities for the composition of the "whole," which as such is actually never given.

The artificiality of personal identity is opposed to both the naturality of animal instinctive life and the implicitness of cultural views or traditional sets of rules. Here I would especially like to highlight the second opposition, which grants the individual a certain emancipation from the collective identity it supposedly belongs to. In fact, the distance from oneself enables a critical position towards one's cultural background and allows a positive approach to other cultures and even the exploration of new possibilities of personal self-design. This can happen in a solitary way or within a collective movement searching for new social forms of life: the openness of the individual personal identity should not be interpreted as individualistic or anti-communitarian. Here I would like to point out in particular the possibility to link this kind of analysis with the reflections of the intercultural philosophy (Wimmer 2004). Intercultural philosophy aims at a process of reciprocal knowledge, communication and enhancement between the

various cultures in the particular field of philosophy, which of course is much more specific than the general aspect of individual self-interpretation and self-design. Either way, intercultural communication, in contrast with the emphasis on collective identity, can contribute to a broader variety of possibilities for the individual self-design, while at the same time fostering the development of a common ethical basis for human coexistence.[10]

Authenticity and irony

So far I have tried to show how Plessner's theories on human being, especially the fundamental anthropological law of natural artificiality, contribute to the idea of personal identity as an indefinite and essentially open process. While on the one hand individuals who are trying to know or discover themselves, meet a sort of opacity and inscrutability, they also have to design and create themselves through 'performance.' Every single human being has to be conceived as a non-transparent process, an open 'construction area' or an ongoing 'execution' of a piece that is being composed as we go. The indeterminate character of its agency means the possibility of a relative emancipation from both natural and cultural environments and their constraints. From this point of view, natural artificiality is not just a negative divergence or aberration from the naturality of other living beings, but it is also the basis for individual freedom and self-determination. To a certain extent, it is the ground for individual responsibility.

Here I would like to add some short reflections on one's attitude towards one's own personal identity. In particular, I claim that a too naïve romantic conception of authenticity becomes problematic if we try to get to the bottom of its anthropological presuppositions. Indeed, it is impossible to recognize one's 'true' and 'authentic' identity as a static essence: this means that the individual actually does not have any objective reference point which would allow him to determine his own 'real' self. From this point of view, it is not possible to take the decision to be 'faithful' to one's 'authentic' self: this is just a rhetorical expression which can be used to justify certain decisions and behaviors as well as their opposites.

Obviously this is meant to be a critical thesis opposed to the existential pathos of the concept of 'authenticity,' since this concept presupposes the determination of the "most authentic possibility of one's existence" (Heidegger 1927, § 58). Referring to one's true self is as speculative as referring to

10 See, for example, Erpenbeck 1996.

the constitution of one's 'soul,' understood as an essence precisely defined in its particular and individual qualities. Both the decision of affirming one's habits and the opposite decision to change them radically can be justified by adopting one's supposed true identity. In the first case, the individual may think that it has always been faithful to itself and that it has to keep on following the same track, while in the second case the individual may think that it has always misunderstood itself and that it has to change in order to 'return' to its own real being. In both cases, the justification is nothing but speculative and rhetorical, misconceiving the principles of inscrutability and of natural artificiality, by which identity is not a monolithic reality. Rather, identity is always temporary, it is a continuous event which 'is' what it 'becomes.' Personal identity is never finished, it simultaneously 'is' and 'becomes' through a process which always balances in new forms of difference and repetition of sameness.

Concerning 'collective' identity, another notion of authenticity as faithfulness, congruence or belonging to a given tradition or cultural identity is not devoid of problems. Firstly, it is theoretically weak, as it presupposes collective identities intended as well-defined and static entities, as holistic things clearly separated from each other by absolute boundaries, denying the historical process of mutual contamination between cultures and traditions. Secondly, the request for authenticity can often have an ideological ground, as its purpose is the simple reproduction of the given situation. The reference to a given identity prevents the possibility of free decision by individual self-design. On another level, a fixed ideological image of what a collectivity is supposed to be can be used by some elites as a means to prevent or deny the internal development and differentiation of the collectivity itself: the identity-formula sounds like "Don't forget what you are: this is what you are and what you have to be." Of course this way of thinking can be the theoretical basis for different kinds of discrimination, since it makes it possible to identify and possibly reject other individuals as foreign and different. On the other hand, this is a major ideological instrument for conservative political decisions.[11]

11 A particularly striking and embarrassing example of this kind of thinking is given by the decision of Italy's conservative Berlusconi government not to accept the recent ruling of the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) about the presence of the crucifix in Italian public schools (Judgment 819, 3 November 2009). After discussions involving the UAAR (Unione Atei Agnostici Razionalisti), the case arrived at the ECHR, which eventually declared the crucifix in the classrooms in public schools as "contrary to parents' right to educate their children in line with their convictions and to children's right to freedom of religion" (ECHR 2009). The sentence was very negatively commented on by the CEI (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana), by the

I think that the appropriate attitude to one's personal identity is a sober, relaxed and confident irony. It has to be said that the concept of irony has come to have many different meanings during its long history, thus it can sound somehow confusing. At the same time, it should be clear that this is not the romantic concept of irony, but rather a sort of sceptical irony oriented against the pathos of authenticity. Plessner himself, referring to the right attitude to one's philosophical standpoint mentioned in a letter to Josef König on 22 February 1928 that he chooses irony as a non absolutistic approach, as an approach between earnestness and its contrary (Lessing and Mutzenbecher 1994, 179-180; see also Schürmann 1997). In my view, irony means the quiet awareness of the relativity of every determination, an awareness which does not lead to despair but rather to a peaceful balance between acceptance of what is necessary one the one hand, and a practical engagement and openness to what is possible on the other hand. As an attitude towards life, it may be understood as a hybrid of responsibility and serenity, involvement and distance, critical reflection and spontaneity, earnestness and joy of playing, engagement and composure.

The recognition of the indetermination and openness of the self allows one to take a critical distance from oneself as well as from one's tradition of belonging. This irony does not mean at all a loss of earnestness and sense of responsibility, but rather implies a conscious acceptance of one's freedom and of the duty of performing one's very personal and unique life through changing situations and challenges. The ironic self accepts the possibility of even setting itself into the indefinite spaces between cultures and may operate with creativity in order to achieve new forms of cultural synthesis.

As I already mentioned of course, this does not deny the fact that every human being is always set in a determinate situation which gives him a particular starting point. Instead, it means that, beyond the 'fact' given by the context, the individual always has a dimension in progress. I would like to add here that self-interpretation and comprehension of one's cultural origin can be important tools for approaching other people and cultures as well as for creatively shaping new ways of life and new cultural options. In this regard, it is possible to make an example by referring to the musical metaphor I used: a musician who is educated in his or her own musical

conservative Berlusconi government and by many opposition representatives as well. Though the explicit statement of the secularism in the Italian Constitution and though a consistent part of Italian society and public opinion show Italy to be open to be a really laicist country, the political authorities as well as the Vatican representatives repeat again and again that Italy is a Catholic country and that it cannot forget and leave its tradition, roots and identity.

tradition can at best acquire some new competencies in other musical traditions or in other musical instruments, which give him or her a broader spectrum of expressive possibilities. At the same time, instruments and musical forms undergo changes and continuously develop because of their different uses and new receptions.

Ironic self-interpretation and self-design of the individual becomes necessary and possible, especially in the modern globalized world. On the one hand, the process of modernization and globalization causes a sort of loss or weakening of the cultural and traditional bounds in the individuals, who experience a sense of bewildered rootlessness, since an ingenuous cultural self-identification has become more difficult and may collide with the framework of the modern liberal state or more generally with the context given by modern homogenized and functionally organized societies. On the other hand, the broad offer of cultural patterns and paradigms given by pluralistic multicultural societies and by the global intercommunication gives individuals the instruments to develop intercultural competencies which enable a more open self-design. The ironic approach to the self allows one to interpret and comprehend the coexistence of both human aspects, the need for belonging and self-identification due to the sense of rootlessness, and the possibility of a free individual development of one's personhood. Particularly the contact between different cultures provides the basis for a multilateral development and cross-cultural adaptation of individuals, who may open themselves for "intercultural personhood" (Kim 2001; Kim 2008).

Far from being a plea for a form of radical individualism, my reflections intend to give a theoretical justification of a conscious, responsible, and open approach between individuals in contemporary society that is characterized by growing multicultural complexities, religious plurality, huge global migrations, and a widespread sense of cultural uprootedness. The ironic attitude to oneself and to one's origin represents an emancipated form of self-understanding, which is ready for intercultural recognition of diversity, self-correction and possibly self-reorientation. The ironic self can be seen as an equilibrist, always trying to keep a difficult balance between lack of a homeland and cosmopolitanism (*Heimatlosigkeit* and *Weltbürgertum*).

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Part II
Culture

10 Anthropology as a Foundation of Cultural Philosophy

The Connection between Human Nature and Culture by Helmuth Plessner and Ernst Cassirer

Henrike Lerch

Introduction: Philosophical anthropology as a new key

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the phenomena of culture and history became a great challenge in philosophy. The discovery of new cultures and other social structures, as well as the emergence of historism relativized our view on Western culture, kicking it of the podium as *the natural way of being*. The modern natural sciences have branched off quickly as the field that attempts to determine and explain the real world. Going back to the works of Kant was regarded as a possibility for developing a philosophy that could satisfy these requirements. Yet, going back to Kant meant going back to new circumstances. Dilthey expressed this with the phrase "Critique of historical reason," which hints at the need for developing a foundation for historical sciences and humanities as Kant did for the mathematical sciences. But there was more to it. It meant finding a basic principle that holds true for all sciences, i.e. referring to the ascent of historism and cultural sciences, new forms of reason had to be reflected in the critique of reason, and you could not afford to focus only on the most abstract and general, namely the mathematical sciences. One possibility was to return to the point before reflective structures, to find the origin of the different forms of science – humanity and mathematics.

In this new scientific vantage point, the human being is faced with new difficulties, which caused problematic moments for him. On the one hand, it became obvious that man could not be reduced to the pure forms of reason, since there were other cultural forms in the world and human concepts were recognized to be relative compared to others in history. On the other hand, the integration of man into natural history received new attention. The Aristotelian question was reformulated: After Darwin, it was no longer interesting to ask how something could exist without being animated by God. Rather, one became more interested in asking how a natural thing, an organism, could even have a soul (Kather 2003, 69). For this, two strategies

were introduced, the naturalistic and the culturalistic one. Naturalists have seen the human being only as a product of nature and tried to explain, for example, the functioning of the brain via chemical processes, in order to locate the mind within it. In contrast, many cultural and philosophical arguments have reduced human nature to reason and skills based on reason or mind. But the situation required a concept of the human being that did not reduce him to only one skill or perspective, while it also enabled this concept to be at the centre of reference in a new philosophy.

Ernst Cassirer, as well as Helmuth Plessner, published mainly in the "Golden 20s"; a decade referring to German philosophy in which a variety of central works were published in order to find an answer to this situation: Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921), Georg Lukác's *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and of course Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923-1929) and Helmuth Plessner's *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928). There is a reason why this chapter focuses only on the last two authors, Plessner and Cassirer. Both can be read as taking the effort to postulate a new formulation of philosophy under the aspect of culture and cultural science. Moreover, these philosophies are integrative. Both offer a concept for the different forms of science in the 'comprehension of expression' (*Ausdrucksverstehen*), and both develop a new concept of what it is to be a human being. Plessner and Cassirer have been extensively discussed in the last 20 years because of their concepts, which have opened new possibilities for contemporary philosophy (Orth 1996).

Although Plessner and Cassirer come up with a similar idea, they deal with it in different ways. Cassirer develops a critique of *culture* which replaces Kant's critique of *reason*. Comprehending the world, no matter how, is based on parity. Nevertheless, analyzing forms such as myth, language or science, in his main work *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Cassirer specifies symbolizing as their common mental capacity. This capacity amounts to the difference between humans and animals: the human being is an animal symbolicum. In short, Cassirer develops a philosophical anthropology which is both a culmination *and* a foundation of his cultural philosophy. In contrast, Plessner's argument takes this stance as its point of departure. In his main work *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928], he outlines a philosophical program in three steps. In order to establish the humanities (cultural science) as hermeneutics, we need a philosophical anthropology. But for all that, we need to evaluate a philosophy of living beings in general, which can be called a natural philosophy. Furthermore, this

natural philosophy is exactly the part that makes the difference between Plessner and Cassirer. Plessner clarifies his point by criticizing Cassirer for being someone who knows that human beings have bodies, without making philosophical use of this knowledge (cf. GS VIII, 242). Plessner regards the positionality of the embodied individual, together with its capacity of eccentric positionality, as the basis of the cultural aspect of human life. This natural artificiality, as Plessner describes culture, is also spelled out in Cassirer's work.

In this chapter, I will compare and contrast Plessner's and Cassirer's accounts by characterizing the concept of the human being and the role of this concept as a foundation of cultural philosophy. To explain the differences of these concepts, I will compare their comprehension of *expression*, the point where nature and culture overlap with one another. All in all, one has to conclude that each of them is approaching this point from a different angle, yet in some sense towards a common direction. We need to consider both in order to fully understand culture.

The foundation of humanities and the concept of expression

Dilthey's approach

Dilthey's famous thesis of the distinction between natural sciences and the humanities is based on the idea that one should distinguish sciences that have nature as their subject from sciences that study the social and historical reality. Connected with this distinction is Dilthey's idea that natural sciences and humanities have a distinct methodology: explaining versus understanding. In Dilthey's view all sciences, not only humanities, have their foundation in life. Dilthey wanted to supplement Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* by developing a *Critique of Historical Reason* [*Kritik der historischen Vernunft*]. Dilthey wanted to apply the transcendental method, which Kant used in his foundation of the natural sciences, in the foundation of the humanities. The critique of historical reason ought to give humanities an epistemological foundation and should remove the human being from the natural context in order to place him into the context of history and culture. A reason for that can be found in Dilthey's critical epistemology, in which the transcendental structure no longer, as in the case of Kant's philosophy, is considered to be timeless and invariant, but becomes a historical a priori. Moreover, Dilthey does not restrict his analysis, as Kant does, to the knowing subject, but he focuses on the human being as a whole:

> No real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought. A historical as well as psychological approach to whole human beings led me to explain even knowledge and its concepts [...] in terms of the manifold powers of a being that wills, feels, and thinks; and I do this despite the fact that knowledge seems to be woven of concepts derived from the mere contents of perception, representation, and thought (Dilthey 1989, 50).

The philosophy of life assumes a foundational role in this argument, because it uses the concept of life as opposed to reason. Ultimately, it is the concept of life rather than the concept of reason that is the starting point of the foundation. Life means a full reality, which is given in a common and evident form. This reality cannot be explained by natural science, but is given in everyday experience. In fact, it is a pre-scientific concept, which can be immediately experienced and understood but not explained. If understood, it can play the role of the foundation of human sciences. However, as Dilthey is preoccupied with the foundation of humanities, he refers to life as being spiritual (*geistiges Leben*). His concept of life is a terminological centre of reference in form of an entity with all kinds of interaction between the inner and outer sphere. Only if a body is in proportion to the interaction with its surroundings in the structure, so that motion follows impression, thinking becomes possible (cf. Dilthey 1982, 345f.). Insofar as this pre-theoretical concept of life already has categories, Dilthey argues, the formal Kantian categories are based on these categories of life (Dilthey 2002, 248ff.; Dilthey 1982, 334ff.).

Life, as the opposite of reason, is an irrational given in the sense that life cannot completely be explained by concepts of theoretical reason alone. Dilthey, instead, demonstrates the fundamental role of life by referring to the possibility of understanding. At this point, he formulates his theory of hermeneutics, which is based on the triad of lived experience (*Erlebnis*), expression (*Ausdruck*) and understanding (*Verstehen*). By applying this triad, he argues that life functions as the foundation of humanities as well as of thinking in general. He often uses the phrase "Life comprehends Life." But life could not understand life just by itself. Understanding needs a detour. Life has to express itself, and these expressions must then be understood. The nexus of life (*Lebenszusammenhang*), i.e. the interaction of surroundings, men and work, is the basis of understanding. Individuals are interactive temporal entities, each differently connected to their surroundings. The specifics of this interaction is depicted by Dilthey as

lived experience (*Erlebnis*), characterized by an impulse and resistance, pressure and release (Dilthey 2002, 248). Although lived experience has an immediate character, in order to fully understand it, we have to relate it to the whole historical nexus of life.

Meaning can be found in every expression of life. Examples of such manifestations or objectifications of life are linguistic expressions, human action, and institutions, such as law. They have to be understood in relation to the totality of the nexus they are part of. Together these expressions form a common world, in which human beings can understand the life of others and of themselves. Here human life can comprehend spiritual life (*geistiges Leben*). But despite all that, the nexus of life as a whole remains utterly incomprehensive; it cannot be explained by reason because it cannot be completely thought of in concepts. Ultimately, life remains the pre-reflective foundation of thinking. Moreover, the plurality of relations and experience are inherent to the concept of life, which can never be entirely resolved.

Plessner and the phenomenon of expression

In *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des organischen Lebens und der Mensch*, 1928], Plessner explicitly adheres to Dilthey's argument in that the function of philosophy consists of making the process of understanding comprehensible (cf. GS IV, 59). He follows the hermeneutical approach by saying that history and cultural science comprehend human life by the expressions of life. Philosophical hermeneutics have to systematically answer how it is possible for living creates to understand their own existence through the medium of history. Just like Dilthey, Plessner continues Kant's transcendental project. However, whereas Kant only asks for the conditions of the possibility of mathematical science, Plessner, inspired by Dilthey, asks for the conditions of the possibility of understanding and interpretability (*Deutbarkeit*), and he also starts from the presupposition that we can only understand life via its expressions. He claims that the investigation of the "structure of expression" (*Strukturgesetze des Ausdrucks*) and the "science of expression" (*Wissenschaft vom Ausdruck*) is the basic task of philosophical hermeneutics (GS IV, 60; Pietrowicz 1992, 229f.).

Yet, for Plessner, the theory of expression is a part of philosophical anthropology, because questions of the natural structure of expression are part of philosophical anthropology equally as much as they are questions about the importance of the body for the expression (GS IV, 61). The most important question for Plessner's philosophical anthropology concerns how we can think of a human being as one point of experience, where nature and

mind are intertwined (GS IV, 62). The phenomenon of expression, especially that of mimic expression, is a phenomenon which excels at demonstrating this intertwinement (*Verschränkung*) of body and mind. Thus, Plessner's interest lies even less in the expressive objectifications of cultural forms than in the *embodied expressions of mental states*.

Plessner analyzes the phenomenon of expression primarily by investigating the understanding and perception of movement. His main claim is that living beings cannot be understood by their kinematics, but only by their behavior. If we understand movement as behavior, we have an interpretation of movement. Living beings exist as a wholeness (*Ganzheit*), which means that the living body (*Leib*) interacts with its environment (cf. GS IV, 149-163, 176; GS VII, 75-82). Plessner demonstrates that there cannot be any perception without an immediately given sense (GS VII, 85). Of course this sense could err at times, because it always remains a kind of interpretation. But Plessner does not give any kind of explanation as to how this interpretation depends on the context or on other forms of perception. In contrast, Cassirer gives some explanations in this respect, as we will see below.

In addition to this demonstration of the understanding of an immediately given sense Plessner analyses the intertwinement of body and mind in the phenomenon of expression (GS IV, 64; GS VII, 215, 235; GS VIII, 209). Dilthey's hermeneutical concept of understanding is extended to the sphere of organic behavior, insofar as perception of bodies is only possible with interpretation and understanding of sense. Alternatively, the sense or intention of an expression is given in an image, and there is only one way to ascertain the intention of it. It is not the organic body (*Körper*), but rather the living body (*Leib*) that is perceived. Therefore, in the movement of the living body, sense manifests. This is not a perception of a body, which is controlled by the mind or something else. It is an indifferent psychophysical entity. Evidently, facial expressions constitute a kind of expression of an inner mental state, but Plessner transcends this traditional idea when he focuses on the relation between the living body, the environment and behavior. The inner, mental sphere and the external world are primarily connected in the phenomenon of expression and the understanding of expression. The division into different spheres is based on this primordial unity. Plessner's concludes the phenomenon of facial expression to be an entity in the form of a neutral psychophysical (*Psycho-physisch neutrale Indifferenz*) and figural-sensual indifference (*bildlich-sinnliche Indifferenz*). He uses this example to demonstrate the indifference and to clarify that the human being is a living being. In the end, he adds that the mental sphere cannot be expressed without the organic sphere (GS VII, 83f.).

Cassirer's foundation of his philosophy of symbolic forms

At the beginning of the first volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer formulates his problem in a way that reminds us of Dilthey, but without mentioning him. He wants to transform the *Critique of Reason* to a *Critique of Culture* by incorporating every form of understanding the world, instead of reducing the critical approach to the highest form of knowledge, i.e. the form of mathematical sciences (Cassirer 1968, 80). Furthermore, he doesn't ask for the conditions of the possibility of meaning (*Bedeutung*) in a dualistic way like Plessner does when he confronts the mathematical type of explanation with historical and cultural understanding (Graeser 1994, 28). Instead, Cassirer emphasizes the plurality of *symbolic forms*, as it is his goal to provide a basis for the factum of cultural sciences. Nevertheless, there are some aspects, which suggest commonalities among Cassirer's and Plessner's ideas. Cassirer describes his work as a "general theory of cultural forms" (Cassirer 1968, 69; the German original uses the term "*generelle Theorie der Ausdrucksformen*" (literally: "general theory of the forms of expression," Cassirer 2001, vii), in which he talks about the symbolic forms of "objectivization" (*Objektivierung*) just like Plessner when utilizing Dilthey's term "objectification" (*Objektivationen*) (Cassirer 1968, 78).

Cassirer uses the term *expression* in two different ways. First, expression is the objectification of a mental content, so that it can be bound up with the body, just as we have seen it being used in Plessner's theory of facial expression, or manifested in symbolic forms, like language, art etc. Second, Cassirer uses the term expression as being one of the three functions of consciousness: *Expression*, *representation* (*Darstellung*) and *significance* (*Bedeutung*), which provide the structural framework of our perception (Schwemmer 1997, 71ff.; Möckel 2005; 192ff.; Meuter 2006, 148ff.).

Beginning with the symbolic form of language in his first volume, Cassirer describes the simple facial expression (*einfacher mimische Ausdruck*). This facial expression, as we know it from examples like anger or fury, shows an immediate external expression of an inner state, indicating that our inner state and external expression are interlaced. In this case, it seems that there is a distinct boundary between expression and the corresponding mental state. It also seems that we have the same distinct emotional expression as animals. Cassirer criticizes this clear-cut connection and the natural interpretation of these first and simplest expressive forms. He thinks that the human being is a product of nature. Human expression, unlike facial reactions in animals, is rather an answer and yet, the simplest expressive

forms are infused by mental articulation. This difference is most evident in forms of articulation like language, art or myth etc.

In his third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer describes his method in the following way. He wants to experience the area of symbolic forms in order to get to the sphere of subjectivity by a deductive and reconstructive examination (Cassirer 1963, 67). The symbolic forms can be seen as mental expressions. They are defined as the primary phenomena of the spirit and can be shown, but they cannot be ascribed to anything (Cassirer 1958, 11). Thus, mental expressions are final entities with their own standards in every form. Their epistemological status is not based on metaphysical speculation, but on their phenomenological perception and can be found in the world, and they are subject to historical, cultural and social changes. "This forms are endlessly divergent and, yet, they are not without unified structure" (Cassirer 1960, 144). Additionally, symbolic forms are meaningful final entities, because they are specified as energies of the spirit, where every meaning is tied to a concrete sensual sign and inheres this sign (Cassirer 2004a, 79).

Seeing mental expressions in symbolic forms enables Cassirer to point out our mental efforts. The three principle forms – myth, language and science – correspond to our three mental capacities – expression, representation and significance (Neumann 1973, 136). Though Cassirer shows in his phenomenology of the single forms that every form has its own movement and follows the steps of expression, representation and significance, in the end, we have to think of these three mental capacities as a plan of orientation, in which every symbolic form can be placed. These symbolic forms are not set at one point only, but rather have a distinct position in every historical phase to each of the three poles of expression, representation and significance (Cassirer 2004b, 262). On top of that, every form has an ideal relation to these three capacities. Myth, language and pure science are characterized as symbolic forms by their demonstration of one specific mental capacity. In each of them, the other capacities are almost repressed, so that there is talk of the ideal symbolic form of expression in myth, the ideal form of representation in language and the ideal form of significance in pure science. Other forms, like art, are hybrid forms, which cannot be reduced to one single mental capacity. Regarding art, expression and representation are mixed with one another (Cassirer 2004b, 267).

In order to examine the relation between a symbolic form and its corresponding mental capacity, we first have to look at the relation between myth and expression. Myth is the generic reason giving rise to all other symbolic forms. In myth, things have an expressive character. They do not display the structure of an object-like thing (*Dingstruktur*). Therefore, perception

is formed by expression and the world is conceived as fluid, indifferent and emotional; things do not have a fixed character and there is a lack of concrete entities. Every expressive experience has an immediate meaning, which changes permanently and is not structured like things and properties (*Dinge und Eigenschaften*). It is a perception that is conceived prior to the dualistic division of body and mind. In order to get to know anything about this form of perception, which is unusual for us given that we live in a science dominated world, we have two possibilities: a subjective and an objective method. The subjective method consists in analysing psychiatric studies about the children's development; the objective method analyses the objective form myth.

The mythical world and the expressive character are only primary phenomena. Certainly, its function is just as important as the function of other forms, but we have to ask ourselves how a world with fixed characters – our own scientific world does not have the characteristics of a mythical one – can be developed in a world with a fluid and varying character. Cassirer finds his solution in language, inasmuch as language has the capacity of representation and fixing things. While one can describe the expressive characters of myth, the other cannot think of myth without a structure of representation and significance. In the end, we have to think of these mental capacities as being adhesive to each other, but entailed in symbolic forms, in which one capacity is much stronger than the others. Cassirer expresses this thought by using the term symbolic pregnance (*symbolische Prägnanz*). He defines symbolic pregnance as a form of perception, where a sensual experience has an intuitive meaning (*anschaulicher Sinn*) and brings it to an immediate and concrete significance. As a consequence, we always see everything as depending on the context. To illustrate this, Cassirer frequently mentions the example of a line, which is seen as a curve by a mathematician, as a periodic vibration by a physicist, and as an artistic ornament by painters. By understanding the expressive capacity, it is possible to understand the immediacy of this kind of understanding. But to understand context-dependency, we must regard the interaction of this capacity with representation and significance. Only then, we gain a bottom-up theory of symbolization, with which we can go on to define the difference between a human being and other animals.

Cultural-philosophical and natural-philosophical anthropology

The difference between man and animal is one of the most important themes in philosophical anthropology. When Cassirer discusses the phenomenon of

expression, he still finds a point where it seems that the boundaries between the human being and an animal are obliterated. But at the point where he exhibits the difference between man and animal, he is only interested in the difference and not in the animal basis of human beings. According to him, cultural philosophy represents the only way of demonstrating this special *conditio humana*, because here, the human being can be shown as an active and free constructor who perceives the world. In contrast, Plessner does not have any problems with a biological or organic foundation of the human being when he comes up with the phenomenon of expression. He emphasizes that we share the immediate understanding of sense in expressions with animals, even if we do not know anything about the sense an animal might have or might understand, even though we can carry out experiments showing that this immediate understanding of sense is given to animals, too. That is why I call Plessner's approach a *natural-philosophical anthropology* and Cassirer's approach a *cultural-philosophical anthropology*. Certainly, Plessner's anthropology also has a cultural-historical dimension, and we would be neglecting half of his theory if we just focused on the natural aspect. To get the whole dimension of the anthropological approach, it is relevant to clarify what is meant by natural *philosophy*. In order to emphasize the difference between Plessner's and Cassirier's concepts, the words "natural" and "cultural" seem most suitable to me.

Cassirer's cultural-philosophical anthropology

Philosophical anthropology obtains an increasingly more fundamental role in Cassirer's methodical approach. Philosophical anthropology was quite popular in the period Cassirer wrote his book and it became one of his goals to show the relation of his own cultural philosophy to philosophical anthropology. Philosophical anthropology provides the opportunity to reflect the symbolic forms (Hartung 2006, 239ff.). The human being becomes a vanishing figure, because he is the last entity of a pluralistic world, of a world of varieties of forms. Moreover, by designating the human being as this last instance, Cassirer sets the vanishing point in the secular and not in a metaphysical sphere. While getting an insight into the basic framework (*Grundstruktur*) of the different activities of the construction of reality and understanding them as an organic whole, he formulates the task of a philosophy of the human being in *An Essay on Man* (Cassirer 1944, 68). In the manuscripts for the unpublished fourth volume of the Philosophy of symbolic forms, Cassirer deals with the subject of philosophical anthropology as a severe contemporary philosophy. He basically focuses on Max Scheler's

work *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, but also mentions Plessner and writes with reference to him that the only way to find the essence of the human being is his own *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer 1995, 36). From thereafter, he finds a correlation between the results of Plessner's critically founded natural philosophy and his own cultural philosophy, even though they came to these results in a different way (Cassirer 1995, 60).

According to Cassirer, cultural philosophy is the only possible way for a philosophical anthropology, as the *conditio humana* presents the difference to an animal life and cannot be annulled. The mental or spiritual world is categorically distinct from the organic one, so human symbolizing breaks the stimulus-reaction behavior of animals whereby the human being is excluded from the group of organic beings. Cassirer's thesis that the human being becomes a human being by creating culture and using symbols looms large. In addition, philosophical anthropology has to explain the use of symbols and how it transforms the unmediated world of animals into a mediated world of human beings. His *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* explains exactly this web of symbols, which is a step in between the web of perception and the web of effects. This web of symbols, analyzed by the philosophy of symbolic forms, is characteristic of the human being (Meuter 2006, 138f.). Philosophical anthropology has to point out the function of the human being as an entity; it has to show the universal dimension of the human being in the plurality of symbolic forms (Cassirer 1960, 144; Meuter 2006, 140). Compendious, Cassirer states symbolizing as the universal anthropological activity; in this sense, the human being is an "*animal symbolicum*" (Cassirer 1944, 26).

Thus, philosophical anthropology has a double function for Cassirer. On the one hand, his cultural philosophy culminates in questions of anthropology, as there are questions about the difference between human beings and animals; and the big question, namely how we can describe the human being as a principle, as an organic whole. On the other hand, Cassirer's cultural philosophy can be seen as a method to find out the structure of every symbolic form and to compare the particular ones at the end. Engaging in philosophical anthropology in this way, however, means one remains faithful to the cultural side. Furthermore, it means seeing the difference between human beings and other animals in cultural functions; and by seeing the difference it is not necessary for Cassirer to look at the animal or biological side of human beings.

Plessner's naturalistic foundation of philosophical anthropology

Referring to Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Plessner wrote in 1963: "Cassirer knows that the human being is a living being, but he makes

no philosophical use of it" (GS VIII, 143). He criticizes Cassirer's reduction of the functional signification (*Funktionssinn*) of the symbolic forms. Plessner misses the subject of action and form building. His philosophical anthropology is about the nature of the acting and symbolizing being, which is insinuated by the use of the proposition that the human being is a living being. His purpose is to explain human nature without the need for any naturalistic argument. The fact that the human being is a living being implies a double intertwinement of the natural and mental world (GS IV, 58). In this context, Cassirer's cultural philosophy and anthropology represent a reduction of the human being to his mental capacities. Plessner's intention is to comprehend human existence in the aspect of experience (*Erfahrungsstelle*), which entails 'nature' and 'spirit.'

In *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, Plessner claims that a philosophy of nature, which is to be understood as hermeneutics of nature, offers a means to the end of making philosophical use of the fact that the human being is a living being. The pivotal question of this philosophy of nature is "What does being alive mean?" It seems that Plessner wants to place the cultural-mental sphere into an organic-natural sphere. Yet, at the beginning, hermeneutics of nature does not provide an explanation, which could be given by natural science but rather with an ordinary understanding of nature. In *Levels*, Plessner commences with the phenomenology of ordinary experience of double aspectivity (*Doppelaspektivität*), which means that things are seen as spatial things and likewise as things with a nuclear essence (*kernhafte Mitte*). The appearance in space and the external side of objects, cannot be developed from the inner essence. Conversely, their physicality cannot be deduced from the mental interior. Referring to the expression of double aspectivity, Plessner shows that dualism can't be modified, neither by monism, nor by assuming a dialectic process. This expression also shows that dualism, or one of these two sides, as experiences show, should not be hypostatized. Every object appears *by the means* of the double aspectivity (*Körper erscheinen kraft des Doppelaspekts*), but living beings appear *within* the double aspectivity (*Lebendiges erscheint im Doppelaspekt*) (GS IV, 137f.; Beaufort 2000, 93).

This difference is explained by the special relation each thing has to its own boundary. 'Boundary' is defined, in contrast to contour, as a barrier, which separates the interior from the exterior and vice versa. The boundary itself is part of the living thing and not only an intermediate between two things, because the boundary is also the link between interior and exterior; it is located, where the interior is expressed in the world. The living thing is not only bounded. It also has a connection to the world as well as an

interaction with it. In this context, a living being is transcendent beyond itself. Moreover, an organism that is positioned in space and, which has an independent relation to its surroundings (*Umwelt*) is given by the boundary. Furthermore, Plessner uses the term positionality for the circumstance that living things are placed by their boundary, have a relation to their surroundings and while also being limited by them. Things with a positional character do not only *have* a boundary; to some extent, the boundary has to be realized. The essential a priori feature (*apriorisches Wesensmerkmal*), which Plessner calls positionality, can be shown in demonstrative forms of motion and movement (GS IV, 157ff.; Beaufort 2000, 48f.).

Plessner shows three formal possibilities of relating to positionality, which together explain the characteristic differences among plants, animals and humans. First, there is a set of things that have positionality without having any relation to itself; these are plants. They have a relation to their environment, but they do not place themselves in this environment. They are dependent on their environment. In contrast, animals do possess a relation to their positionality. They live self-contained in their environment, which can be seen by their movement in space. Animals are ordered towards their centre (*Mitte*), centrically organized and thus have the form of centric positionality. Human beings, like animals, also have a relation to their positionality, but in addition, they are aware of their positionality.

The human being lives like an animal in and beyond his boundary, although he experiences this experience. It does not only have a boundary as a limitation and distance to its environment. The human being is also aware of the boundary as a difference of interior and exterior and as a bridge to transport inner to outer and vice versa. Having this knowledge, the human being does not only have a representation of his body (*Körper*) in form of a living body (*Leib*), but he can also focus on the body as a body and see the difference between a body and a living body. This new element of reflection makes the centric positionality of animals an eccentric positionality for humans. The human being does not focus on the centre, because he has the view of an outsider. His exterior view toward the centre is a view, which is not in the centre anymore, but it is a different approach from the centre by the human being himself. The two aspects, body and living body, (*Körper* and *Leib*), which go together in a centric form or positionality, are diverged by the awareness of such difference.

Because of the exterior view to oneself, the concepts of interior and exterior change completely. The human being does not live in just an environment; he lives in a world, whereby living in a world means having a grasp of things, not only of aspects and the immediacy and directness of

experience becomes mediated perception. The human being has to form things and himself, because the immediacy of the relation between animals and their world is lost. Culture and history are forms, which should take root in this unstable condition. Thence, the understanding of him and the world results from history. These forms and objectifications in culture are creations, which can be seen as reactions to the loss of immediacy and directness and are a mode of handling a bizarre situation. Because of the eccentric position, the human being is placed in nothing (GS IV, 365). Where should a human being get his appropriateness from, when he cannot even find the centre point, which he is himself, due to the double aspectivity he has, when the world is open and indeterminate to him? The world he constructs in culture and history is a world of mediated immediateness (*vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit*), where the immediate nature is a mediate culture. Beside the external and internal world, the human being lives in a shared world (*Mitwelt*), a social world, which he forms with others and where he and others regard him as a person.

Conclusion

The human being is seen as distinct to animals; both authors refer to Kleist's *Marionette Theatre*, to illustrate the consequences of being a human being. After Kleist's marionette has discovered that he is a marionette, he cannot remain the same anymore. The same applies to the human being. A human being can no longer live in an immediate world as soon as his world is symbolically mediated, i.e. as soon as he has learned about his own positionality. In return, Cassirer focuses only on the cultural side. After a break of the immediacy of organic-nature, cultural forming is regarded as what makes the difference and thus becomes the subject of examination. Cassirer sees nature as mediated by symbolic forms, so that coming up with organic nature, cannot be an option for him. He works out a formal determination of the human being without any reference to biological structures and gains the general rule of symbol building from the fact of culture. In contrast, Plessner crosses nature and culture in a human being and, with the idea of double aspectivity, obtains a concept, which embraces the ambiguity of a human being as an entity composed of physical body (*Körper*), lived body (*Leib*) and spirit (*Geist*). He features the possibility of reflexivity in a concept of the living and thus locates the break with immediacy in the concept of life without deriving it from biology (i.e. without naturalistic argumentation). He can explain the special mental and spiritual state in

a formal stage of life, so that he gives culture a foundation, although he only has an undifferentiated view of the cultural phenomena and their differentiated functions. In this case, it is Cassirer who announces the different functions of culture. Of course, Plessner has an historical-cultural argumentation, too, but Cassirer shows how we can find a framework of the human being by analyzing culture. In contrast to Plessner, Cassirer fails to see man as a living being. All in all, Plessner and Cassirer use different ways to formulate answers to the same question, namely what it means to be a human being, without having to reduce it to purely culturalistic or naturalistic arguments.

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11 Bi-Directional Boundaries

Eccentric Life and Its Environments

Robert Mugerauer

Organism-environment dynamics

Current research and reassessments of natural and social phenomena using complexity theory, self-organization, phenomenology, enactivist approaches to cognition, and developmental systems theory are making advances beyond dualisms and reductive neo-Darwinism by developing "a middle way" to understand the co-generative dynamics between organisms and environment (Lewontin 1995). There is direct continuity between Plessner's ideas and many of these contemporary interpretations of organism-environment relationships at the level of life itself, and in cultural manifestations such as architecture. Indeed, much of this work was pioneered by Plessner, who did not shy away from the big question of "what it means to be alive" (Grene 1968, 65). Our understanding today can be deepened by recovering and applying his theory of organic modals, which deals with the characteristics or qualities of life, especially his insights in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928] concerning eccentric positionality (which replaces old dualisms with a dynamic view of the sustained tensions of human existence) (GS IV).

We take for granted not only that our environments influence us, but that we shape – or even create – our environments. But taking common ideas for granted does not mean we understand what they mean, especially with regards to their underlying assumptions and implications. To investigate organism ↔ environment dynamics, tracing the continuity from organisms to humans in order to better understand what is shared as well as our distinct characteristics, there are many phenomena well worth considering, amongst others: plasticity, porosity, developmental processes, self-regulation, niche selection and construction, the co-constitution and co-evolution of organisms and their environments (Grene 1968, 9, 33). Here, I focus on one such phenomenal motif, namely boundaries.

Boundaries are certainly important across the entire range of organic and human domains, as is apparent from analogies commonly used by the natural and human sciences as well as by built environment disciplines and professions:

membrane:: skin:: wall
cell:: body:: house or city

Taken at face value, these analogies are at best misleading, and at worst straight out dangerous. Thus, it is essential to examine each pair as well as the entire set if we are to better understand life. As a general, but not insistent tactic, I first review the findings of current scientific and phenomenological theory and research. I then include the formulation of the situation by Maturana and Varela, because they are exceptionally clear and among the most fruitful heirs to Plessner and Merleau-Ponty (and other philosophical anthropologists). Finally, I bring forward Plessner's Promethean ideas, both to document the lineage and to further illuminate the subject matter as it stands today. The result demonstrates that, to an astonishing extent, the views of contemporary scientists (unaware of Plessner's ideas) as well as more informed phenomenologists (such as Maturana and Varela) coincide with the main outlook of Plessner.

Boundaries: Membrane and cell

First of all, membranes generated from hydrophobic lipids allow the basic differentiation of material from the bio-chemical environment and the collection of chemicals and fluids that can develop in a unique manner, establishing the fundamental energy transfers that constitute an organism's metabolism (Morowitz 1992). Here, with the beginning of life as unicellular organisms, we find the emergence of a unity that has an identity – the cell; but, crucially, this identity is formed insofar as there is both a selectively permeable membrane (boundary) and porosity (allowing a dynamic exchange with the surrounding milieu) (Niehoff 2005).

> The plasma membranes of a cell designate the outer boundary of the system and distinguish between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the system. [This is] a property of compartmentalization that allows a concentration of chemicals (inside) for biochemical reactions. […] Once a space has been enclosed, then communication across the boundary becomes essential, both for transportation of nutrients and wastes and for cellular responses to the external environment. [As selectively permeable, membranes have a] more complex function than just establishing boundaries (for example, in trans-membrane transport and signalling) (Morowitz 1992, Yeagle 1992).

Some of the more complex transfers across boundaries include the following:
- Bacteria trade genes in a casual and quick manner (a mode of gene acquisition): strands of DNA may be traded in plasmids or as viruses. In some bacteria a cell bridge forms between the one donating its genes and the other one receiving them (Margulis and Sagan 1995, 93-96).
- Cells merge into composite beings: in endosymbiosis one being lives inside another; here organic beings merge and produce new individuals (Margulis and Sagan 1995, 120-121).
- Cells grow: "How the state of one region [in time and space] depends on the state of neighboring regions define[s] a field, the behavior of a dynamic system that is extended in space. Here, the cytoplasm can be regarded as an elastic skin, kept under tension (stretched) by the osmotic pressure pushing on the cell wall, against which the cytoplasm is closely apposed. [...] This process is like a traveling wave that rises and falls with an irregular periodicity. [...] [T]his is called a moving boundary [phenomenon], described by a category of field equations in which the boundary of the field moves as the result of patterned growth, as in a growing crystal, or, in our case, a growing cell" (Doyle 1997, 96, 104).

In the nowadays referred to as 'classic' characterization by Maturana and Varela (1980) and colleagues, life occurs "where the biochemical closure of membrane constitution and metabolic repair make the cell a viable self-distinguishing autopoietic unit," with "the ability for self-organization and self-maintenance (e.g. metabolism) and the generation of relationships with neighboring elements" (Varela and Bourgine 1992, 170-171).

> The basic life processes [...] are the result of an organized complex system of molecular interactions that occur within and also produce the system's physical boundary structure. [Thus autopoiesis] is the organizational pattern of life processes, including the notion of dynamic compartmentalization – that is, that an inside space is made different from an outside space by virtue of a closed, spherical cell-like boundary that is itself a product of those life processes (Fleischaker, Colonna, and Luisi 1994, xii).

Maturana and Varela describe the double dynamic of life (centripetal and centrifugal) in terms of a) organizational stability and b) structural coupling (where each is dependent on the other). Every living system is a composite unity that exists in at least these two non-intersecting domains: the organizational domain where it interacts as a unity and the structural

domain of the operation of components (Maturana 1980). Note the technical connotations of the terms:

– Organization: the autonomous cell is a self-contained unity, where the relation among components remains invariant (necessary for a composite unity if it is not to change its class of entity – e.g. for a table, legs supporting a flat surface) (Maturana 1980, 45, 48).
– Complementarily, the structure is the ensemble of actual components and the relations among them that realize something as a concrete entity in space, e.g. the particular oak legs and grained board of a table. Here the "organizational closure does not imply interactional closure or isolation from the environment"; the point is that "such interaction also continues the ongoing processes of autopoiesis" (Maturana 1980, 48; Mingers 1995, 206).

Thus, "these two aspects form part of a circular, self-sustaining process. The result of organizational closure is autonomy – the organization demarcates itself from its environment [by constantly specifying its boundaries in the space in which they exist] and, through its own self-referential process, maintains itself" while being structurally open in physical space to operate with regards to materiality and energy (Mingers 1995, 206). Here, I will not treat Plessner's position on cellular life, but only point out that, as we know from the preface and afterword to the second edition of *Levels*, he felt his ideas concerning "the way an organism bounds itself" (*Begrenzung*) were confirmed by then-current research as to how the cellular "entity is enclosed in a semi-permeable membrane." As it turns out, his views are even more substantiated in light of today's research findings (GS IV, 30-32, 434-438; Grene 1968, 74-75).

Boundaries: Skin and body

The first order autopoietic whole (cell) is the simple unity from which emerges the possibility of second order composite unities, such as a multi-cellular organism with specialized organ tissues. As autopoietic phenomena, animals and persons are understood as integrated multi-cellular systems of elements (Maturana and Varela 1980). Plessner's view of an organism as "an organized body which has as parts the organs which in their totality it is" certainly seems to already articulate the position developed some sixty years later, which holds that the self-organization that characterizes life at the level of organisms is such that the autocatalytic loops through which the

organism maintains its integrity (continually producing itself in the course of its life) simultaneously result from and define the constituent organs, tissues, and systems (GS IV, 155, 181-182; Grene 1968, 94).

The site of the distinctive identity and growth that we discern in embodied organisms such as mammals most dramatically coincides with and is marked by the skin, which encompasses the entirety of our body (Oyama 2000, Keller 2001). The skin that bounds the body articulates the individuality of the organism as it moves and behaves in space and simultaneously serves as the point of exchange between the self-regulating internal systems and the external environment upon which the organism depends (Cavalier-Smith 2005). Note that here, identity does not amount to an "inside" operating in terms of an "in/out" dualism as it does in the modern model of the body-person, where the skin is taken as the boundary separating the self-inside and environment-outside. A case in point would be the Paris School's reinterpretation of the immune system as homeostatic. This new approach challenges the dominant model in which the immune system is taken to operate from inside by detecting and subsequently destroying foreign agents from outside. Instead, the autopoietic conception shifts to seeing it as a distributed system maintaining organizational stability during perturbations (Tauber 1994).

Insofar as the skin of an animal or person is that organism's boundary, the demarcation of an individual helps "contain" conditions by maintaining internal processes, and as selectively permeable it allows environmental responses (e.g. sweating as part of thermal self-regulation), similar to how a cell's membrane functions. But in contrast to the cellular level, on the organismal level, the whole organism is interacting with the world. The skin, though important, is only one aspect of the body. Still, it does manifest features of the organism's modes of situatedness and life. The skin certainly is more than the outer boundary of the body: it is a means of the organism's interaction with the community of life beyond the individual. Portmann has clarified, for example, how the patterns on animals' skins are "for the other[s]." "The highest expression of individuals, i.e. the possibility of manifesting their internal condition, is of use in helping them find one another. Only the most outstanding organic forms, which reach the highest measure of individuality, have been endowed with the ability to break the ban of isolation so as to possess that common life which rests on a rich inwardness and on preformed organs of mutual recognition" (Portmann 1967, 196).

Furthermore, what Plessner says about positionality and display helps us to see that the skin is a dimension of the animal that helps it, as a living thing, "take its place" such that – to comprehend the whole phenomenon

it "arises in its environment, is dependent on it, and yet opposes itself to it." Indeed, in its frontality, the animal confronts the world; it does not merely take a place, it can be said to take a "stand" (Grene 1968, 100).

The skin and fur, then, are means for an organism to display or camouflage itself. The lack of pattern on a human's outer surface would seem to indicate a significant difference. However, we tattoo our skins, affirming through the process and the image that we belong to a given community or displaying a chosen aesthetic. Makeup, clothes, and jewels, Luce Irigaray argues, are the artifices through which woman, so long deprived of a place of her own, constitutes her own envelope in order to situate herself (Irigaray 1993, 11, 35). While these behaviors do exhibit a trajectory of having some continuity with animal life, the difference to animal behavior is substantial. By modifying our skin, our bodily consciousness is already reflexive. Clearly, here we see our bodily consciousness as already reflexive. As Husserl and then Merleau-Ponty put it, this is the

> circle of the touched and touching: [...] [my] initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand; [only] through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, [that occurs as] a veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the 'touching subject' passes over to the rank of the touched (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 133-134, 143).

As Grene so clearly explicates, in Plessner's view: "life [...] sets itself to itself as its own." Our "double-aspect character" is not a matter of an inner/outer duality, but rather, "the body [is], through its relation to its boundary, both directed out beyond the body that it is and back into it again" (GS IV, 418; Grene 1968, 78).

Human self-perception is a mode of engagement with the world where we are aware that and how we appear to organisms outside ourselves. We consequently modify our appearance in response to that exterior realm in an intentional attempt to elicit a certain exchange or outcome from a set of somewhat predictable alternatives. Our attempts to manipulate the phenomality of the skin demonstrate that the body is the site and means of self-knowledge and intended performance, but more precisely, that the distinctive human capacity is the ability to reach beyond the centripetal realm of processes inside our skins. Rather, as persons, we transact with the world to which we reach out beyond our self-containment and then return, able to modify and continue the co-constitution of ourselves and

our environments. For Plessner, human "life has its natural place, as all animal existence has, yet is at the very same time detached from locality, is everywhere and nowhere" (GS IV, 365-366; Grene 1968, 104).

As whole organisms, we are situated in the world via our mode of embodiment. Our centred life is directionally differentiated and thus valenced, providing a "non-arbitrary" orientation: with our upright posture, our heads are "up" and feet "down"; our faces, stomachs and genitals are "front" while our backs are "back." Architect Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes how "we touch, listen, and measure the world with our entire bodily existence and the experiential world becomes organized and articulated around the center of the body" by emphasizing haptic memory – how the body learns and remembers through the active involvement of muscles and bones. He reminds us that "as we open a door, body weight meets the weight of the door, legs measure the step as we ascend a stair, a hand strokes the handrail and the entire body moves diagonally and dramatically through space" as we stride through arcades and across the squares in the dense and complex experience afforded by cities. He also argues that "[t]he percept of the body and the image of the world turn into one single continuous existential experience – there is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceived self" (Pallasmaa 2005, 26-27, 44-45).

It is crucial to note here that this position is part of a larger movement to reaffirm the importance of the organism, in opposition to the long-dominant traditions which a) reduce away the organism with a one-sided over-emphasis on the gene at the micro-scale or on entire populations at the mega-scale, or b) see the organism as determined by interior drives or genetic "information, or as deterministically driven by "given" external environments. As Plessner and other philosophical anthropologists contend, prior to their being phenomena such as "adaptation" or "survival," "there first must be an organism [...] assessed in its own right, by its own appropriate norm" (Grene 1968, 61). It is the whole organism that acts in the world and that provides the context for its constitutive dimensions. It is the whole organism – in its centricity – that provides the context for its constitutive internal dimensions, that interacts with what is external in a manner such that the organism and its environment are co-constituted and co-evolving (Lewontin 1995; Grene 1968, 89).

Maturana and Varela explore the reciprocal structural coupling that occurs between humans as organisms and our environments in terms of the body as the site where perception and cognition arise such that consciousness and language already involve being "out in the world" beyond the confines of our bodies.

> In an organism with a nervous system rich and vast as that of human beings, its realms of interaction open the way to new phenomena by allowing new dimensions of structural coupling. In humans this makes for language and self-consciousness. [In this third order social coupling,] what is peculiar to human beings in that, in their linguistic coordination of actions, they give rise to a new phenomenal domain. [...] This comes about through the co-ontogenetic coordination of their actions (Maturana and Varela 1998, 176, 209).

More broadly, the continuing demonstrations that humans operate in the world as embodied consciousnesses, capable of cycles of reflexivity, self-recognition, artifice, and directionality toward multiple possibilities both confirm and are illuminated by Plessner's explication of positionality. This holds specifically for the dynamics between two "directionalities," the centric and eccentric, in which the human position is to stand both within our own perspective and at the same time outside of it (Landmann 1974).

Boundaries: Walls, house, and city

As humans, we all partake in the sphere of social life and artifice. To an extent, all organisms are constituted by social relations. Yet, the position of higher vertebrates and certainly that of humans in our historical-linguistic communities means that we are individuals and at the same time members of groups that operate with some high degree of coherence in or across spatio-temporal milieu such as buildings, neighbourhoods, cities, and nations (Margulis and Sagan 1995; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991).

While it is well documented that animals do probe and manipulate their environments and both provide and benefit from learning opportunities, we are faced with the question of the continuity and difference of these phenomena among humans (Sterelny 2001). Of course, we have not only created a world with language and symbols, but also with material things: equipment, art works, and everything else that we design and build. Plessner powerfully explains our "natural artificiality," wherein we "must make ourselves into what we already are" and elaborates how our existence is "contrived" to be achieved by way of non-natural things that "must be 'real' in order to satisfy our needs" (GS IV, 382; Grene 1968, 109-110). This emphasizes the importance of buildings and cities, and our civilized environment in general. With regards to understanding our built environments and ourselves by way of the concept of external phenotype, as DeLanda puts it, we can shift from an individual's en-

doskeleton to "the urban exoskeleton, in which bricks are turned into homes, monuments, and walls; however we also need to be cautious about comparing organisms and cities, especially insofar as "organic" often is taken to mean "in balance or stasis" whereas both need to be considered "as different dynamical systems operating far from equilibrium" – which is especially crucial in the case of cities because the latter seldom are in equilibrium, given the flows of matter, energy, money that pass into them" (DeLanda 1997, 27-28, 104).

Insofar as we consider the analogy with our bodies and skins, the wall seems to border the house and act as an intermediary between inside and outside. But, there are substantial caveats that need to be heeded in light of the fact that human skin is only an aspect of our whole embodied consciousness bringing forth a non-dualistic world. Parallel to that, walls are only a dimension of buildings which themselves are artifices enabling us to continue the project of actualizing ourselves. For example, the house embodies a bi-dimensionality manifest in the ambiguity between the individual person and social group. Beyond the common notion of the "house as one's castle" and the old architectural idea of house as a combination of both refuge and prospect, there are the hermeneutics of the house with regards to personal identity as relational, i.e. as a mode of belonging to community and of the house as the archetypical location of the family, both nuclear and extended (Cooper-Marcus 1995). Thus, walls indeed mediate inside and outside, not as part of any dualism but as a means of enabling the dynamic trajectory of ourselves as whole social beings.

Phenomenologists describe and analyze our houses and other buildings in terms that clearly correlate with, and yield even deeper meanings when interpreted using Plessner's insights. The best approach would be to consider these descriptions (already sophisticated beyond ordinary observations) and explicitly apply Plessner's ideas here in order to expose any dramatical insights we can gather from this process. However, given the limiting scope of this essay, let us keep in mind Plessner's ideas of centric and eccentric positionality and artifice as we go along, let us merely focus on the deeper resonance they can add to the primary phenomenological descriptions. I will concentrate on examples from architectural morphology, i.e. a description and analysis of built forms as spatial boundaries.

There are certain aspects where walls are similar to bi-directional cellular membranes and the skin, for example, by how they manifest boundaries that distinguish inside and outside: "Walls have multiple ways to bring forth a world: massive, opaque walls or even a 'heavy and short skeleton system' have a closed character, in contrast to the contemporary skeleton wall's openness, facilitated through the use of glass: "In the clear glass wall, inside and outside seem to merge. […] Transparency and mirror-effect, therefore,

unite inside and outside like projections on a screen. [...] The wall face and window face are seen as the boundaries of two different spaces. The wall face is the boundary towards the exterior and is perceived as the outer shell of the house. The window face, on the other hand, is a boundary relating to the interior, because through the window we glimpse the interior's own life, which is held in check by the membrane of the window" – thus four choices for the location for the window face give highly different strengths of interior/exterior relationship" (Thiis-Evensen 1987, 189-191, 211).

Of course, the wall is no more impenetrable than are membrane and skin, though the openings facilitating connections are much more phenomenally obvious in/as thresholds and doors, entryways, windows, or other mediating elements. For example, (using a University of Oslo building as his example, Thiis-Evensen describes how "round and square columns differ in the relation between inside and outside – whereas the square columns and pilasters are seen as part of the delimiting wall, the round columns are intermediaries between inside and outside. One passes easily around and past them. They form the actual transfer point for the continuous flow of people moving freely between the fore-court and the great staircases" (1987, 291, cf. 283-297). In the example of the floor attached to the walls, we can ask: "What importance, then, does the firmly attached floor have in the insider-outside relationship?" It emphasizes security, as a "floor marks a center, a firmly anchored interior." However, "at other times the emphasis is on the similarity between inside and outside, thus eliminating the difference between the interior floor and nature's floor" as made clear in Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water and the floor of a Gothic cathedral (1987, 53).

Even among the most basic forms of buildings, such as a house or dwelling, we can already find the multi-directionality that characterizes the human mode of existence. Here, we can go on to appreciate (for all their continuity) the gulf that lies between the Umwelt or immediate surroundings of the individual organism as Von Uexküll masterfully sketched it out and "world" (*Welt*) in the full sense of what humans bring forth together (Heidegger); in Plessner's terms our world consists not only of outer and inner realms, but in a "shared world" (GS IV, 369, 379; Grene 1968, 109). The "house both opens up to the surrounding world and is a retreat from it; because life in a house is a shared life, withdrawal does not mean isolation but the intimate meeting of private dwelling" (Norberg-Schulz 1985, 89).

Obviously, the issue of 'human positionality not only deals with a merely physical proximity in space, but with the phenomena of dwelling, which again enacts both trajectories. Norberg-Schulz, an astute reader of Heidegger, explicates the novel of the Norwegian writer Vesaas, whose character Knut

"describes [his] place as something permanent [...]. The place unites a group of human beings, it is something which gives them a common identity and hence a basis for fellowship or society" (Norberg-Schulz, 1985, 9). Note, the challenge of dwelling, including the emphasis on co-constituted belonging, remains in the midst of a perpetual dynamics. On the one hand, Vesaas's character Knut's

> faithful heart [...] needs a fixed spot to return to, it wants its square house[, because] there exists an interdependence between the house and environment. [...] To settle in the landscape means to delimit an area, a place. We stop our wandering and say: "Here!" Then we create an "inside" within the encompassing "outside." The settlement is therefore a point of arrival – thus settlement is a center. Yet though settled, humans also are wanderers: This dialectic of departure and return, of path and goal, is the essence of that existential 'spatiality' which is set into work by architecture (Vesaas, 1971, translated by Norberg-Schulz 1985, 12-13, 31).

Buildings as well as people, DeLanda reminds us, "exist in collectivities of similar assemblages," so that houses, for example, "form larger assemblages such as residential neighborhoods" (DeLanda 2006, 99). Maturana and Varela explain the spatial and social parameters within which distinct groups emerge: "The living system, at every level, is organized to generate internal regularities. The same occurs in the social coupling through language in the network of conversations which language generates and which, through their closure, constitute the unity of a particular human society" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 232).

At base, small social groups couple "their biological and cultural tradition." Since "the common biological heritage is the basis for the world that we human beings bring forth together through congruent distinctions, [...] this common biological heritage allows a divergence of cultural worlds brought forth through situations of what can become widely different cultural traditions" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 243-244). As Scheler pointed out, the realization of values depends on the diversity of local historical life-worlds, in which our embodied enactions and buildings bring forth existential modes of openness and a plurality of distinctive worlds with regions of identity within each of them (Scheler 1973).

This social-linguistic region, since it often has been characterized by a shared dialect and customs, and normally is situated adjacent to, but distinct from, the next unit, is properly understood as a neighbourhood (or quarter, district) (DeLanda 1997, 2006). Of course, Heidegger famously

interpreted "building" in terms of dwelling in the sense of the way we live together with those who are nearest, our neighbours (1971, 146-147). Like the cell and the bounded body, the neighbourhood would be a coherent place where and by means of which identity is especially enacted, and the site of the dynamic exchange with the surrounding milieu of other neighborhoods and the more distant realms (Odling-Smee, Laland, and Feldman 2003). That neighborhoods rarely ever have walls is not evidence of a lacking boundary, as is clear to any teenage gang member who knows that to enter the turf of a competing gang by so much as crossing the invisible line running down a street can be risking serious harm or even death.

Even a counterinterpretation such as that of Deleuze and Guattari, which essentially disputes the holism of much of phenomenology and philosophical anthropology, still emphasizes the importance of spatial boundaries within the realm of the neighbourhood: "The concept of territorialization must first of all be understood literally. Face-to-face conversations always occur in a particular place (a street corner, a pub, a church), and once the participants have ratified one another a conversation acquires well-defined spatial boundaries. Similarly, many interpersonal networks define communities inhabiting spatial territories, whether ethnic neighborhoods or small towns, with well-defined borders. Organizations, in turn, usually operate in particular buildings, and the jurisdiction of their legitimate authority usually coincides with the physical boundaries of those buildings" (DeLanda 2006, 13).

In the complete historical life-world of the space-time dimension of neighborhoods and communities, we find ourselves beyond the life of an individually embodied person. Spatially, it is in the settlement that we most clearly enact our social life, both in the streets and in public buildings, which partially generate the gestalt of the city and its skyline: our historically more monumental public buildings "rise out of the mass of houses" and therefore offer promise when seen from afar (Norberg-Schulz 1985, 63). Here, "the continuous boundaries" of the city constitute urban space and its distinctive figural quality, one which greets us and holds out the promise of greater social possibilities; with regards to temporal extension and continuity, "interpersonal networks vary in duration: dispersed friendship networks do not endure longer than the persons that compose them, but tightly knit networks of neighbours living in proximity yield communities that survive the death of their parts [through] the overlap of successive generations" (DeLanda 2006, 42-44, 57-58).

Of course, "meeting does not necessarily imply agreement; primarily it means that human beings come together in their diversities. Urban space, thus, is a place of diversity" (Norberg-Schulz 1985, 13).

> Interpersonal networks are subject to a variety of centripetal and centrifugal forces that are the main forces of territorialization and deterritorialization. Among the former the most important is the existence of conflict between different communities. Conflict has the effect of exaggerating the distinction between 'us' and 'them,' that is, it sharpens the boundaries between insiders and outsiders – hence the danger of solidarity in time of conflict since it tends to social exclusion and homogeneity. [Stories] rigidify the identities of the conflicting parties, the narratives being part of a process of group boundary construction. In the case of ethnic communities, for instance, the enforcement of identity stories and categories occurs chiefly at the boundary. […] In the terminology of assemblage theory, stories of conflict (and the categories for insiders and outsiders associated with them) serve to code and consolidate the effects of territorialization on interpersonal networks (DeLanda 2006, 59, cf. 66).

Maturana and Varela share this perspective that differences are inevitable, but go on to examine its consequence (which either would be rigorously consistent or perhaps ironic), that we might find the only possible resolution through that same dynamic: "the only possibility for coexistence is to opt for a broader perspective, a domain of existence in which both parties fit in the bringing forth of a common world. […] A conflict can go away only if we move to another domain where coexistence takes place" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 24). Norberg-Schulz's phenomenological reading offers perhaps the best positive assessment of our situation: "When we have a world, we dwell, in the sense of gaining an individual identity within a complex and often contradictory fellowship. Both aspects are important: fellowship means sharing in spite of diversity, identity means not to succumb to uniformity" (Norberg-Schulz 1985, 51). Here, if there were space at all, it would be fruitful to bring to light Plessner's treatment of the tension between community and society as two of the basic modalities of life (Plessner 1999) – again a new and promising area of research unfolds itself to us.

Boundaries: Borders and nations

The extension of our analogy from buildings and cities to nations can be treated more briefly because in this case, the analogies most completely break down, and when are not seen to do so, become the most dangerous. I would argue that both extremes – attempting to understand nations as encapsulated organisms (as it has been viewed by the ancients philosophers all the way to Kant and Hegel) and in terms of arbitrary assemblages (as it has been viewed by poststructuralism) – are the most problematic, which should also caution us against becoming too comfortable with extending what philosophical anthropology develops as a "middle way" (Mugerauer 2009).

Ethics and politics, the sphere of our activities that deals with the well being of humans, animals, and the ecology, unfortunately provides us with the least reliable understanding. All too often, what we have learned to be true about individuals and communities no longer holds in the political-national sphere. This includes our growing appreciation for biologically driven cooperation concerning the dynamic co-constitution of ways of life and local environments across the arc of life; from cells (with membranes) to organisms (with skin) to persons (with their built environments such as houses and neighborhoods). What is publicized as "natural political-spatial wholes" are often forcefully "unified" and enforced by highly policed borders; as intentional social creations nations are anything but autopoietic. In the ethical-political sphere, the reduction of the living to the gene-centric or to undifferentiated populations to be managed has disturbing echoes of earlier attempts of social engineering and eugenics (Mugerauer 2010).

The social-linguistic realm described by Maturana and Varela, in which structural coupling brings together members of specific historical communities and creates a distinguishing label from other groups, involves more than the physical-social boundaries of neighborhoods, settlements, and nations. In terms of general systems theory, this third order social domain also exhibits internal organizational stability, which is generated and maintained by yet another, complementary sort of boundary. Niklas Luhmann analyzes this latter self-organization and self-reference in terms of autonomous "social systems" – which he uses in a specific technical sense to refer strictly to communication systems (Maturana and Varela 1995, 408-412). "Social systems use communication as their particular mode of reproduction. Their elements are communications that are recursively produced by a network of communications and that cannot exist outside of such a network. […] Whatever they use as identities and as differences

is of their own making" (Maturana and Varela 1990, 3). Social systems in this sense operate within the environment of the natural sphere and human consciousness, but are organizationally closed and distinct unities of information, utterance, and understanding (Luhmann 1995, 28-31). According to Luhmann, these self-organized systems are autonomous because each one of them differentiates itself from the rest by specifying its own boundaries and selecting what counts as communication: "Society is a system with boundaries. These boundaries are constituted by society itself. They separate communication from all noncommunicative events and states of affairs, and thus cannot be fixed as territories or groups of persons. Insofar as this principle of self-constituting boundaries becomes clear, society distinguishes itself" (Luhmann 1995, 410). "A social system can never use operations outside its own boundaries. The boundaries themselves, however, are components of the system and cannot be taken as given by a preconstituted world" (Luhmann 1990, 7).

Furthermore, specific sub-systems (law, economy, science, religion), each with its own code and internally determined rules of selection, are autonomous by comparison to each other. For example, the legal communication system itself selects what is included within or excluded from it, the protocols and limits of what can be communicated in the system. As they continue this self-reference, generating successive recursive communicative events from what historically has occurred, these systems maintain themselves as self-organizing: "In this sense boundary maintenance is system maintenance" (Luhmann 1990, 5; 1995, 17).

While from the viewpoint of the subsystems, the local interactions among information-utterance-understanding appear to be a closed network, they are in fact open with regards to the structural coupling that requires humans for utterance and information may refer to the environment. From a meta-perspective, these social systems of communication reconnect with what Maturana calls "natural social systems" (families and political parties) (Maturana 1980). Here, as Plessner points out when analyzing society (*Gesellschaft*), in the public sphere not only the relationships among nation-states but also the subordinate spheres of value (economy, law, education, etc.) need formal coordination, which is achieved through the "art of transaction," that is, diplomacy and not merely the tact that is useful in everyday life (Plessner 1999, 149-170).

Conclusion

As Merleau-Ponty argued, the human body certainly has a complex and phenomenal interiority, while also being in constant interaction with its external environment, in a circularity marked by chiasm and coupling of our flesh with the flesh of the world, a circuit in which the human body is understood finally as open and transformable (Merleau-Ponty 2003). His vision of our "active manner of being" in a world with "a topography unfolding by differentiation," "which [yet] holds together" in a sensible field is empirically supported by current research on organic growth in terms of dynamic boundaries (Rayner, 1997). As Maturana and Varela explain: "What biology shows us is that the uniqueness of being human lies exclusively in a social structural coupling that occurs through languaging, generating a) the regularities proper to the human social dynamics, for example, individual identity and self-consciousness, and b) the recursive social human dynamics that entails a reflection enabling us to see that as human beings we have only the world which we create with others – whether we like them or not. [...] Indeed, the whole mechanism of generating ourselves as describers and observers tells us that our world, as the world which we bring forth in our coexistence with others, will always have precisely that mixture of regularity and mutability, that combination of solidity and shifting sand, so typical of human experience when we look at it up close" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 246, 241).

Our generated human positionality and artifice are means through which we enter and explore what can be called "the open," as with Plessner's "open positional field" (setting aside confusions that arise from Plessner's differing use of "open" and "closed" with regards to both forms of positionality and of positional fields) – a realm of undetermined possibility and freedom that houses, beckons, and characterizes human life (GS IV, 252; Grene 1968, 97-98). Our boundaries and buildings, in their delimiting and mediating dimensions, help us enact our identities and the capacity "to experience a total world as meaningful; along with orientation humans possess a world, and thus an identity. Today identity is often considered an 'interior' quality of each individual, and growing up is understood as a 'realization' of the hidden self. However, because identity rather consists in an interiorization of understood things growing up actually depends on being open to what surrounds us. Although the world is immediately given it has to be interpreted to be understood, and although humans are part of the world, they have to concretize their belonging to feel at home" (Norberg-Schulz 1985, 20).

In the terms of autopoiesis, our emergence as social-linguistic creatures is indeed the enaction of a distinct domain: "We human beings are human beings only in language. Because we have language there is no limit to what we can describe, imagine, and relate" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 212). Hence, fully appreciative of philosophical anthropology and echoing Plessner on capacities and the possibility of becoming other, Gadamer can define health and well-being in terms of keeping all options open, "a feeling of well-being means we are open to new things, ready to embark on new enterprises and, forgetful of ourselves, scarcely notice the demands and strains which are put on us" (Grene 1968, 94; Gadamer 1996, 112). Though we all are centred in one specific historical realm, we are not bound there because of the possibility of some event "that lets us see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us" – which is yet another way of saying what Plessner described as the perpetual dynamic between centricity and eccentricity, within which, particularly in the open space of our *Spielraum*, we always remain an open question to ourselves (Maturana and Varela 1998, 246; Grene 1968, 112).

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12 The Unbearable Freedom of Dwelling

Jetske van Oosten

Architecture and today's postmodern society

Our modern society is changing. As a result of an increasing prosperity and mobility, social identities are becoming more complex and mutable. In the past, the identity of a person was closely related to that of places, for it was mainly defined by the person's social and regional background. Nowadays globalization has led to a state where the original identity of people and their connectedness to specific cities or places seems to disappear. Using networks that transcend place and time, the modern individual identifies himself less and less by local communities and local spatial structures.

Globalization has led to an unprecedented degree of uniformity in lifestyles, value systems and patterns of behavior. This uniformity can also be observed in the way urban spaces are now specifically designed to facilitate the urban activities. An overwhelming focus on creating 'functional surroundings' is levelling regional differences to a point where cities are losing their identity. A multitude of spaces have very similar looks, regardless of their location or function. Buildings like offices, shopping malls, fast-food restaurants and airports around the world are developing a striking resemblance all throughout. The contemporary city is predominantly consisting of so-called 'non-places': uniform places, without history or identity (Augé 2008, 61-93).

In today's postmodern world, authentic social identities, connected to a given place, are losing importance. This can at least in part be attributed to globalization, which has a great influence on the appearance of our built environment. But what does this mean for built environments in general? In other words: what is the influence of our changing postmodern society on the meaning of architecture and urbanism? Answering this question will be the central aim of this paper.

A place to call home: The basic anthropological law of 'natural artificiality'

> For at moments like this, the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or worse the city invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in.
> – Jonathan Raban

In order to explore the meaning of architecture and urbanism within the context of today's postmodern society, this paper starts by describing the encounter between the architectural work of Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) and the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985). Plessner was one of the first philosophers who considered the spatial constitution of man as an important feature of his being, thus developing a philosophical framework that is very useful for the exploration of the meaning of architecture and urbanism. His philosophy, as we will see below, is still surprisingly up-to-date and particularly well suited for the exploration of contemporary developments in architecture.

Plessner wrote *Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*] in 1928. In this book, he established the foundation of his philosophical anthropology, defining life by the notion of boundaries. A key characteristic of living beings is that they enter into a relation with the world around them through their boundaries. Only through boundaries, the distinction between what lies outside and what lies inside, comes into existence. Plessner explains how every living organism becomes part of its environment through its boundaries, just as the environment becomes part of the organism.

Elaborating on his notion of boundaries, Plessner moves from plants to animals to man. He thereby distinguishes between three different forms of life. He identifies man as a living being that differs fundamentally from plants and (other) animals, because of the unique way a human being enters into the relationship with itself and its environment. On the one hand, human beings have a centric positionality just like animals, marked by a direct and unreflected relation to themselves and their environment. They relate to themselves and to their environment from the inside out. In contrast to animals though, human beings also have the ability to free themselves from this direct and unreflected relation by creating a distance to themselves and their environment. Human beings are able to have an indirect relation to themselves and their environment. With this detachment, they relate

to themselves and to their environment from outside in. Plessner refers to this as eccentric positionality (Plessner 1975, 292).

According to Plessner, the human being is centrally positioned in its directly embodied and unreflected relationship with the environment, while at the same time, it is located outside of this boundary (eccentrically positioned). As a result of his eccentric positionality, man is able to objectify himself and his environment. From this perspective, the world appears to man not only as it is, but also as it could be, for man can imagine the world to be different from what it is. Because he has the ability not just to see what is real, but to visualize what is possible as well, man is no longer directly bound to a specific place and time. Being located outside of his own boundary, freed from himself and the world around him, he is no longer confined to the 'here and now' reality. As a result of his eccentric positionality, one could say that man has lost his place in the world. In this respect, Plessner speaks of a "constitutive homelessness" of man (Plessner 1975, 309).

Having lost his place in the world, the human being still has to struggle with a no less constitutive desire to find a place to call home. This void can only be satisfied artificially, i.e. the human being will try to compensate for his homelessness by artificially creating the world around him. By turning a once only hypothetical reality into (a new) reality, man establishes new, albeit artificial, boundaries for himself. In culture, the endless possibilities that man is aware of as a result of his eccentric positionality, find their limits in space and time. What was once just a possibility becomes reality, when the not-here and the not-now are turned into the here and now. Conversely, the very notion of reality becomes a mere possibility, because the reality of today is not necessarily the reality of the future. Reality and possibility are united in culture, and therefore culture offers the human being a place to call home. As such, culture makes up an integral part of human life, as humans depend on cultural expressions such as language, art, technologies and science in order to resist their constitutive homelessness. Being both centrically and eccentrically positioned, whilst continuously having to find a balance with respect to this twofold constitution, it is part of man's nature to be artificial. Plessner therefore speaks of the natural artificiality of man (Plessner 1975, 310).

It is this concept of natural artificiality that reveals the first aspect of the meaning of architecture and urbanism for man. Architecture and urbanism have great importance as practices that (could) offer man a place to call home. They offer the artificial means to turn those possibilities into reality which man sees for himself and for the world. In architecture and in the urban environment, the centric and eccentric positionalities of man can be

united. The practice of architecture and urbanism can provide man with a home in this world.

Now, let's try to further explore the meaning of architecture and urbanism as means to create ourselves a home, by turning to the work of Constant Nieuwenhuys. Constant, as he called himself as an artist, became famous as a painter while being part of the international avant-garde art movement COBRA. Afterwards, he worked alone for almost twenty years – from 1956 until 1974 – on an architectural project that he called *New Babylon*. Constant envisioned a world in which people would be free to create their own environment according to their own needs and desires. Constant developed *New Babylon* as an architectural project, representing a world of total freedom and creativity, for "it is as a creator, and only as a creator, that the human being can fulfil and attain his highest existential level" (Constant 1974, 49).

According to Constant, it was only by means of a mutable environment that such a world could be actualized. That's why he designed *New Babylon* as a flexible environment in which no permanent building components existed. As a dynamic environment in which nothing is permanent, *New Babylon* offered its inhabitants the artificial means to spontaneously carry out any desired change. *New Babylon* knew no restrictions. The inhabitants were activated to explore different possibilities by changing the shape of the spaces according to their own needs and desires. In gigantic spatial structures, consisting of mutable structures, the inhabitants of *New Babylon* were encouraged to use their creativity maximally. "Just like the painter, who with a mere handful of colors creates an infinite variety of forms, contrasts and styles, the New Babylonians can endlessly vary their environment, renew and vary it by using their technical implements" (Constant 1974, 54).

Using different creative techniques, Constant produced numerous models, maps, drawings and paintings. Over the years, *New Babylon* grew to become an enormous project. The drawings show seemingly unending structures, built on high supports, presenting an urban atmosphere that stands for freedom, openness and limitless possibilities. Different maps show how the structures were linked and stretched across the landscape on various scales from the scale of a small neighbourhood, to the scale of virtually the whole territory of the Netherlands. The models consist of flexible walls and transparent screens and are crisscross supported by columns and walls. Different levels are interconnected by stairs and movable ladders, providing the inhabitants with the opportunity to wander and explore. In the paintings, human silhouettes are wandering apparently aimlessly in all directions.

As an artist, Constant turned to architecture and urbanism, for he believed them to be the most useful means for establishing a world of total

freedom. He envisioned how a new way of living will emerge in *New Babylon*, based on the creativity of its inhabitants. For this, he designed *New Babylon* as a diverse and inspiring environment, in which the inhabitants had the opportunity to live their life according to their deepest desires. *New Babylon* was to offer them a world with endless possibilities. The inhabitants had the opportunity to create their own urban environment. *New Babylon* was to offer its inhabitants the artificial means to create themselves a place to call home. *New Babylon* can therefore be seen as a project which affirms the meaning of architecture and urbanism as derived from the natural artificiality of man: architecture and urbanism are practices that provide man with a place in this world and in doing so offer man the opportunity to fill his constitutive homelessness.

Reality's resistance: The anthropological law of 'mediated immediacy'

> Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them.
>
> – Jonathan Raban

Viewing human beings as both centrically and eccentrically positioned – Plessner formulated three constitutive anthropological laws. The first one relates to the natural artificiality of man: man is artificial by nature, for he relies on culture to compensate for the loss of his natural place in the world. The second law concerns 'mediated immediacy'; it refers to the unintended and unpredictable autonomy of reality. In the cultural realm, the twofold constitution of man is united, since different possibilities can be turned into reality. However, when a possibility is indeed turned into a new reality, this new reality displays an autonomy, which cannot be totally deduced back to the original possibilities. This autonomous reality, once determined by man, determines the human being in return. The world around him shapes the human being by the resistance it offers when the human being tries to shape the world around him. On the one hand, the human being is thus an active being, dynamically defining reality. Yet, in the sense that the human being is itself defined by reality, he is a passive being, always influenced by reality's resistance. The relation between human beings and their environment is always mediated, because expressions are always

bound to the media in which they are realized and through which they are communicated. Once bound to the media in which they are realized, they go beyond their original intentionality. As a result, expressions are always partly unintended and unpredictable in their effect on the human being.

The human being creates himself a place to be home by his architectural and urban expressions. In architectural and urban projects the possibilities that man is aware of become reality. But being realized, the projects display an autonomy, that cannot be totally deduced to the creative intentions of the designer. It is from the autonomous impact of reality that the second aspect of the meaning of architecture and urbanism can be derived. Architecture and urbanism form mediated expressions of the human being, yet at the same time offer their own impressions to the human being. As reality, architectural and urban projects, once defined by a human being, define the human being in return.

Let us further explore the meaning of architecture as a reality that defines the human being by returning once more to *New Babylon*. Having produced numerous models, maps, drawings and paintings, Constant created a world of freedom and possibilities. These productions suggest endless possibilities of what *New Babylon* could be. Yet they do so, without ever fixating the project in any given form. The sketches, for instance, evoke the construction principles of *New Babylon* rather than showing them in technical detail. In the case of the models of *New Babylon*, one cannot clearly ascribe definite functions to specific parts of the building. The paintings are without definite perspective, without a central point from which the spatial organization can be understood. And as for the maps of *New Babylon*: sometimes existing maps serve as background, yet at other times the maps are set in a completely abstract, neutral environments. Constant never clearly defined *New Babylon*. As a consequence, none of the models, maps, drawings and paintings seem to refer to an architectural reality. In *New Babylon*, the possibilities do not find an unambiguous fixation. It is not a technologically developed design, ready to be built. The vast amount of paintings, models, sketches and maps of *New Babylon* show an architectural project which stays undetermined in its form and open to every possibility. While *New Babylon* proposes a world of possibilities in which man is not bound to a 'here and now' reality, it lacks the restrictions which reality consists of. *New Babylon* can only be seen as an illustration of possibilities, for *New Babylon* will continually and perpetually be constructed by the inhabitants themselves. "The real designers of New Babylon will be the Babylonians themselves" (Constant 1974, 72).

New Babylon depicts a world where people are liberated from all norms, forms and conventions. It offers a world of freedom, without a fixed pattern

of habits associated with specific places. "In imagining a society in which each man is free to create his life, to give it shape according to his deepest aspirations, we will not have recourse to the forms and images of this long period of history" (Constant 1974, 32). The ordinary, everyday framework has been abolished in *New Babylon*. In order to achieve the goal of total liberation, all oppressive ties, all traditions have been destroyed (Wigley 1998, 12-14). However, while there is something liberating about the endless possibilities of *New Babylon*, there is something stressful and deeply unsettling about it as well. Regarding *New Babylon*, one cannot speak of a newly defined reality with an autonomy of its own. With all the possibilities it offers, it stays open and undefined. Yet being undefined itself, it lacks the possibility to define its inhabitants in return. Without even an attempt to resist reality, without an ordinary everyday framework of traditions and habits, the inhabitants seem to be losing their way in the labyrinth, as well as themselves. The freedom of *New Babylon* creates a threat to the identity of the individual, namely the threat of an identity dissolving into emptiness. Man cannot thrive in indeterminacy. It is therefore not a surprise that a dark tone is noticeable in this world of possibilities. The models, maps, drawings and paintings prove themselves to be frightening representations of a world of freedom. Paradoxically, in the world of possibilities of *New Babylon*, the possibility for man to find himself a home has disappeared. While offering man total freedom, *New Babylon* is unable to offer man a place to call home. For 'being home' calls for the recognition and trust of a resisting reality. 'Being home' presupposes habits and tradition, and exactly those are lacking in *New Babylon*. Without memories and history, there cannot be recognition and trust. Therefore, the project as expressed in its models, maps, paintings and sketches, gives a feeling of discomfort (Heynen 1994, 173).

Awareness of man's desire not only for a freedom of possibilities, but also for the restrictions of reality, clarifies how New Babylon, with all its possibilities, does not offer its inhabitants the security and trust of a home. Clearly, dwelling in a situation of pure indeterminacy does not respond to man's deepest wishes and desires. Pure flexibility and permanent change are in conflict with the human desire for harmony, recognition, identity and trust. Therefore, in capturing a glimpse of a world of total freedom, the models, maps, drawings and paintings represent the horror of this totality. New Babylon arouses fear rather than desire, for man has no place in a world in which nothing is fixed, only for the sake of making everything possible. Without a resisting reality, *New Babylon* can offer its inhabitants no resistance to the constitutive homelessness of man.

New Babylon and today's postmodern world

While Constant worked on the project of *New Babylon* from 1956 until 1974, the project is still surprisingly relevant in the context of today's postmodern world. *New Babylon* was never built, yet in a way, some characteristics of the world of today resemble the characteristics of *New Babylon*.

Today's postmodern world is characterized by the phenomenon of globalization. A growing number of individuals have access to spatial, economic, technical and social networks that span over the whole surface of the earth. The individual already has instruments that place him in constant contact with some of the most remote parts of the world. Furthermore, the continuous development of new technologies for transportation, information and communication indicate that this trend is certainly not curbing. By use of television, portable phones and computers, the individual can experience an environment that is wholly independent of his immediate physical surroundings. As a result of these networks, which transcend place and time, the authentic experience associated with a specific place and time is getting lost. Time and place are more and more experienced as flexible and arbitrary. Modern life is saturated with the sense of the fleeting, the transient and the contingent.

Globalization has led to the situation that the modern urban citizen no longer acts from a local framework. The modern individual identifies himself less and less by his local communities and urban structures. Using networks that transcend place and time, his connection to specific cities or places vanishes. Likewise, the urban fabric is no longer characterized by a unique identity. The phenomenon of globalization changes the urban fabric itself and local differences disappear.

Globalization gives rise to spaces that do not abide to the logic of place. Today's postmodern world is often described as a world of non-places. A place is a recognizable space, a space with historic meaning. It has features that provide a certain personality or identity. Non-places however, are spaces dominated by temporariness and transience: anonymous, undetermined spaces of transit. The contemporary city increasingly consists of such non-places. It has continuous spaces of transportation, communication and consumption without a unique identity. Projects for offices, shopping malls, fast-food restaurants and airports around the world are all looking very much alike. Their spaces resemble the characteristics of infrastructures by directing and funnelling people. It can be extended indefinitely and connected to anything. They control movement and behavior and can be described as spaces of flow and circulation. Features of continuity and

openness thereby have become increasingly more common in today's architecture. The architecture and urbanism of today's postmodern world can be described as anonymous and undetermined. Its homogenetic, endless spaces are lacking a distinctive recognition. As a result, they possess very few identifiable features. Former boundaries have ceased to exist. Stable concepts in architecture like 'place,' 'identity,' 'history' and 'tradition' suffer from inflation. In this respect, the architecture and urbanism of today's postmodern world reminds us of Constant's *New Babylon*.

The anonymous and undetermined spaces of today's postmodern world and the absence of 'place,' 'identity,' 'history' and 'tradition' will lead to an impossibility of finding a home in today's postmodern world, just as it did in *New Babylon*. As a result, the current condition of postmodern man can be described as frightened and alienated. Indeed, many topical architectural discussions mention homelessness as a typical feature of postmodern man. Modern man finds himself confronted with a desire for a home and for domestic security, which he cannot find in the modern world, where all boundaries have disappeared.

Where does this leave us human beings? Contemporary architectural debates mention homelessness to be a feature of postmodern man. Plessner even argued that homelessness is a fundamental property of human existence. Are we indeed doomed to have no place we can call home? Must we conclude, that the human desire for freedom is fundamentally irreconcilable with the human desire for security and trust? Are possibility and reality incompatible and never to be united? Is man in fact, not only as a condition of today's postmodern world, but more fundamentally because of his eccentric positionality, forever without boundaries and without a home? I don't think so.

Searching for a home: The anthropological law of 'the utopian standpoint'

When Plessner refers to homelessness as a fundamental property of the human existence, this is not because he is of the opinion that the possibilities, that we as human beings are aware of, cannot be turned into a new reality. It is merely because every new (artificial) reality will open new possibilities. As a result of the human positionalities, this is a perpetual process. Man will never cease to be open to these new possibilities, for he can never escape his eccentric positionality.

Man is constitutively homeless, but not because possibility and reality cannot be united in culture, but because the unity of possibility and reality,

and thus the home that culture provides us with, will always be temporary. Every possibility that man turns into reality will lead to new possibilities. Therefore, every attempt he makes to provide himself with a home, will only be greeted by a new feeling of homelessness. It is because of his eccentric positionality that every human being experiences his or her 'constitutive homelessness.' The constitution of the human being condemns us to an eternal quest for a new home.

However, as a fundamental property of the human existence, this constitutive homelessness of man is not a state that the human being should passively give into or reconcile himself to. On the contrary, the historical and relative character of every newly found home demands action. It is the unease we feel about this constitutive homelessness that compels us to keep searching for the unreachable home. The constitutive homelessness of man forms the driving force of all culture and can be seen to ignite our productivity, for it is within the ongoing interaction of possibility and reality that the human being has the opportunity to develop himself and his culture. Possibilities can lead to new realities, and in return, every new reality will lead to new possibilities. It is within the ongoing interaction of possibilities and reality that man has the opportunity to define and develop his identity. The identity of man is not an immutable fact, it needs to be constructed repeatedly and successively. Identities are momentary and temporary, and always open to the future. In the absence of permanence, the human being will have to create himself over and over again. The new possibilities that come into existence in culture form the conditions for this historically ongoing (self)realization.

It rests on the temporary character of the unity between possibility and reality, and the obligation of man to realize himself over and over again, that Plessner refers to in his third anthropological law, as the utopian standpoint. He explains how man has not only the possibility, but also the obligation to realize himself over and over again within the interaction between possibility and reality. Man is himself responsible for repeatedly realizing himself, thereby affirming his constitution. However, in search for stability and a clear and unambiguous reality, the human being will always be tempted to turn to religion or ideologies as absolute and ideal worlds to believe in. Yet, he should not admit to this temptation of a belief in an absolute God or ideal world, while these too can offer him no firm ground. Every utopia in which man believes to find a permanent home, will in time turn out to be an illusion. The human being can only stay faithful to himself, accepting the irreconcilability of possibility and reality. Confronted with endless possibilities and the arbitrariness of reality, the human being has

to take the chance of creating his own world by choosing and favouring some possibilities over others to become reality. Only within this dynamic interaction can man find himself (Plessner 1981, 161-164).

The eccentric positionality of the human being condemns him to constitutive homelessness. Even in architecture or urbanism, an ideal and eternal world cannot be reached. Architectural and urban projects will always confront man with the impermanent and contingent character of the unity between possibility and reality. A place to call home in this world, will always stay a receding ideal for the human being. However, this relative and historic character of architecture and urbanism does not diminish the very meaning of architecture and urbanism; if anything, it enriches its importance. Architecture and urbanism offer the human being the opportunity to create itself an identity, while at the same time confronting the human being with the temporary and tentative nature of this identity. The real importance of architecture and urbanism lies in the ongoing realization of possibilities itself. Architecture and urbanism have meaning, not as means to a final end, but as practices and never-ending processes of building and creating.

Furthermore, it is within the temporary and tentative nature of identities, where the human being can find freedom. For true freedom exists, not in the endless possibilities that the eccentric positionality offers him, but in the perpetual interaction between possibility and reality, i.e. in the repeatedly established relation between the centric and eccentric positionality of man. Only within this dynamic interaction can the human being really be free. Only through the confirmation of a new reality can a dynamic occur in which new possibilities come into existence. Therefore, it is the transience of the unity of possibility and reality itself that offers freedom. True freedom of man cannot be found in the existence of absolute freedom of possibilities, but only in the ongoing realization of these possibilities.

According to Constant, the inhabitants of *New Babylon* would only be able to fulfill their destiny as creative beings if they were free from all habits, traditions and conventions. Therefore, Constant designed *New Babylon* as a world of possibilities in which man was no longer bound to any defining reality. Constant deliberately refrained from fixating the spatial environment. As a paradoxical result, the possibilities of *New Babylon* as a world of freedom became static and unchanging. For without the confirmation of a new reality, new possibilities could not come to existence. While aiming to fulfil the human desire for freedom, Constant disregarded the importance of reality. As a consequence, *New Babylon denies rather than affirms its inhabitants* the possibility to fulfil their destiny as creative beings.

However, the importance of the project does not lie in the realization of an ideal world of freedom, for this would only be a flight into utopia. The real meaning of the project lies in the process of creating itself. Here, the real liberating moment of *New Babylon* takes place: in the embodiment of Constant's vision in the models, maps, drawings and paintings. The world of *New Babylon* was never defined as architectural reality, and was merely meant to trigger and stimulate the creativity of the inhabitants themselves. However, in the models, maps, drawings and paintings, specific possibilities do find their limit in space and time. In this respect, *New Babylon* is more of a work of art, than an architectural work. The new reality that Constant created, is not an architectural reality, but an artificial expression nonetheless.

Furthermore, the fact that *New Babylon* does not represent an architectural reality doesn't mean that an architectural possibility can never be turned into an architectural reality. The mere existence of *New Babylon* as a world of freedom without limitations, does not mean that the possibilities that we as human beings are aware of, cannot be limited at all. The fact that *New Babylon* offers no boundaries to its inhabitants doesn't mean that architecture itself can offer us no boundaries. The possibilities that man dreams of can become reality in architecture. Architectural projects can be built. In architecture, man can creates artificial boundaries for himself.

The meaning of architecture and urbanism in today's postmodern world

Plessner's philosophical anthropology provides us with a framework to understand (contemporary developments in) architecture. He explains how on the one hand, the centric positionality of human existence entails that human beings are confined to the psychophysical boundaries of themselves and their surroundings. Yet on the other hand, the eccentric positionality of human existence offers endless possibilities for freedom, as a consequence of which humans live in a world of freedom. The incompatibility of the centric and the eccentric positionality of human existence creates the fundamental drive to overcome this contradiction artificially. The human constitution forms the driving force of culture, and of architecture and urbanism in particular, for architecture and urbanism are practices in which man can resist his constitutive homelessness in a unique way. As practices that deal mainly with physical boundaries, architecture and urbanism are prominently suited to offer man artificial boundaries and a place to call home.

As cultural practices, architecture and urbanism act on the brink of possibility and reality in the sense that in architectural and urban projects, man tries to unite the two. In the long term, these efforts are in vain, as possibility and reality are in fact two sides of the same coin and can never be permanently united. The unity between possibility and reality can only be temporarily. Architecture and urbanism will therefore never be able to offer man a final home and thus, man will always remain homeless.

However, this does not lead to a relativism regarding the meaning of architecture and urbanism as practices which offer man a place to call home. On the contrary, it rather confirms their relevance. For it is in the historical and relative nature of architecture and urbanism that we find their true meaning: the human opportunity of ever continuing (self)realization. As a consequence, architecture and urbanism have no meaning as final embodiments of a perfect world, but all the more as a temporary and relative moment of (self) realization. Architecture and urbanism form a fundamental element of human life, where the freedom to create repeatedly encounters the human call for reality of place and matter. This call for reality, for boundaries, for security, for tradition and for identity, is a call that particularly in these postmodern times, architecture should take into account.

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13 Eccentric Positionality and Urban Space

Huib Ernste

Introduction

The recent renewed interest in the work of Helmuth Plessner also sparked the use of his philosophy, theories and concepts in other fields of science. Immanuel Kant, who from 1756 onwards taught geography for more than thirty years,[1] has already coined the crucial meaning of philosophy for geography as well as for history. Nevertheless, the disparity between philosophic reflection and applied human geographic research is sometimes substantial. Certainly, most theoretical positions within human geography are well founded on established philosophical positions, but as the philosopher Jeff Malpas reminded us of at the 2010 Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, there is a difference between consuming philosophical insights and having a dialogue among geographers and philosophers about these insights. On one side, this involves reflections on different philosophical positions and arguments about certain philosophical issues for geographers. On the other hand, this also involves gaining insights in the more practical use of philosophical arguments in geographic research for philosophers. This chapter focuses on the latter and therefore does not deal explicitly with the exegetic subtleties of how Helmuth Plessner's work can be interpreted, but rather tries to show how his general views could productively be used and developed further in the field of human geography. Human geography in general, and Dutch geography in particular, has a long tradition in applied research in service of sometimes also rather imperialist ruling powers (Ernste 2008; Ernste 2009). However, today's human geography is strongly influenced by a critical and emancipatory tradition (Habermas 1972). Independent of whether it is based on a critical stance or from a more mainstream point of view, in both cases, human geographers want that their research matters in practice for today's society (Massey and Allen 1985). As such human geographic research is problem oriented. Of course, it is a well-known fact that Helmuth Plessner was also not wary of critical thinking and political and social philosophy (Plessner 2003a;

1 http://www.manchester.edu/kant/Notes/notesGeography.htm

Plessner 1999). In this contribution, I therefore would like to explore how the core concept of eccentric positionality coined by Helmuth Plessner, can be used for the analysis of current societal problems and how it contributes to the related social theories.

In the following I will focus on a field of application at the core of human geography, namely urban development and urban living. The urban environment represents a specific spatial setting, which also calls for a specific way of life, or to put it in contemporary human geographic terminology, a specific human sociospatial practice. This is a specific example of the more general relationship between *space* and *human being*, which is the classical focus of human geographic research. As a starting point, I approach this relationship from a geographic action theoretic viewpoint (Werlen 1992; 2009a; 2009b), although my elaborations will also lead me to some outlooks to post-structural theories of practice (Bourdieu 1977; 1990; De Certeau 1984; Schatzki 2001), which are currently enjoying great popularity in human geography. I criticise both theoretical approaches on the ground that, to a large degree, they neglect a thorough conceptualization of the *human being* in their relationship with the environment, even though critical human geography has the pretention to put human beings in the center. Certainly, human geography is not just about human beings, but also about space and spatiality. Strangely enough, space and spatiality is nevertheless given much more thought by human geographers than the human being. To explain what I mean, let us first return to urban life as an example for such a concrete relationship between human being and space. One way to approach urban living would be by means of a fashionable theoretician like Henri Lefebvre (Soja 1996). But in this case, I prefer not to celebrate fashionability but rather focus on the argument itself. To do so, I chose to focus on one of the classics, Georg Simmel, who actually was one of the first to address this relationship so poignantly.

Urban development

In 1903, Georg Simmel wrote his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In contrast to the later Louis Wirth (1938), Simmel did not compare urban life with rural life, but rather distinguished modern urban life from pre-modern life. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the heyday of modernism, he described urban life as characteristic for a modernistic way of living. Simmel actually grew up in Berlin, at the corner of Leipziger and Friedrichstraße, during a time when the city was undergoing a trans-

formation from a provincial administrative capital into a cosmopolitan, industrialized, modern metropolis. At that time, Berlin was the world's fifth largest city in population size (Scaff 1988; Jung 1990). Simmel's deepest commitments and mental instincts were formed in a setting in which aesthetic culture, art, psychic nuance and emotive expressiveness linked to the oppositional identity of Jewish intellectuals (Käsler 1984, 357-385) and to the turn-of-the-century Viennese bourgeoisie milieu (Schorske 1981).

For Simmel, social life in modern cities was noncommittal and unengaged. Surrounded by the many others with whom one has no direct relationship, one can actually only do one thing, namely to (partly) 'switch off' or acquire a selective distance. This seems to be a recipe for how to deal with the big crowds in the city. It would not only be impossible, but also unnecessary, to actively engage with everyone one encounters. Such encounters happen, for example, when people sit next to you on the bus, when you stand in front of a traffic light next to another car, or whenever you are in an elevator with many others, not talking to each other, not even looking at each other, almost as if you are alone in this world. But even then, this kind of behavior has to be qualified as social behavior, as you do take the presence of the others into account. This peculiar kind of solitude, which seems so typical for modern cities, is a kind of togetherness based on uncommitted detachment. Being 'alone' in a full train is indeed not the same as being alone in an empty one. It demands that one coordinates one's own use of space with the movements of others, and that one communicates with each other by means of an implicit social language of indifference.

At another accession, Simmel assumes the special character of urban psyche as follows: the human being is essentially a differentiating being. People create meaning and make sense of their surrounding by selectively distinguishing different sensual impressions. We determine when and what we perceive, how we endorse certain tones and sounds, and what we simply ignore. However, this ability to filter our perceptions is heavily strained by our urban environment. In the city, we are confronted with an explosion of sensual impressions and rapidly changing sceneries, a continuously chaotic and almost random stream of impulses, which overburdens our ability to make useful distinguishments and selections about what deserves our attention. Mental life in modern cities is characterised by an overload of stimuli.

Following Simmel, Robert Park (1967, 40-41) writes in a similar fashion about the intensive stimuli of urban life, which, at least to a certain degree, may even be attractive for young and fresh nerves. The downside of this situation, especially for those with somewhat older and worn nerves, is that

one is torn somewhere between excitement and powerlessness. Such a bombardment of our senses also carries the risk that one is literally distracted, and often even agitated, causing us to respond with a blaze attitude, a kind of chronic disengagement and indifference towards our surrounding. At the time of Georg Simmel in early-twentieth-century Berlin, distancing oneself from the urban jungle still required active and perhaps forceful effort. Today, with all our mobile technologies, ranging from MP3 players to smartphones, one does not even need to appropriate such an attitude, as the technical aids pick up on this logic of detachment in a perfect way. Immersed in our private soundscape or involved in a talk with someone else at the other end of the phone, one can easily detach from the city as shared perception space or social space.

This subjective attitude also corresponds, according to Simmel, to a more fundamental aspect of modern social interaction. In this modern urban context, an increasing number of aspects of social interaction are reduced to market transactions, or the logic of our monetary economy. Walter Benjamin calls this the 'theatre of buying and consuming' (Benjamin 1986, 40). The dominance of monetary economy in modern cities also has specific effects on people's personalities, as not just the urban social constitution but also the monetary exchange relationships imply a functional, succinct impersonal way of relating to other people and the material world around us (Simmel 1997, 176). In Simmel's eyes, this latent antipathy and a kind of pre-stage of practical antagonism affect the distances and aversions, without which urban life would be impossible.

The rules of repulsion or non-participation are a part of the spatial economy of the city, according to which bodies in space are sorted and kept at a distance to minimize social exchange. This social logic on the one hand produces anonymity amongst the crowd and on the other hand encourages the urban actor to stand out and make a good performance in order to tell apart oneself from that same crowd. If nobody listens to you, it is difficult to be heard, even by oneself (ibid., 184). On the street, nobody seems to be watching, while at the same time we are all trying to present our selves to the others (Goffman 1959; Davenport and Beck 2002).

The anxiety of anonymity is the driving force, which turns the city to a stage for the performance that mediates between the individual and the collective. This is the place where the tension between the recognition and respect of others, as an ethics of identity, is played out against the isolation of the self and the current social differences. Urban life is a continuous dilemma between individual concretizations and the possibilities for urban sociality. What is crucial in Simmel's observations is that he problematizes

the idea of a harmonic urban culture. He characterizes modern urban life as under-determined, flowing, permanently becoming and overcoming (Jensen 2006).

Simmel's ideas have shown to be path breaking in urban research and have been picked up and developed further by many others. One of the most influential followers was Louis Wirth, who in 1938 wrote a seminal essay with the title: "Urbanism as a Way of Life." Here, Wirth proposed a research agenda for examining how cities produced forms of social interaction that is different from those of rural settlements, hence aiming to determine how urban and rural ways of life could be distinguished.

Wirth attempted to analyze urban culture by distinguishing three 'independent variables' – size, density and heterogeneity – which he identified as causal factors behind urban cultural life. In his own words:

> Large numbers count for individual variability, the relative absence of intimate personal acquaintanceship, the segmentation of human relations, which are largely anonymous, superficial and transitory, and associated characteristics. Density involves diversification specialisation, the coincidence of close physical contract and distant social relations, glaring contrasts, a complex pattern of segregation, the predominance of formal social control, and accentuated friction, among other phenomena. Heterogeneity tends to break down rigid social structures and to produce mobility, instability, and insecurity, and the affiliation of the individuals with a variety of interesting and tangential social grounds with a high rate of membership turnover. The pecuniary nexus tends to displace personal relations, and institutions tend to cater to mass rather than individual requirements. The individual thus becomes effective only as he acts through organised groups (Wirth 1938, 1).

All three traits mentioned by Wirth were seen as being characteristic of urban rather than rural life: only cities had large numbers, and dense heterogeneous social relations. Wirth thus implied that there was some connection between the type of settlement and psychic life; that certain sorts of personalities, psychic traits, and attitudes towards life, were closely associated with being in the city.

It is clear that Wirth drew not just on the work of Simmel, but also on Ferdinand Tönnies's (2002) distinction between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).

Although Louis Wirth's work sparked a tremendous body of research in the field of urban geography and even nowadays still seems to have some

sway over policy-makers, the idea of there being a generalizable 'urban way of life' was rejected as it showed that even in some of the largest urban environments, collective life persists in segregated groups. Many inner city populations consist of relatively homogeneous groups, with social and cultural moorings that shield it fairly effectively from the suggested consequences of number, density and heterogeneity (Gans 1968, 99). Furthermore, a number of counter examples were produced to the supposedly anonymous and anomic patterns of urban life, but also to the integrated community of the countryside. In summary, the evidence for the urban-rural contrast was found unconvincing.

However, it would be premature to completely write off Wirth's contribution, as some – mainly American writers – have recast Wirth's framework in somewhat different terms. Claude Fischer (1982), for example, argues that urban life allows the proliferation of subcultures and identities, since people can always choose a variety of bases on which to identify themselves. Urbanism allows such subcultures to proliferate, since a critical mass for the formation of a distinct culture is often only possible in a city of a certain size.

In general, Wirth's work went through a period of reappraisal in which it was recognized that the original critiques were, albeit justified, vastly overstated. Indeed, the issue of conflict, dispute and negotiation was often too neglected in this search for counterexamples. Furthermore, ethnographic studies continue to demonstrate that local contexts and spatial arrangements do matter. Finally, it was shown that these contradictory conditions and phenomena, such as community and society, usually co-exist with one another. So it might not be invalid but just more complicated.

And as we shall see below, the work of Simmel seems to point the way to go, by stressing the double sidedness of modern urban life; a double sidedeness, which Plessner analogously describes as both, the centric and eccentric positionality of human being. Simmel's description of the double sidedness of urban life was also picked up by later authors such as Urry (1990), Jay (1996), Berman (1984), Gregory (1994), Harvey (2009), Frisby (1992) and many others. Marshall Berman, for example, writes about the double sidedness of modern urban life (1984, 123). The freedom of human beings to develop and change themselves cannot be separated from the insecurity deriving from the uncertainty of urban possibilities. Here, Berman conceives the street as a microcosm of modern life and the struggle for public space as the core of modernist striving. Encounters on a street in a big city are very unpredictable. As we walk down a busy street, we never know who we are going to meet, or what will follow as a result. On the one hand, this represents an enormous potential – for example, to meet the love of our

lives, or to meet a potential employer or an old friend – but on the other hand it is very distressing – we could be robbed, attacked, or even killed.

These ethnographic descriptions do not just show an urban setting that has certain affects on human behavior and on human mental life. They are also more than just a description of the typical materiality of urban forms and urban society, as they are not only facts about urban life, but are mutually constitutive in a complex way, from which we do not just gain a better understanding of the urban but also of the human life, as well as their intricate relationship.

What is central here is the relationship between urban environment and social relations or society, which the human being is a part of. Thus, the physical form of the city is a crucial element. In traditional sociology, as well as in traditional human geography, the material objects in the urban environment are conceived as objects on which we project a certain meaning and which we use for the expression of socially determined meanings. Space as such is symbol for society. However, this view assumes a fundamentally binary world order, in which society is, in the end, kept separate from the physical environment. Life in the city is conceived from a sociocentric point of view, irrespective of whether we, in doing so, refer to 'rational choices' (Becker 1978), 'sense making actions' (Werlen 1992), 'pure communication' (Luhmann 1996), 'binding institutionalisations' (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Hall and Tayler 1996) or determining societal discourses (Foucault 1970). In all cases, the non-social disappears behind the social, even though, as Heike Delitz (2009) expressed it, we are surrounded by these physical artefacts. These artefacts are still seen as passive objects, serving only as the symbolic representation of the social, which was constituted beforehand and to a large part independently of the physical urban forms.

An alternative possibility, Delitz (2009) continued, lies in allowing urban space to play a much more active role, i.e. treating space as an active medium of the social. A number of scholars already made propositions in this direction. For example, Benjamin (1999) conceived urban structures, especially shopping arcades, as expressions of the modern consumption society, while at the same time, such shopping arcades also played an important role in the construction of the consuming subjects. Also, Michel Foucault (1984) emphasized the role of spatial configurations in the genesis of power relations. An example worth mentioning here would be the Panopticon. These early proposals do allow a two-sided relationship between urban space on the one hand, and human being and society on the other. Nevertheless, none of these scholars were able to fully overcome the classic Cartesian duality. For this task, we are in need of other conceptualizations.

One possibility can be traced back to the French sociology of life, of which Gilles Deleuze is an important representative, as he conceived urban life as an immanent process, as a 'becoming of difference.' This urban sociology, inspired by philosophy of life, does not only conceive social being as just consisting of intentional acting subjects, but rather also includes all 'bodies' in an active constellation, which can only be described in combination, as a whole, as a *Gestalt* (King and Wertheimer 2005; Marks 1998). A similar approach is conducted by Bruno Latour (2005), though he uses different terminology. Given the limiting scope of this chapter, I cannot go into more details with respect to these approaches.

Instead, as Delitz (2009) suggested, another non-Cartesian alternative, derived from philosophical anthropology, is of interest here. This school of thought is also founded on philosophy of life and enables to think of human corporeality and urban artefacts together with the social. In contrast to the French vitalism, the philosophical anthropological approach inspired by German idealism, emphasizes the special position of human beings and their ability and necessity for stabilizing human life. This implies that one does not rush to conclude the constructive character of human nature, but takes into account the special character of human biology. Following the work of Henri Bergson (1911; see also Deleuze 1991) and Hans Driesch (1909), life is conceptualized as a process of creative differentiations and as the formation of an own individuality. In addition, the theory of environment of Jakob von Uexküll (1909; see also Von Uexküll 2001) contributed substantially to this school of thought. In his theory, each living organism is bound to its own niche, which fits to its inner world. Philosophical anthropology goes one step further, as it assumes that the human being is, after all, not just like any other animal, but rather is a uniquely unspecialized animal that is characterized by a profound world-openness. These insights turn out to be more than mere philosophical speculation, as the special position of the human being is increasingly also biologically (specifically evolutionarily) founded (Portmann 1970).

It was especially the biologist and philosopher Helmuth Plessner who has systematically developed and elaborated this position. His main work was published in the same year as Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and indeed shows a number of parallels. However, while Heidegger takes time as a starting point, Plessner places the metaphor of space as his point of departure (Schatzki 2007; De Mul 2003). In this sense, Plessner argues that all living organisms constitute themselves by bordering themselves off from their environment. 'Living things' are 'border realizing things.' They therefore have a 'position' in space. However, not all living creatures are

the same. While non-human animals are bound to their niche, they do not just react automatically on impulses from the environment, but have the virtuous of choice, spontaneity, consciousness and intelligence. Yet, their choices are subject to the primacy of the practical, which coordinates their reactions (Eßbach 1994, 23f.). Human beings are different (though from an empirical point of view, the development from non-human animals to *Homo sapiens sapiens* may be gradual). The stimulus-response cycle, which still dominates animal behavior, is interrupted for human beings. The relationship between the inner world and the environment is not direct or fixed. Humans are not restricted to react to their environment from the central position only. This hiatus is the basis of human reflexivity. Human beings are at distance from their own living-centred bodily being (*Leib*) and thus *have* their own corporeal body (*Körper*) at their disposal and are, as Helmuth Plessner calls it, 'eccentrically positioned.' Like all living creatures, human beings also have to maintain their bodily boundaries. The main difference is that the human beings are aware of this, and therefore experience it as a task. Human beings are, as such, unadapted and unspecialized, not just with respect to their outer world but also with respect to their own inner world. The complexity of the unspecified stimuli, which patter down on us from the outside as well as the complexity of the excessive unspecified drives needs to be reduced. Here we can observe a characteristic similarity between Plessner's conceptualization and the autopoietic systems postulated by Varela and Maturana (1980). The human being, thus, needs artefacts, routines and institutions, to actively manage this border relationship. Through these artifices, affections, motives, actions, perceptions, imaginations and social relations are channelled and habitualized. As a consequence, human beings are artificial by nature. At the same time, the human being is not separated from this artificial environment, but rather forms a unity with it. The whole human existence is therefore an embodiment. Institutions, but also the built environment and even the natural environment become an embodiment and objectivation of his actions. Since this embodiment is artificial, it is contingent and can be changed. From this profuse vitality, as Delitz (2009) described it, all cultural processes are fed, history is made, and geographic differentiations emerge; or to use Benno Werlen's words, "everyday geography [is] made" (Werlen 2009b). So what the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner does not do, is defining the substantial essence of human being. To the contrary, instead of trying to essentialize the human existence, Plessner understands it as a permanently becoming. Plessner describes the human being as the *Homo absconditus*, the inscrutable being, inscrutable for others but also

for one self. The human being is to itself as well as to others, dependent on an expression, a mask, a role, a performance to become what it is. All the while, this mask or outer skin, also hides and distances the self from the outer world, and as such creates space for change.

The human eccentric positionality is the position of the self-consciousness. It is a place that cannot be located on any map. It is the point of view from a utopian position, from which the human being still experiences itself in its concrete here and now in the directness of its relation to the objects in the environment and to itself. But at the same time, the human being feels distanced from its own direct experiences from this eccentric position; a position beyond space and time from which the human being becomes aware of the contingency and relativity of concrete life (Plessner 2003b, 363). From this position, the human being also becomes consciously aware of individuality and the non-differentiated sociality (ibid., 375). In this non-differentiated sociality, the human being experiences himself as possibly equal to others, as part of a shared 'we'-world. It is the sphere between things and human beings and – last, but not least – also between places (Entrikin 1991). It is a utopian place, and seen from this place each concretization in life with all its restrictions in time and space cannot succeed. The eccentrically positioned human being, therefore, cannot avoid having to start over again, to continue to act, to create anew and to reinvent himself. Helmuth Plessner summarizes these insights into three anthropological laws:

1. *The Law of natural artificiality*, which suggests that each human being must create his or her own life to compensate for the natural place he or she has lost through the process of hominization (Nennen 1991, 20ff.).
2. *The Law of mediated immediacy*, according to which the relation between eccentric human beings and their environment is actively mediated by human corporeality and its artificial relatedness to the social and physical environment, enabling humans to objectify (and subjectify) themselves and their environment. Human being and identity is therefore partly created and limited by these physical, technical and cultural media.[2] On the other hand, the eccentric positionality allows the human being to aware of that which enables him to create a distance between himself and the environment and to transcend the limitations of a particular

2 In the context of urban life forms, the issue of the resistance or inherent logic of cities and their repercussions on the urban way of life is currently coined by Martina Löw, see e.g. http://www.stadtforschung.tudarmstadt.de/media/loewe_eigenlogik_der_staedte/dokumente_download/artikel/martinaloew_intrinsiclogicofcities.pdf.

mediatedness. Be that as it may, humans still cannot entirely avoid being somehow mediated (Hammer 1967, 170).

3. *The Law of utopian position* points to our eccentric positionality. From that position, we are at a distance with our own physical existence and our passive experience in a world of praxis. Because of this eccentric positionality, every human being experiences his or her 'constitutive homelessness,' which impels him or her to transcend the achieved and thus perpetually search for the unreachable 'home': a position of unambiguous fixation, a place in this world, and a clear identity for the self and the world around it. The eccentric positionality leads to a positioning in a counterfactual utopian home, a kind of 'smooth place' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 383) or 'non-place' (Augé 1995, 75f.), or perhaps also counterfactual ideal speech situation (Habermas 1984) can be seen as related to this utopian position with real concrete effects. In this utopian position, we feel related to the 'other' excluded from our own factual concrete being, doing, and saying. This detached positionality, which is constitutive of human subjectivity, is also the power of putting oneself in the place of any other person, indeed, of any other living thing. Where there is one person, Plessner says, there is every person. Thus, a particular being, in one's own limited, parochial situation, can be seen as a non-utopian concretion of this utopian generality, thereby providing a general basis for the sociality of human actions. But there are different sides to the transcendence of the particular through the postulation of, or even religious believe in, a concrete utopia. On the one hand, it is the human eccentric positionality, which makes this need for transcendence to a human a priori. But on the other hand, that same positionality towards this transcendence is unveiled as an unreachable utopia (Hammer 1967, 185ff.).

In one of my previous essays, I have already tried to show that these laws, which, because of their paradoxality, already sound very postmodern, indeed could mediate between classical late-modern action theories and post-structural approaches (Ernste 2004). Putting that aside, let us now return to the issue of understanding urban life.

Some patterns, as they were described earlier by Simmel and Berman, now gain a clear anthropological meaning. Urban life seems to be exemplary for the double aspectivity of human life as proclaimed by Helmuth Plessner. The law of natural artificiality expresses itself both in the performativity (Butler 1997; Jacobs 1998; Rose 1999) and in the hiding mask or blazé-ness of urban life. The law of utopian position shows that the idea that the human

being can live in perfect harmony and stability within its own niche, as Wirth's idealized description of the living on the countryside (in contrast to urban life) presupposes, is unfeasible or even impossible. The inherent discomfort with the actual embodiment and objectification of human life urges us to continue acting, to become creative and to search for new possibilities. The special attractiveness of cities seems partly explainable on the basis of these anthropological insights, as the vast potentialities and contingencies of cities, at least in some respects, seem to come closer to what has been described as eccentric positionality. It almost seems as if modern urban life provides a partial realization of what we would otherwise only experience from our eccentric positionality. Does urban living indeed strive towards an eccentric existence? What Georg Simmel described as process of modernisation might then in philosophical anthropological terms be understood as a process in which we try to get closer to an eccentric urban world. An eccentric urban world in which the city is formed in such a way that it offers a maximum of different possibilities, different forms of community with many different groups and in which the city is experienced as a playground for creativity, for masking and de-masking in multiple ways, and for socialisation and privatisation, for performativity and for selectivity. While we set boundaries in the city, we also transgress these boundaries and move on. In this sense, these anthropological insights in urban life are also an important input for the currently popular theories on cultures of mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006), where urban life can be conceptualized as being permanently on the move, as a continuous becoming and overcoming. Seen from this point of view, creating a city environment is an enormous challenge for the concretization and design of urban life.

But before we hurry to go and create 'the eccentric city,' a word of caution should also be given. One has to be careful when trying to determine how the utopian position or a particular utopian city should look like, as such kind of objectifications are bound to be unsuccessful. The oppositions in the three anthropological laws declare that we cannot be either/or and that we always have to be both at once: natural and artificial; immediate and mediated; utopian and concrete.

Conclusion

What we learn from these elaborations is that a philosophical anthropological approach to urban geography can indeed bring forward both a critical scrutinization of hitherto conceptualizations, as well as a number of hints

for future urban design. While the work of Simmel shows a number of relationships to the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner, the conceptualization of the urban by Louis Wirth does not reflect this anthropological sensitivity. This becomes understandable once we take a look at the broader setting in which Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth operated. As Rudolph Weingartner (1960), and subsequently Deena and Michael Weinstein (1993) show, Georg Simmel felt a close relationship with the new philosophy of life, which he tried to synthesize with the neo-Kantian legacy (Windelband, Rickert, Dilthey). At an early stage, he already dealt with the founding fathers of the philosophy of life, including Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as with the work of Henri Bergson, whose *Creative Evolution* [*L'Évolution créatrice*, 1907] at Simmel's instigation was translated into German by his student and mistress Gertrud Kantorowicz (Jung 1990, 13). Simmel is fascinated by the interplay between Life and Form. While Life, in the view of Simmel, should be understood as a continuous stream, forms are the points of rest and fixation as objectifications of the process of life, which, as such, also develop their own inherent dynamics. So mankind expresses itself in objectifications, which Hegel designated as 'objective spirit.' These objectifications reach from societal and state institutions, all the way to moral rules, habits, law, religion, art, and science, and not to forget, to architecture and urban design. While human beings need these objectifications to survive, they are at the same time bound, restricted and reduced by them. Life needs forms, but simultaneously also needs more than just these forms, which once established, always hamper the pulsating stream of life (Jung 1990). The tragedy of life is that it is compelled to constantly objectify itself in forms. Unable to ever find comfort in these same forms, life is urged to transcend them in a perpetual cycle. Life appears both as unbounded continuity, as well as a bounded 'I.' Life always strives for more life (Simmel 1918, 12). Simmel describes this as a double boundary, implying that our existence can only be described in such paradoxical terms as 'we are bounded in every direction, and we are bounded in no direction,' and 'man is the limited being that has no limit' (Weinstein and Weinstein 1993, 105). In other words, human beings are defined as boundaries of boundaries, never able to be just one thing, and always remaining elusive (ibid. 219). In this way, the individual urban dweller is ever-resistant to absorption into the urban social totality. The metropolis is the site of critical tension inherent in the atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture (109). This ambivalence of urban life shows great resemblance with postmodern thought. As such, Simmel can be characterized as a postmodernist *avant la lettre* at the height of modernism.

Louis Wirth, on the other hand, took Simmel's description more on its impressionist face value and applied it in a modernist way, which we can also describe as a behaviourist approach, describing urban forms – size, density and heterogeneity – as causal factors or independent variables, determining human behavior and human attitudes. This also suggests that one can influence human behavior by providing a certain spatial setting in such a way that the urban dweller can feel at home and in a way that lets urban communities flourish. Thus, Louis Wirth was a child of the modernist tradition of his time. Even if one does not follow his generalized conclusions nowadays and accepts that urban realities are more complex, the behavioral and modernist implications of his observations can still hold some merit. What is missing in Wirth's conceptualization of urban life, and in the work of many urban geographers in the same tradition, are the philosophical anthropological insights Georg Simmel anticipated. Not only are they extensively elaborated in the work of Helmuth Plessner, but they gained renewed relevance in the face of today's late-modernist (Werlen 2009b) and post-structuralist (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, see also Weinstein and Weinstein 1993) social constructivism (Ernste 2004).

From this philosophical anthropologically informed point of view, we can at least enjoy an improved understanding of the dialectics of urban life, as Simmel described it. At the same time, we can better imagine urban designs, which anticipate the eccentric positionality and double boundary of the urban dwelling, as well as the eccentric and becoming qualities of the city.

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14 Strangely Familiar

The Debate on Multiculturalism and Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Kirsten Pols

The groundlessness of multicultural society

For the purpose of inviting a new perspective to the debate of multiculturalism, I would like to present an account of what it is like to live in a multicultural society. This account is not from a personal or political perspective, but rather a description of two concepts (indeterminacy and embodiment) that are found in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology and political philosophy. These concepts highlight the aspects of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and culture, all of which are important when one wishes to investigate the tensions, problems and possibilities that arise in multicultural societies. They can help us understand why living in a multicultural society can be a liberating experience for some, while it can also cause anxiety to others, which then can lead people to change their attitude towards others from being open to becoming more defensive and exclusive. The key concepts in the following account are indeterminacy and embodiment. I took both concepts from Plessner's work, and in this paper I will first briefly put these concepts in the context of Plessner's own work and time, and subsequently make some suggestions as to how they will help us give an account of what it is like to live in our own time and society.

I will begin by giving a very short introduction to the debate on multiculturalism, after which I will leave this debate for what it is and try to give what I think is the best possible description of life in multicultural society. My account starts with Plessner's ideas on culture and identity, which I will use to formulate what I imagine Plessner's idea of cultural identity would look like; in Plessner's social and political philosophy, our sense of identity is a continuous process of familiarizing with the unfamiliar and vice versa. I will illustrate this understanding of cultural identity with a short description of Plessner's own experiences during his exile in the Netherlands. The aspect that is central to this experience, in a philosophical sense, is what Plessner – following Dilthey – calls the principle of *Unergründlichkeit*, a term that Plessner used in his political philosophy to emphasize the openness, unfathomability, and indeterminacy of human nature. This

principle of indeterminacy – as I will translate this term from now on for reasons I will explain in the next section – is found in Plessner's three laws of philosophical anthropology and also in Plessner's political philosophy. I believe it to be of importance for this paper because it opens the way to something unfamiliar and indeterminable that is part of our identity. The principle of indeterminacy also lies at the foundation of Plessner's concept of power in his political philosophy. According to Plessner, politics is a process relying on the ability to familiarize oneself with the unfamiliar, and the power behind this ability is grounded in our indeterminacy. Indeterminacy is the power of the possible; it endows us with freedom and potentiality.

There is another aspect, however, that features mainly in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, but which is also very important when it comes to an account of cultural identity, namely the aspect of embodiment. Indeterminacy is not just part of our existence, but it is part of our life in society. This life is always experienced, first and foremost, in an embodied way. The relation between indeterminacy and embodiment will be explained in a short description of Plessner's thoughts on laughing and crying. In the end, I hope to have demonstrated why Plessner's concepts of indeterminacy and embodiment are important when we want to think of the best possible account of life in multicultural societies.

Multiculturalism

Commenting on multiculturalism requires me to give an overview of the most prominent positions in the discussion so far, and explain where I myself side and why I do so. The discussion on multiculturalism emerged out of previous discussions on subjects such as the level of representation of African American literature or feministic literature in the curriculum of universities, the legal situation of minorities, such as the French speaking Canadians. In this discussion, multiculturalists such as Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka 2002) and Charles Taylor (Gutmann 1994) have made important contributions in arguing that cultural identity should be recognized as an essential aspect of citizenship and the rights regarding this cultural identity should be protected and put forward as (at least) equally as important as economic rights. Liberal philosopher John Rawls puts forward an unencumbered subject at the foundation and center of his *Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971) and gives priority to redistributive justice rather than recognition. This stance put him and some similar kindred philosophers in opposition to communitarians who prioritize the importance of cultural recognition.

As it becomes clear from Amy Guttmann's book on multiculturalism (Gutmann 1994) and from the numerous other books and articles that dealt with the subject after that, the discussion on multiculturalism has far more than just two positions from which one can argue from. Furthermore, the focus and label of the discussion can range from "identity politics," "politics of recognition," to "politics of difference" and many more. The scope of the issue of multiculturalism – even just in the philosophical realm – has become too broad, too diverse, and too complex for me to attempt to touch on all of it in this article.

Fortunately, the most important aspect of the discussion with which this paper is concerned, does not require us to first get acquainted with all of the aspects, goals and players in multiculturalism. The recurring problem that I wish to highlight is the difference of opinion on what aspects of subjectivity and culture are of importance when it comes to political and social justice. While evaluating this discussion, I tried to answer two questions: 1. Is a (comprehensive) theory of the subject a necessary element in the discussion on multiculturalism, and if so, 2. What should such a theory look like in order to give the best possible account of the subject of life in multicultural society? For both these questions I have found Plessner's work to be of utmost importance.

Cultural identity

Our ideas about our identity are as contingent as the concepts within our horizon to which these ideas relate. They have no ground outside of the horizon within which they originate. At the same time, when confronted, I can come to realize that my horizon is the one I am put up with: it is an inevitable part of me that I did not choose, yet for which I am nonetheless held responsible and accountable. Whenever we don't take our horizon completely for granted, for example, when it is put into questionably someone else, it can also mean that our sense of identity and our self-image are put into question. That means that the contingent character of our cultural horizon can be felt as a threat to our sense of identity. In the normal flow of life, we may take our sense of identity for granted, as we are absorbed in the roles we have taken up, the roles and patterns that were obvious to us. That sense of identity also defines our sense of integrity; as long as we act according to the roles, with their corresponding values, they give us a sense of direction and a sense of structure.

The experience of losing that sense of structure and familiarity can be a disconcerting experience that truly shakes the ground under our feet. As an example, I shall use the experiences that Plessner described from the time he was forced to live as an immigrant in Groningen (Dietze 2006, 99-186). Before he moved to Groningen, he was a citizen of Germany, but this was probably not a role by which he primarily used to define himself. More likely, he defined himself as a scholar, a sociologist and philosopher. He came from a background of affluent German citizens. As a well-educated reflexive personality, he was capable of distancing himself from any rigid or absolute definitions of his cultural heritage or social class. Nevertheless, he described his time in Groningen and his attempt to fit in, as difficult, painful and sometimes confusing. One of the first obstacles was that Groningen did not live up to his stereotypical expectations of the Netherlands (Dietze 2006, 102). This impeded his integration efforts, since even stereotypes could have at least given him some clues to what he could expect and what would be expected of him in his new societal role. Instead, he found that he would have to reconsider what he thought he knew about the Dutch culture, what the rules, practices and customs were. This he could only learn through experience, by observing customs and regulations or bumping into taboos and sensitivities he did not know. He had to experience first hand that he could not simply grasp a situation, follow intuitions, but he had to develop a new sensitivity to the structure of situations. He lost the familiarity with which he used to address situations and persons. But he also described that in this process, he lost the familiar way in which he used to see himself, that for the first time, he started to see himself as a German. That must undoubtedly have lead him to the question of what this German identity meant, what it encompassed, which was certainly not a simple task at a time when the entire German identity was being redefined in the National Socialist regime. It is important to note here that what he encountered was not something strange that determined him from outside, but something strange that had already been a part of him. He encountered the *Unergründlichkeit* in himself, which always included the strange as part of the 'own' (*das Eigene*).

Plessner's experience illustrates a concept, which he used in his philosophical anthropology as well as his philosophical sociology, namely the *Unergründlichkeit* of human being (GS V, 161). As with many German concepts, this one is difficult to translate. *Unergründlichkeit* speaks for the fact that we can never get at the center of our being, never fully grasp what we are, even though it is exactly this concept of *Unergründlichkeit* that points us in the direction of who we are. It means that we have no essence, although

Plessner is certainly not an existentialist. Since *Unergründlichkeit* also entails the fact that we are not determined by any essence of what we are, I prefer the translation of *indeterminacy* here. Though one must be careful not to confuse what I call indeterminacy with the idea of indeterminacy as something that has yet to be determined. This difference will become clearer in the following description of Plessner's laws of philosophical anthropology.

The principle of indeterminacy is sometimes called Plessner's fourth law of philosophical anthropology, though one could equally claim that the indeterminacy is a structure that is found in each of the three laws, the first of which is the law of natural artificiality (Plessner 1975, 309). As a life form that is naked, split and incomplete, man has an artificiality that is characteristic of his natural condition. Man, as a life form that is constitutively homeless, only has roots and a ground from which to exist as far as his natural artificiality creates it and carries it. Culture, the realm of normativity, is the outcome of human existence and the only way in which he can exist: the cultural norms and values we live by have to have their own weight. Their necessary adaptation to the objective world grounds their validity as independent from us. This may seem contradictory to the idea that those norms are constructed by us, therefore it is important to remember that they are constructed by us only insofar as they are an outcome of our ontological condition, rather than being constructed by us in the constructuralist's sense. The content of culture and normativity is far from absolute, but normativity and culture as such are an absolute part of the human being. They have their objectivity, which presents itself in that which we have to find or discover, as opposed to what can be constructed. Every product of culture has this structure of being dependent for its creation on human being(s) and being independent at the same time. Man, says Plessner, can only construct as far as he can discover.

As we bring culture into existence, we establish our relation to the world. This brings us to the second constitutional law of philosophical anthropology, i.e. that of mediated immediacy (Plessner 1975, 321). In short, mediated immediacy encompasses the idea that, as man lives and at the same time leads his life, he does so in immediate relation to the world and experiences this relation in a mediated way. This means that we cannot speak of two parallel relations, a mediated and an immediate one between man and his world. It is first of all an immediate one, because man realizes the possibility that is already given in the life form of the animals. Yet, in light of his loss of innocence, this immediate contact has to be given to him in a mediated way. The loss of his equilibrial relation with nature, which animals still have,

is the key to understanding expressivity. Expressivity is the driving force behind the historical dynamic of human life. Our deeds and crafts, which are supposed to overcome the impossibility of an equilibrium, succeed in this task, but at the same time undermine this very relation they established, as they can only reach the natural world in an artificial way. We try over and over again to become rooted in nature, each time with apparent success, but in the end to no avail.

The rootlessness that man tries to overcome in his mediated artificial ways is grounded in a nothingness that constitutes our life form. The third constitutional law, the law of the utopian standpoint (ibid., 341), tries to describe mankind's rootlessness in terms of the "nothing" that constitutes both man and his world. It claims that we always have to stand somewhere, be in and at a certain point in space and time, but at the same time, this position is not given to us immediately or unconditionally. We have to take a stand and be rooted somewhere and some time, but whichever standpoint we choose to take, it is always without a foundation in an absolute ground. There is no eternal or absolute point of view; there are always just positions we may occupy. These positions are necessarily groundless and so our position is always rootless. "As the eccentric positionality is precondition for the fact that man grasps reality in nature, soul and a world-along-with, so it simultaneously holds the necessity of recognizing its unsustainability and nothingness" (ibid., 346).[1]

In every one of these three laws, there is a tension between two aspects, aspects of being free and indeterminate and of being bound to the search of a natural equilibrium. This means that there is always an openness of the structure of the human being. This inevitably has consequences for the structure of our cultural identity, where the same principle of indeterminacy can be discerned.

The principle of the indeterminacy of the human being is important with respect to this paper, because it opens the way to including aspects of the unfamiliar within our sense of identity. If, according to Plessner, we always have to come to our familiarity through the unfamiliar, then our own self has carried within its boundaries aspects of the unknown or unfamiliar all along. The possibility of a subject that is completely familiar with every aspect of itself, thus completely transparent to itself, is excluded from this philosophy of human being: "The designation of eccentricity in terms of 'transferral to the Otherness in one's self' (GS V, 231) leaves room

1 The translations of citations in this text are all my own, except where no translation was needed, i.e. in the citations from *Laughing and Crying* (Plessner 1970).

for an interpretation in which the self is already occupied by the strange, so the strange does not have to force entry from outside. The wavering frontline dividing the familiar and the strange is laid transversely through the self" (Arlt 1996, 115). Plessner did not create his philosophical anthropology on the basis of the familiar characteristics of our species (rationality, language, meaning). Instead, he described structures that already include characteristics that we may not see as our 'own.' In this way he describes human being as constitutively homeless. Everything that is our home, that which we describe as familiar, natural, true to its nature and necessary, can only be attained if we abandon what we define as unfamiliar, unnatural and irrational. The friend-foe relation is one that transcends political and cultural relations between people and is always at work within every one of these relations. This is why this relation is central to what Plessner called his political anthropology (GS V, 139).

Political anthropology

Plessner starts with the observation that the question at the heart of political anthropology, i.e. the question about the relation between human being and politics, can only be adequately addressed within the domain of philosophy rather than within politics itself: "The foremost question in political anthropology: in how much does politics – the struggle for power in intersubjective relations between individuals, groups and the dealings of peoples and states – belong to the essence of man, seems to be only of philosophical relevance rather than political relevance" (GS V, 139).

Plessner deeply disagrees with such a division between politics and political theory on one side, and the issues of science, art, law and belief on the other. Practical politics needs to be pervaded with theory in order to lead to decisions, and forgetting this close relationship between theory and praxis can lead to bad politics as well as bad philosophy. "Here philosophy itself must interfere. It cannot do this by way of asking directly what the nature of the political is, pretending to comprehend it unprejudiced, instead philosophy must pay attention to the mode in which it asks the question, since philosophy itself will be put into question when asking about the nature of the political" (GS V, 141).

According to Plessner, the notion of power is what relates the fields of philosophical anthropology to the field of political theory (or what he simply calls the political). His notion of power differs from the power of a leader, the political power of a state, or physical power. Instead, power

refers to a particular structure of human being. This structure arises from the *indeterminacy*, which I mentioned earlier: "that is why the possibility of humanity, which entails that which makes mankind into mankind, that is every human potentiality, must work with the stipulations set by our indeterminacy" (GS V, 161). The principle of indeterminacy is at work, not just in the object of philosophical anthropology, but also in the underlying framework from which philosophical anthropology works, and in every theory that aspires to touch upon aspects of human being, including political theory.

A person – in the sense of Plessner's anthropology – is never fully determined, neither by nature, nor by history. History itself is something that is always open to interpretation, something that can be taken up and changed according to who questions it. Thus mankind always begs a question that has no final answer. Man, never beyond question, is also power; since he is never fully determined by anything outside of himself, he will always have the power of possibilities. This shows striking parallels to Heidegger, where *Dasein* is determined as well as design (Heidegger 1927, 145). Only death may constitute the end of possibility (Heidegger 1927, 261). For Plessner, it is the process of ageing that signifies the loss of some possibilities, yet is accompanied by the fulfillment of other possibilities. At the same time, it is also death that signals the limit of possibility (Plessner 1975, 169). Man as power is the aperture between history and future, only a snapshot moment, passed as soon as we begin to think about it. Yet no other species except for us has this aperture, this power to affect the future and history, endowed by our mere existence. According to Plessner, this structure, which he calls power, should have its proper place and significance in political theory. The structure of power endows man with potential, freedom and responsibility, and takes man as a force of change (GS V, 190, 200).

A political theory that incorporates Plessner's notion of power as well as its implied idea of human nature and history, is opposed to political theories that reduce history to a single principle or to a purposeful movement towards a specific state of affairs. Any kind of essentialism, be it regarding a group of people, a culture, a race, or even history itself, is excluded from the kind of political theory Plessner's anthropology implies. This also means that certain political systems could be criticized from the viewpoint of a political theory in which this idea of power has a place. The strongest example is a dictatorial system, where civilians are a mere complement to the dictator and there is no room for individual freedom. The principle of indeterminacy does not just exclude essentialism, historism and determinism with regards to our own Western culture, but it also affects the way we think about other

cultures and other eras "only in so far as we take ourselves as groundless, do we give up our position of supremacy over other cultures as is they were barbarians and only strangers, then we also give up on the purpose of a mission against the Other as were it an unabsolved and immature world and with that we disclose the horizon of our own history and present state unto a history that is open to heterogenic perspectives" (GS V, 161).

The principle of indeterminacy underlies power and our mental and practical skills. Our comprehensional skills are gained within the horizon of the familiar, which we strive to gain against the unfamiliar and the uncanny (*unheimliche*). This conflict between the familiar and the unfamiliar characterizes us as political beings, as everything we undertake is marked by the political struggle to gain the familiar at the cost of the alien (GS V, 191). The anxiety that accompanies our indeterminacy drives the political struggle. The anxiety that accompanies our indeterminacy has a structure that relies on our bodily existence. In order to give the best possible account of living in a multicultural society, we must therefore not forget to explain how this indeterminacy, which is such an important concept for Plessner's political philosophy, is grounded in our embodied existence. The relation between our embodied existence and indeterminacy is best described in Plessner's account of laughing and crying, which I will briefly elaborate on to highlight its relation and consequences for life in a multicultural society.

Our bodily existence in society

As I mentioned when explaining the three laws of philosophical anthropology, we normally find ourselves having a position in the world, while we simultaneously have to take a stand in that same world. The world I am speaking of is a meaningful whole, a structure of sense, signification and intentionality. This entails the whole of meaningful situations in which we find ourselves in our daily lives and in which we can respond adequately most of the time. Plessner's account of human expressivity in laughing and crying is founded in his theory of our eccentric existence as the embodied being we are. It is important to keep in mind that Plessner's theory of laughing and crying only holds true if we discard the metaphysical tradition of treating body and mind as completely separate substances. Furthermore, we must start from the idea of our fundamental situatedness in the biological world, and our mediated and indirect relation in that same situatedness. As Plessner puts it:

> Animals behave according to the situation, follow its relationships (more or less), adapt to them or perish by them; man sees them [i.e. his relations, both in the world and between the world and himself. KP] and conducts himself in the consciousness of their organization – he articulates them: through language, through schematic projects for action and for shaping. He not only masters these relations, he also understands them *as* relations and can isolate the relation as such from the concrete situation. He must take them in some *sense* or other: concretely or paradigmatically, practically or contemplatively (Plessner 1970, 153).

But according to Plessner, we also find ourselves in situations in which we cannot adequately respond to the relations within and about it. It is in these situations that Plessner takes a special interest, because they mark the boundaries of our behavioral mastery. After the nature of our existence, it is a natural fact and at the same time our moral obligation to always respond to the situation we find ourselves in and take a stand in it.

> Usually, in unequivocal situations which can be unequivocally answered and controlled, man responds *as* a person and makes use of his body for that purpose: as an instrument of speech, as a grasping, thrusting, supporting, and conveying organ, as a means of locomotion, as a means of signalling, as the sounding board of his emotions. He controls his body or learns to control it (ibid., 34).

According to Plessner, man has no choice but to respond somehow. At the same time, it is impossible to find an answer within the power of our ordinary expressive tools (i.e. language, action, etc.). It is in light of the absolute necessity and plight of taking a stand in answering to our situation, that a category of expressive movements, i.e. laughing and crying, can be specified as a singular category.

Plessner distinguishes expressive movement from gesture, bearing and gesticulatory language. Expressive movement is found in animals as well as humans, e.g. a dog wagging his tail, a chimpanzee baring his teeth, or an embarrassed girl who bows her blushing face. Expressive movements find a universal prevalence among peoples and periods; they have a compulsive onset and discharge in certain situations; and finally they have a purely expressive and reactive character (ibid., 50-51). Expressive movements are opaque and immediate: "[t]he furrowed brow, the flashing eye, the outthrust chin, and the clenched fist are components of an immediately expressive language whose transparency refers 'on its own' to an emotional

state and is not first produced by the interposition of the person (as in the case of gesture)" (ibid., 54). In short: "[i]rreplaceability, immediacy, and involuntariness give laughing and crying the character of true expressive movements" (ibid., 56).

Plessner deals with this category by illustrating how a situation can make it impossible for us to answer to it as the person we are, while at the same time demanding such an answer from us nonetheless. This can be the case because a situation is ambiguous to such an extent that it cannot be resolved by gestures or language alone. In such instances, we erupt into laughter, our body responds in a move that is neither a gesture nor a posture, but still a meaningful expression. The expression is impersonal and direct, which means that the person we are recedes into the background and our body acts as the floor for an expression that comes from our impersonal embodiment. Its answer does not mean anything besides the expression of the fact that we are unable to respond to the situation through other means. There is no other adequate response, because any response can only touch one of the multiple layers of meaning, in a situation in which they overlap each other without neutralizing each other. Jokes usually use the ambiguity which they can provoke to make us laugh. They play with meanings and set them within a context in which we cannot make normal sense of what is meant, and we laugh. For example, this is why we laugh at the cartoon character Homer Simpson when he tells his wife, during what was supposed to be a deep and meaningful discussion: "Oh, Marge, cartoons don't have any deep meaning. They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh" (Irwin 2001, 92). That is also why we laugh when someone we take seriously as a person, all of a sudden pulls a funny face. We still recognize him in the situation as a person we take seriously, but in the same situation he acts in a non-serious way. We cannot choose to either take him completely seriously, because he is pulling a funny face. We also cannot simply abandon the usual serious attitude we have because the person pulling the face is still recognized as being the same person he was. The crossing point of the layers of meaning is what we understand as the point of the joke. And so we erupt into laughter, we retain the ambiguity of the situation and we manage to respond to the situation in one and the same movement. From here, we have no trouble regaining mastery over ourselves and the situation we are in, since we never completely lost that mastery, part of it remained in tact in the laughter.

However, a situation can also be unambiguous but laden with a meaning that is too overwhelming to be grasped by our comprehensive skills. We do not feel the tension of multiple layers of meaning overlapping, but we

feel incapable of grasping the full weight of the situation and respond to it adequately. Here we cannot respond with laughter, for in laughter we answer a situation directly and impersonally. In a situation that can lead to crying, there simply is no other adequate response because no response can do justice to the full scope of what is happening to us. It is not the intensity of a certain personal feeling that leads to crying, but instead, just as in laughter, it is the relational nature of the situation. We want to acknowledge the absoluteness of what is happening, and so we refuse to put things 'into perspective,' since for us there is no perspective in that moment, and so we surrender ourselves to our tears.

If we want to give an account of laughing and crying that reckons with the complicated psychophysical structure of these expressive movements, we must abandon the traditional split between body and mind and our conventional tendency reducing phenomena to either one of these realms. Hence, Plessner's aim in describing laughing and crying is to explain and support his theory of eccentric positionality. In contrast to other bodily movements that we use meaningfully, e.g. speaking, shaping, acting, the body acts autonomously in laughing and crying. And only in a being that has an eccentric relation with his body, can the body act autonomously as the medium of meaning. Laughing and crying are exceptional because they make the unity of the body collapse, and they maintain it at the same time. The person retreats temporarily into the background as he let's his body answer for him. The function of elaborating on these exceptional cases is to show the bodily nature of our existence and to emphasize the role of the body in the way we find and express meaning in our existence. That means it is also important to account for the role of our body in our relation with culture and society.

The cultural and the political

In light of the discussions on multiculturalism, I had posed the following questions at the beginning of this paper: is a (comprehensive) theory of the subject a necessary element in the discussion on multiculturalism? And if so, what should such a theory look like in order to give the best possible account of the subject who lives in a multicultural society? If we look at what Plessner said about the relationship between philosophical anthropology and political theory, the answer to the first question is affirmative. The notion of power that is of central importance in political theory, is deeply connected to the way power features in the human being itself. The answer

to the second question is also derived from Plessner's philosophy and has embodiment and indeterminacy as its central concepts.

If we want to give the best possible account of what it is like to live as a subject in multicultural society, we must also include our embodiment, as it plays such an important part in finding and expressing meaning in our existence with each other. I think Plessner's work is very fruitful in this respect, since his philosophical anthropology puts great emphasis on embodiment and at the same time gives an account of our embodiment that is open and complex enough to function well as a foundation for his political philosophical account of society. The openness that we find in his three laws of philosophical anthropology, and which accounts for the dual role that our body plays in situations such as laughing and crying, is the same openness that we find in Plessner's account of power and indeterminacy when he writes about political philosophy. The fact that this openness is always correlated to our embodied nature closes the circle in which we tried to tie together his philosophical anthropology and political anthropology to give the best account of life in multicultural society.

If we agree with Plessner's view of the political, which he sees as the matrix of relations that entails the exertion of our primary power in order to familiarize the unfamiliar, then the political has been connected all along to the structures that we find in philosophical anthropology. Political theories that speak about society, always address the relations between groups and individuals, whether directly or indirectly. Any theory that wishes to do justice to those relations cannot avoid the principle of indeterminacy. The best possible account of what it is like to live in a multicultural society accepts that there is no singular relation between an individual and his or her cultural background, nor is there one between an individual and his or her body. Furthermore, it takes into account that the body plays an important role in the relation of a person towards his or her culture, not only in the sense that cultural expressions often involve the body, but also in that the relation towards the body is influenced by culture. None of the relations are straightforward or singular, all of them bear an ambiguity that we often wish to overlook in the hopes of simplifying the ethical discussions about cultural practices or group rights. A complex and ambiguous account of life in a multicultural society is not the easiest one to use in discussions on multiculturalism, but it might be able to build bridges in the discussions that more monistic accounts could not build.

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15 De-Masking as a Characteristic of Social Work?

Veronika Magyar-Haas

This article aims to examine the consequences for the analysis of the structural logics of social work, as well as for the analysis of professional social pedagogical acting, with Plessner's interpretation of masks serving as a theoretical background. By referring to Helmuth Plessner's approaches on "natural artificiality" (GS IV, 383f.) and "ontological ambiguity" (GS V, 63f.), it can be assumed that masks are indispensably relevant for social interactions. Masquerades presume a participant's distance to himself, to others and to the situation. Analogously, de-masking is meant to reduce this distance by fixing or suppressing behaviour with the help of certain contextual conditions. This interdisciplinary paper will tackle the empirical question of the constitution of agency in structurally de-masking, shameful situations.

The contribution is structured into five parts. After the introductory sequence (1) about the provoking undertaking to interconnect philosophical anthropology, social work and empirical research, I will sum up (2) the topicality of Plessner's theory of masks. Next, I will reconstruct the possibilities of (de)masking on the level of structural logic (3) as well as in the actual practice (4) of social work. The paper closes with some continuative thoughts (5).

Interconnection of philosophical anthropology and social work

In the German context, the discipline of social work is not a discipline explicitly turning towards anthropological subject matters. Social pedagogical research deals with the reconstruction of circumstances and with coping the strategies of clients, as well as with the analysis of the conditions of acting with regard to professionalism, organization, social structure and social policy. Despite all that, the renaissance of Plessner in the socioscientific and philosophical research appears – quite unhastily – in the social pedagogical context, too. This trend can be noticed when critics state that the discipline and profession of social work lacks an explicit, dispread and binding (or obligatory) idea of man. These opinions give rise to the propagation of

Plessner's concept of man. Carsten Müller even promotes it as an essential benchmark for professional orientation (Mühre l and Birgmeier 2009, 201-11).

The idea to conceive an instruction for professional acting based on an anthropological perspective is somewhat naive, particularly if the anthropology of Plessner is expected to foot the bill for this task. Plessner neither formulated an optimistic nor a pessimistic anthropological perspective. Hence, he did not draw univocal ethical conclusions from anthropology – which would be a fallacy according to Oelkers (1992, 159).

In this paper I argue that the force, strength, and the (social)pedagogical connectivity of Plessner's anthropology is based precisely on his non-categorical concept of man. On the basis of phenomenological analysis, Plessner reconstructs three "levels of organic being" (GS IV). Here, Plessner does not start with one's own perceiving body, but with the distant object as it appears to perception (Fischer 2000, 271) and as it is related to the environment. Plessner conceptualizes human beings as "inscrutable" (*unergründlich*) and does not lay down any kind of catalogue of criteria (GS V, 160). Plessner applies the characteristic of "eccentricity" (GS IV, 364) as a metaphor for the insight that human beings are bound to the here and now, while at the same time create a distance to themselves, "put[ting] a gap between themselves and their own experiences" (GS IV, 363).

Thus, eccentricity is a "principally realized [...] distance (*Abständigkeit*) of the human being to himself in his (outer-, inner-, con-)worldly references" (Schürmann 2006, 34). By this possibility of dissociation, by having broken up the bodily cohesion via eccentric circumstances, the human being may *be* and *have* a body at the same time (GS IV, 367). It is this ambiguous relation, the interconnection between being and having a body, between conditionality (*Zuständlichkeit*) and objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*), that the expressivity and instrumentality of the body (GS VII, 248f.) corresponds to as "two permanent dimensions of human expressive activity" (Richter 2010, 12). In his philosophical work concerning expressivity, *Laughing and Crying*, Plessner marks the difference between mimic and gestural expression by means of the relation between the "form of expression" and the "content of expression" (GS VII, 260). Mimic insolvably merges the form of the expression with its intention or content. In contrast, gestural expressions show the separation of form from content and thereby the instrumental character of the relation to one's own body. The interpretation whether an expression is actually mimic or a typically mimic expression (like the one expressing disgust) is utilized or stylized as a gesture (ibid.), though it depends on the social situation (ibid., 264) without having proof of the accuracy of the interpretation. In this sense, human beings cannot be

predefined, as the characteristic of a person (*das Personenhafte*) expresses itself by the performance between being and being-different.

Accordingly, after the reconstruction of Plessner's approach at masks in the next chapter, the following questions seem to be relevant for the context of social work, in which "the preservation and the guarantee of the bodily and psychosocial integrity of each person in the sense of an accepted plan of the dignity of human beings" (Oevermann 1996, 88) serve as core criteria for professional acting: How does the constitutional non-fixability appear in this context? How broad is the scope for opportunity-relations? In which way do clients and professionals handle this scope? On the basis of these empirical questions, I will evaluate which new questions and cognitive interests arise, if Helmuth Plessner's anthropology is used as theoretical frame of reference.

Plessner's theory of masks

If Plessner's anthropology (GS IV) is understood in relation to the philosophy of life of his time and to the discourses held about the difference between the animalistic and the human way of existence – which I consider to be necessary – then the current renaissance and topicality of Plessner's theory may look amazing, but only at first sight.

The focus of anthropological reflections today lies on artificiality. In the centre of these reflections, the potentialities of transformation (*Verwandlungsmöglichkeiten*) of the human body by way of artificiality have high relevance. The question is less that of the special feature of the human body. Instead, the question of interest could be: What exactly does sensory/bodily perception mean, if this perception can be modified or switched off via artificial implants, operations, the expunction of temporality, or of the presence of time of the body?[1]

In the following paragraphs, I will refer to the "anthropological fundamental law" (GS IV, 383) of "natural artificiality" resulting from the eccentrical positionality. I will do this because, firstly, the concept of natural artificiality is related to current discourses, and secondly, because I think that this constitutional law explains human beings as by their nature being only conceivable as social (Rehberg 2008, 38), most explicitly in their socially graspable existence[2]. The existential brokenness of human beings

1 I thank Rita Casale very much for these thoughts.

2 This is one of the arguments that Plessner had not conceptualized individual-related, rather a social-related ethics, as Fischer pointed out, too (Eßbach et al. 2002, 87).

(GS IV, 383), the non-coincidence of the self with himself/herself, which constitutes the inscrutability, is also the foundation of the dependence on culture and artificiality, and by analogy, the desire for masks. This non-coincidence leads to a life of indirectness, serves as a decisive incitement of inter-subjective processes, and constitutes the interdependence of the self with others.

In *The Limits of Community* [*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 1924], Plessner argues that because the soul is "becoming and being in one" (GS V, 62f.), it cannot sustain a definitive estimation or judgment and defends itself against any preliminary determination. But it is in need of authentic visibility, too, because "the soul suffers from nothing more than from being disregarded" (ibid., 64). Plessner metaphorizes this "ambiguous nature of the soul," the simultaneousness of visibility and invisibility, of unveiling and disguising or covering, of recognisability and misjudgement as "ontological ambiguity" (GS V, 63). What follows are the two basic powers of human life: the urge for revelation, or the "need for recognition," and the urge for restraint, called shamefulness (GS V, 63). The playful wresting (*Entwinden*) and the diverse possibilities of performance become obvious by this non-fixability.

In conclusion, it may be stated that human beings are in need of (social) masks because their manner of existence is fulfilled in a dignified way (Haucke 2003, 41). Dignity – as a crucial point in Plessner's philosophy – is "the idea of a harmony of the soul and between soul and expression, soul and body" (GS V, 75). Scopes and spaces of acting, possibilities of disguise and freedom of masks are essential for the protection of dignity and for granting this harmony, this balance between soul and bodily expression. Joachim Fischer sums up that "the mask is a desire of the soul, an invention of the mind and a performance of the body: it is an artificial boundary of the expression" (Eßbach et al. 2002, 97). By limiting or preventing the scopes of acting (such as through complete frankness, as it is enforced by the community), by the momentary revelation of the soul, the harmony becomes brittle. The inscrutability seems to be voided by the fixation of human beings and the limitation of their ability to mask. The loss of face resulting on the one hand from the risk of being laughed at, which is constitutive for the soul, and on the other hand from the conditions of social contexts, needs compensation, it has to be "dressed" via masks, or possibilities to disguise and to draw artificial boundaries (GS V, 71f.), marked at the verbal or at the non-verbal level. These compensatory ways of behaviours allow for the protection of one's own dignity and integrity.

Plessner is not the only one and not even the first who became fascinated and stimulated by the manners of the seventeenth-century French

society aristocratic imprint, as Wolfgang Eßbach (2002, 73) pointed out. Dorothee Kimmich (Eßbach et al. 2002, 162) has shown the closeness of Plessner's theory to the idea of mask freedom, Heinrich Heine's "Maskenfreyheit" (Eßbach et al. 2002, 165f.). For Heine, the authentic expression of one's own emotions – instead of playing with the masks – represents a kind of latent violence rather than a gesture of liberation. According to Kimmich, Heine connects the ethic of distance[3] with the aesthetic of illusoriness. What makes Plessner so special is that he goes one step further: he explains certain elements of courtly-aristocratic performance by way of anthropology.

In the following section, I will analyze the relevance of this anthropologically sound social masquerade in the context of social work. The question becomes: Which scopes and spaces of acting, possibilities of disguise and freedom of masks are allowed, opened up, or constricted for protecting the dignity and integrity of the clients or addressees? The difference between client and addressee is not only semantic; as there has been a heavy theoretical discourse in the past few decades on these issues (Großmaß 2011).

De-masking features in the structural logic of social work

With the social-ethical reading of Plessner's theory concerning artificiality and the desire for masks (GS V, 41) there emerge three critical possibilities of connection on the dimension of the structural logic of social work. The first level concerns the construction of clients, the second level concerns conceptualisations of social pedagogical acting, and the third level of the analysis concerns research methods in the field of social work.[4]

The first level basically preoccupies itself with the question: social work – for whom? This question concerns the problem of identification and identifiability, which results from the social mandate with its nature of normalization. Potential addressees will be identified on the basis of

3 Helmut Lethen explains (Eßbach et al. 2002, 39) this approach of distance-behavior by Plessner as a behavior of coldness. See the critical article to Lethen's interpretation by Wolfgang Eßbach (2002, 63f.).

4 Some of the following paragraphs have been published in my article "Critique of the Community – Mask – Dignity: The Relevance of Plessner's Ethics for Social Work," published in Bettina Grubenmann and Jürgen Oelkers, eds., *Das Soziale in der Pädagogik. Zürcher Festgabe für Reinhard Fatke* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2009, 77-96).

certain characteristics.[5] Their circumstances and life plans will be accurately described, and their situation becomes quite transparent through the process of software-based documentation. Thus, questions like: How could some kind of distance to the situation become possible, or how broad is the scope for playing with masks for possibilities to disguise, might become highly relevant here.

The second level of the interconnection hints at problems with some theoretical conceptions concerning social pedagogical, professional acting. The divergent procedure of prevention, social early warning systems, as well as the concept of evidence based practice, suggest the possibility of fixation and predictability of prospective acting (Magyar-Haas and Grube 2009), as well as the potential controllability of human relationships (GS V, 16). According to an article by Rabe-Kleberg, professionality lies in the active balancing of paradoxical situations, which in the context of social work can be countless (Combe and Helsper 1996, 285f.). The antinomy lies on the analytical level between two different ways of reasoning: firstly, between the rationality of organization and the rationality of service, and secondly, by the double mandate to serve both the society and the client.

As a criterion of professionalism, Gildemeister und Robert postulate the development of strategies which are based on knowledge and are orientated towards the situation and towards the clients to recover from their hurt and vulnerable integrity (Müller et al. 2000, 319). Furthermore, professionalism means the realization of "communicative symmetry," which presupposes cooperativeness as well as trust – on the part of the clients. It is remarkable that with most profession-theoretical concepts, the focus lies primarily on the professionals. Even if the relationship between client and professional is conceptualized as intersubjective and interrelational, a rather passive role is ascribed to the client. They are supposed to follow the intentions and guidance offered by the professional. Clients are supposed to cooperate and have trust in the setting, while professionals are supposed to manage.

Quite seldomly does the social-ethical perspective of the concept of trust (Brumlik 2002) come to the fore. This requires cross approval and respect, as well as possibilities to keep one's distance, to wear and play with masks and the trust not to be fixed or defined according to certain characteristics. The potentiality of de-masking appears particularly in the institutional

5 Weakness and unwillingness to work are the most used characteristics in the political and public discourses. In the German context the clients of social work are strongly exposed to labeling as "new underclass" (Nolte 2004, 35, and also see the critical perspectives by Kessl 2005 and the Kessl et al 2007).

context. De-masking means – referring to Plessner (GS V, 70-76) and Heine (in Kaufmann 1972) – the demolishing or tearing down of masks and, in analogy to this, the narrowing of the possibilities of concealment and agency. In Helmuth Plessner's anthropology, masks serve as constitutive elements of the human being, of being a person. According to this, processes of identification, "clientification," or the tendency to make clients more transparent, would serve as an attempt for de-masking.

I come to the third level in my analysis of the structural logic of social work, where I will pursue the question of what kind of new knowledge and incitement arise on the level of social pedagogical research if the theory of masks, conceptualized by Plessner, serves as a theoretical background. The reading of Plessner's approach scrutinizes the suggestion of the evidence-based practice that research could provide explicit instructions for acting in professional practice. Analogous to this logic, the client would be construed as a passive "type" and accordingly, professionals could find the "problem to the solution" (Pfadenhauer 2005, 12). Furthermore, even in the case of evidence-based research results, applying generalities to individual cases would be as naive and inadmissible as to generalizing from one individual case to the whole population. Empirical research provides empirically based results and produces knowledge which can serve as a context of reflection for professional acting.

In the context of social work, there is a desideratum of research about the tactics of clients, about their handling of shameful situations in the context of social work. The question seems to be relevant to what kind of scope can be used for playing with masks and for gaining some distance to the situation in order to protect the integrity of professionals and clients.

In the article "The Social Production of Clients," Sarah Hitzler and Heinz Messmer (2007) show through their research concerning the analysis of conversations in the semi-annual care planning reviews, the performative construction of clients via social addressment, identifications, objectivations, and social categorization (in Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al. 2007, 47f.). The conceivable tactics of clients in this specific, hierarchical situation have no relevance for their interpretations. Paying attention to Plessner's anthropology, the tactic of not saying anything could be seen as the last, scanty option of escaping from being completely fixed (Canetti 2003, 337f.).

By concentrating on clients in the social pedagogical field under the perspective of freedom of mask, the sequences of the conversation during care planning reviews could also be analyzed, in spite of the dramatic situation, as a kind of context-sensitive play, as a self-determined actionability of the client: like engaging with the situation, staging himself/herself as a

client, bursting out with laughing, not signing the documents and so on. Such a performance requires a certain distance to the situation, which happens rather seldomly under hierarchical conditions.

De-masking features in the practice of social work

By exploring an empirical example,[6] the fourth part of this paper focuses on the following questions: How and under which conditions do processes of de-masking emerge? How do clients and professionals handle situations characterized by de-masking? What kind of possibilities become obvious by the bodily-spatial action context? These questions will be pursued on the basis of audiovisual empirical data that was recorded at a youth centre, in a social-pedagogical context of open youth work. The social-scientific method of video-interaction-analysis (Knoblauch 2009) allows for the interpretation of nonverbal forms of expressivity such as gesture and facial expression, behaviour patterns and ways of life, as well as the analysis of processes of de-masking and potentially also re-masking in a certain context. A transcribed excerpt of a videographed girl's parliament meeting, taking place bi-weekly, is shown below.

> In the context of a girls' parliament meeting at an open youth institution with 20 participants, Anne reports that Nicole, a girl "of their's," went to her friend Susy and told her that Anne was exploiting her. The social pedagogue asks the girls what they make of it. The girls sit on chairs, arm-chairs or on the sofa, all arranged in a circle. They predominantly look at the floor in the middle of the circle or look at Nicole or Anne. Some girls have crossed their arms in front of their breasts and move towards the backrest, support their thighs with their hands or leave their hands rest on their laps. Helen, who is sitting on the sofa next to the social pedagogue, says while bending the upper part of her body forward: "Okay, eh, I think, sh, why should you, even if, let us say, let us say, eh?" and looks at the two others who are sitting next to her on the sofa with a grin. She looks backwards and laughs. "Eh, let us say, Susy is

6 This abstract of a video-ethnographic report as well as several aspects of the following analysis have already been published in German language in my article "Subtile Anlässe von Scham und Beschämung in (sozial)pädagogischen Situationen," in Arbeitskreis Jugendhilfe im Wandel, ed., *Jugendhilfeforschung. Kontroversen – Transformationen – Adressierungen* (Wiesbaden: VS, 2011, 277-289). See this article for further thoughts on theoretical approaches to shame and humiliation.

> exploiting Anne, eh, and we all know this, but after all, we don't have any reason – excuse me – after all we don't have any reason, have we? To go to Susy or to Anne and no. To Susy?" While speaking, Helen looks at the two girls sitting together and mutually caressing their arms alternatingly. "To Anne," says Susy. Helen is smiling and continues, while focussing Nicole and bending forward even further: "To go to Anne and say, Susy is exploiting you. Because, what will she do? What will she do then? Yes, you all know very well, if she goes there, to Anne and says, yes, Susy and so, what will happen? Stress. Eh, trouble. And that is her aim, that is what she wanted to achieve. Eh, let's ask Nicole, when you went to Susy and told her everything, what was your aim? What did you want to achieve?," asks Helen, firmly gesticulating with both hands while speaking. "I didn't want to achieve anything," Nicole replies while moving with her chair slightly out of the circle and looking at Helen. During Helen's speech she looks at the floor or at the plush duck she holds in her hands. "And why did you say that?" asks Helen. "Because, I had said it already, for me it was a joke, but perhaps it is not a joke for you, so –," she stops and throws the plush duck back and forth. "Yes, but what did you want to achieve with this? With this joke?" "I did not want to achieve anything," says Nicole. "Why why why to them? Why, let us say, why didn't you go to Monica and tell her this?" "Because, perhaps because Susy was then standing beside me?" A girl from the circle joins the dialogue between Helen and Nicole: "Eh only because of having fun or something like that?" "Okay, I won't say anything at all" – says Helen.

In the presence of all the girls at the youth centre during the girl parliament meeting, a conflict between two girls is quasi-publicly discussed. In the following paragraphs I will give an analysis of the kinds of conditions that are straitening the ability of masking.

The social and official function of the girls' parliament meeting is primarily education towards democracy, in the sense of Dewey (2002). In addition to the aspect of democracy, the establishment of a discursive setting has high relevance for professionals. Rituals provide reliability, have something confidential and make a contribution to integrate individuals into a group – or even a community. Yet at the same time, rituals are one of the most effective social strategies for establishing and intensifying social power as well as hierarchy structures in a very implicit way (Butler 1993).

In the girls' parliament meeting, everyone is sitting in a circle. The circle is quite a popular shape in the various pedagogical contexts as outlined by Magyar-Haas and Kuhn (in Tchibozo 2010, 7-15). The idea behind it is

equality and a reduction of hierarchical relationships in order to have the possibility of looking into each other's eyes and thereby receive the full attention of the other person. However, participants in circle rituals are always completely physically exposed to other people's views, without any chance to avoid them. They cannot stay out of the group's sight, which constructs a paradoxical situation. Based on his theory of recognition, Emmanuel Levinas (1998) pointed out that others are constitutive for the self, particularly for self-awareness. At the same time, it is also the gaze of others which might make someone feel ashamed (Sartre 1993). Jean-Paul Sartre points out the existence and significance of others by the analysis of shame. There would be no shame for the lonely self. In the face of the shameful gaze of others, a person perceives and sees herself or himself compared to the benchmark set by others. Sartre considers the expression of shame to be chiefly an internalization of power. Due to the restricted possibilities to evade or compensate, the potential shamefulness of a situation becomes particularly increased when sitting in a circle. The possibilities to make a stand, and to compensate behaviour are limited in this potentially shameful and de-masking situation.

The reserved position of the bodies of the girls, such as folding their arms or pressing their bodies to the back of the chairs indicates the desire to keep some distance to a situation when they are discussing private affairs in public. In the scene presented above, the girls in the circle are discussing what somebody has done and why she did so. During the discussion about this topic, the girls' parliament meeting gradually shifts into a tribunal. This occurs with reference to an orientation towards norms. On the basis of the differentiation between the dimensions of I and We, or from the analytical perspective, between private and public, it will be demonstrated by how little space is left for playing with roles and masks, in a setting which is predestined for role-playing.

The scene is a diametrical debate between Helen and Nicole. Helen's dominating position results from the power of verbalism and from her bodily position, from her moving to the frontline. She argues while playing the role of an advocate. Helen demonstrates her solidarity with Anne and with the shared norms of the collective, which are symbolized through Anne. The girls stage closeness and intimacy by laughing together and by leaning their bodies towards each other.

During her speech, Helen addresses a girl sitting in the circle with her eyes, and after a while also verbally by saying "Let's ask Nicole." Nicole, holding a soft duck toy in her hands, avoids eye contact with Helen. She looks at the floor, at the girl beside her, at her duck and so on, but not at

Helen. Nicole uses the variability of this spatial arrangement and tries to move away with her chair from this pedagogically arranged circle. She keeps the others at a distance and is kept at a distance by the girl to her left. She will be construed and identified as "guilty" by means of a specific bodily-spatial context, by gazing at her and by repeating the same questions: "Why?" and "What did you want to achieve with this?" With these questions, Helen refers to the intentionality and responsibility of acting. She expects rational arguments from Nicole, but instead only receives the reply "for me it was a joke." This seems for Helen not a reason at all. This setting (the form, the spatial arrangement and the discussed topic) do not really leave room or scope for getting out of the situation. The hurling of the duck by Nicole serves as a comment on the created constraints of justification.

The implicit topic of the setting is to find out if Nicole is part of the group, whether or not she is part of the "us." This "we" is construed in the scene in a performative way: "and we all know this, but after all, we don't have any reason." Nicole takes up this differentiation. She addresses Helen not as a single person, but as a representative of the whole group with its shared norms. Nicole says: "for me it was a joke, but perhaps it is not a joke for you." Because of the supposed intentional violation of the norms of the group, Nicole risks sanctions in the form of being excluded. In this sequence, Nicole has reduced possibilities of gaining some distance to the situation and drawing artificial boundaries that are essential for saving one's face and dignity. "Losing honour is losing face," as Agnes Heller (1985) pointed out. Nicole is publicly exposed and unmasked by the de-construction of her status as a person, by tearing off her masks.

This conglomeration of space, setting and a specific topic, construct a potentially shameful situation. In this might lie the power of shame. On the basis of the allegation of guilt, the group is construed and the legitimacy of its norms is re-produced.

The lack of possibilities to compensate in shameful situations results from a situation of powerlessness. The social worker is sitting beside Helen, but she does not intervene and it seems that she does not really feel well about the situation.

Conclusion

If the mask is supposed to protect oneself from the tyranny of intimacy (Sennett 2008), it is relevant to consider the social and spatial conditions of masking and de-masking, too. The situation has shown that the room

for disguise or for handling potentially shameful situations like this may be quite narrow. Shameful situations can serve as a method for taking human beings to the common values of the group and for internalizing the predominant norms of the collective. According to this, the phenomenon of shame and of de-masking would be a method of socialization – and herein lies the power of shame (Heller 1985). Loyalty to the norms of the group, like the norm of appreciating the private sphere, serves as the most significant norm in the sequence. The paradoxical side of this is that precisely this norm of appreciating the private sphere is demanded through the lack of appreciation of this norm in the context. Because here, in this setting of the girls' parliament meeting, a conflict between two girls is discussed in public, in the presence of all the girls at the youth centre. In this sense, the scene reminds of an ostracism.

In most pedagogical situations, moralization seems to be established as a method of integration of the youth into the predominant system of norms. In addition, social work fulfils an explicit role of normalization. This is the reason why in social pedagogical fields of acting, it is getting more important to consider the situational conditions of the genesis of shame. If we want to understand social work as a profession of justice (Schrödter 2006), the right to dignity and integrity is of high relevance, too. These are formidable challenges for social work, which cannot be considered only at the intradisciplinary level but also require reliable interdisciplinary and international perspectives and debates. The connectivity of Plessner's masks approach, even to the social work, could be illustrated at the level of discourse, research and actual practice.

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16 Helmuth Plessner as a Social Theorist

Role Playing in Legal Discourse

Bas Hengstmengel

Plessner's social philosophy

Relatively independent of his anthropological groundwork in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928), Helmuth Plessner developed a philosophy of the public sphere in some of his other works. In his social and political works *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1924), *Macht und menschliche Natur* (1931), *Diesseits der Utopie* (1966) and *Die Frage nach der Conditio humana* (1976), he presents a philosophy of public life as a sphere of social roles, prestige, ceremonial, tact, and diplomacy. Man is regarded as a role player who wears masks. Although Plessner does not develop a complete social, political or legal theory, his work contains important building blocks for other theories in these fields. In my view, social role playing is a key concept for enabling Plessner's work to contribute something fruitful in these domains. Given this connection, this concept is the central theme of this chapter.

Interestingly, Plessner's thoughts on man as a player of different social roles has the potential to mediate between his anthropological theory and his social (or sociological) theories. One of the fields of social theory in which role playing has a clarifying potential is that of legal discourse, more specifically the purpose and function and functioning of the legal process. Legal subjects in a process can be regarded as prototypical role players, as their action potential is strictly framed by process law, practices and customs. Plessner's notion of social roles can offer a model for the legal subject as an abstract bearer of rights and duties. Unfortunately, social role theory is rarely discussed among legal scholars. In this chapter, I try to fill this void by presenting some elements of a Plessnerian theory into legal discourse. I relate Plessner's thoughts on social roles and the public sphere to relevant thoughts of some other social theorists, especially to Niklas Luhmann's sociology of law.

The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, I discuss some key elements in Plessner's social philosophy. Secondly, I briefly discuss some comparable elements in the thought of Sennett, Tonkiss, Arendt and Huizinga. Thirdly, I discuss Luhmann's sociology of law, with an emphasis on the legal process.

Next, I try to integrate these perspectives into a more comprehensive approach. Finally, I make some concluding remarks by showing some threats in Plessner's perspective to both the stability of the self and the stability and functioning of the legal system.

Plessner's social role theory

Plessner elaborated the notion of the "indeterminacy" (*Unbestimmtheit*) of man, both as an ontological and social ambiguity. In *Die Stufen*, the ontological ambiguity is understood as "eccentric positionality." In his social and political works however, the position of man is not so much characterized by the recognition of man's individuality in the ontological *Mitwelt*, but by the indeterminacy and invulnerability of the inner man in relation to his social surroundings. The emphasis is not on the ambiguity of human nature, but on the ambiguity of the human soul. It is the "despair of his inwardness" (*Verzweiflung seiner Innerlichkeit*) that forces man to search for "roads to invulnerability" (*Wege zur Ungreifbarkeit*) (Plessner 2002, 92). Here, the concept of social roles is crucial for understanding these "roads."

In order to function in public life, man needs the equipment of a mask that hides his interiority, but at the same time enables him to interact with his environment. Because of the ambiguity of the self and the doubt about his interiority, man needs "roads to invulnerability," just like he needs ceremonies and prestige (Plessner 2002, 79ff; Richter 2005, 165). Man has to play roles, but can never be defined by any of them. In this sense, he is a "*Doppelgänger*") (Plessner 1974b, 30). Man cannot do without continuing self-exegesis. He never *is* anything, but he constantly *becomes* something. He has to "lead" his life (Dallmayr 1981, 71, 73). He is neither an angel, nor an animal; he is the only one that appears as a *Doppelgänger*. He only becomes a self through the doubling as a role figure (Plessner 1974b, 33). Because of his roles, he has an intimate sphere (Dallmayr 1981, 73).

Whereas on the outer side man is the figure of his role, on the inner side he is a self (Plessner 1974a, 20). This self, however, cannot be conceived of as something separated from its social role, as it would thereby lose its humanity. In other words, there can be no inner man without an outer man. The outer man makes the inner man possible (Plessner 1974b, 30). On the inner side, man can never be one with his "self," but can only be one with something, with someone, with "me." On the outer side, he can only meet others through a role (Plessner 1974a, 20). The social role enables a person to stay socially untouched to a certain extent, and to have a zone of privacy,

intimacy and personal freedom. A role secures a certain respect for the individual and protects him from his public character (Plessner 1974b, 26). Therefore, he cannot escape his situation as a *Doppelgänger*.

Man as a "defective being" (Gehlen's *Mängelwesen*), needs culture ("natural artificiality") to live and a role to have an identity. In the classical notion of the *theatrum mundi*, every man has a fixed role to play in the order of being, that is to say, his identity *is* his role. With the birth of the modern "I," the private identity is separated from the public one. The roots of this development can already be found in Augustine's "inward turn" (Taylor 2003). In contemporary, functionally differentiated society, one man can play many roles that need not be connected at all. His private identity "hides" behind the roles that he plays. Moreover, the inner side is often regarded as the "authentical" real, while the outer side is viewed as "unreal" and artificial. According to Plessner, however, there is no inner man without an outer one.

In Plessner's conception of social roles, the playing of roles is not so much an alienation of the self, but to the contrary, the roles make it possible for man to embody himself. Through role playing, he can learn about himself and others (Dallmayr 1981, 76). Public life, according to Plessner, can be regarded as a "basic form of human coexistence." It is essential for human beings to have a zone in which they are strangers to themselves. This zone is the public sphere (Plessner 1974a, 10).

The concept of public sphere or public realm is complex and much discussed, e.g. by Arendt, Habermas and Sennett (see for example, Delanty 2007 and Lofland 2007). When talking about the public sphere, one can, for example, distinguish between the public-political, public-social and personal-social sphere (Van Gunsteren 1998, 138). Plessner loosely and sometimes ambiguously uses the term *Öffentlichkeit* (the public). It covers all the aforementioned categories. *Öffentlichkeit* is the opposite of man's internal-psychological sphere; it is the opposite of the indeterminacy and invulnerability of the inner man in relation to his social surroundings. Therefore, man is as much a role player in family life as he is in, for example, his occupational life or in politics.

The public sphere, according to Plessner, is the open system of interaction between unbound people. It is loose enough to absorb the "fluctuations of life" in all its shades and let it pass through it. This open system of interaction particularizes into peculiar spheres in accordance with specific classes of values, such as the spheres of law, morality, education, the state, economics, and human interaction on the individual level.

According to Plessner, the public sphere is the sphere of *Gesellschaft*, i.e. the sphere of "the rules of the game" and the exteriority of the action (cf.

Max Weber's *Verantwortungsethik*). This is contrasted with the sphere of *Gemeinschaft*, i.e. the sphere of seriousness, intention and conviction (cf. Max Weber's *Gesinnungssethik*). Especially in *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, Plessner warns against a conception of society as a closely tied community. Even common values function to arrange human interaction. They are not the characteristics of a "real" community (Plessner 2002, 95).

The public sphere is a horizon of possible connections between a varying number and kind of people. It begins at the same boundary where love and kinship end. Just how there cannot be any identity or self without a role, there can be no closed community without there also being a public sphere (Plessner 2002, 55-56). The public sphere can be regarded as a "hygiene system of the soul." It has the possibility to relax the "tense face of humanity" and to release it in a culture of impersonality (Plessner 2002, 133).

It is role playing that makes society possible at all, because if every *self* would throw off its mask, society would disintegrate into a war of everyone against everyone (Plessner 2002, 81). In return, it is also society that makes role playing possible. The role that an individual has to play in society can never be independent of other people and structures. A role makes demands, because it is part of the functional connection of the social whole (Plessner 1974a, 19-20). In addition, a role brings along expectations.

The public sphere cannot do without forms. Social conflict and impulses need to be articulated, canalized, and sometimes even suppressed. In the public sphere, the observance of forms has the same purpose as the observance of the rules of a game. In public life, people appear in functions and roles, thereby making the public life become like a game in front of people's true nature (Plessner 2002, 83).

The play of forms

The importance of keeping a healthy distance between an inner and outer life is also stressed by Richard Sennett in his work *The Fall of Public Man* (1974). Sennett suggests that an anonymous, impersonal public sphere is a necessity for human (social) life. Only by keeping a certain distance, life in the public domain becomes possible. Sennett very strictly separates the public domain from the private domain. The public domain here is "the world of strangers," and specifically refers to urban people who do not know one another in person. Sennett rejects the "intimate society" in which an ideal of authenticity dominates, because according to him, "every self is in some measure a cabinet of horrors" (Sennett 1992, 5; Taylor 1991, 25ff, 43ff.).

Therefore, "the absorption in intimate affairs is the mark of an uncivilized society" (Sennett 1992, 340). Sennett emphasizes the importance of civility, which he describes as "the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company." In other words, "[c]ivility is treating others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance" (ibid., 264). Civility is a formality, respecting a distance in order to prevent the public sphere from becoming unlivable. Through keeping people at a distance, living together becomes possible. Sennett points to the classical tradition of the world as *theatrum mundi*, the playing of social roles and the expectations associated with them. He also points at the wearing of "masks" that hide the individual's feelings and emotions. He states: "Wearing a mask is the essence of civility" (ibid., 264). Sennett stresses the importance of suppression of emotional inner life more so than Plessner does. Plessner's emphasis lies on man's "indeterminacy," although he does not ignore the necessity to suppress emotional inner life.

The wearing of a mask and the playing of a role could, to a certain extent, be regarded as an indifference towards the "real" person. Fran Tonkiss, a sociologist at the London School of Economics, seems to go further than Sennett and Plessner in appreciating the function of distance in this context. In her studies on multicultural city life, she develops an "ethics of indifference." She stresses that indifference is not necessarily bad. Living side-by-side is better than living face-to-face (Tonkiss 2003). She calls for a re-valuation of urban indifference as a moral minimum, for "indifference as a politics of tolerance, by default, as it were" (ibid., 301). That does not exclude affinity groups. Tonkiss states that "an everyday politics of difference in the city at times works through an ethics of indifference" and "that there are positive claims for what can appear as a negative relation" (ibid., 309). This is an interesting approach, although I think the ethics of indifference needs clarification and specification concerning the handling of inevitable social conflict. Tonkiss would also have to clarifies how indifference is shaped, i.e. is it just indifference to the difference of the other, or is the other as such ignored? In either case, Sennett's and Plessner's respect for social distance and social roles is aimed at forging a social bond and framing a structure of expectations, both protecting the self and the other.

The themes of masks, role playing and forms reappear in Hannah Arendt's conception of the public domain. However, she adds the notion of law into the discussion. Longing to escape the meaninglessness of life, man has to leave the private domain and enter the public domain, in which continued recognition can be gained. An artificial common space is necessary for man to speak and act in public. When individuals come together, there has to be

a certain distance between them at first. In this sense, the public domain is an in-between-space. It both separates and connects individuals. "The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak" (Arendt 1998, 52). The law has the important function to structure communication through rules and procedures. An important aspect of this is the equality of individuals. Here the artificial nature of the public domain comes clear, because people aren't equal by nature. It is the law that makes them artificially equal (isonomy) (Arendt 1990, 30-31). The law also brings continuity throughout generations. Laws "guarantee the pre-existence of a common world, the reality of some continuity which transcends the individual life span of each generation, absorbs all new origins and is nourished by them" (Arendt 1968, 465).

When entering the public domain, individuals need to put on a mask, as they simply cannot enter this artificial sphere without it. For example, when entering a legal process, individuals cannot do without the mask of a legal person (legal subject). In this regard, Arendt discusses the Latin term *persona*: "In its original meaning, it signified the mask ancient actors used to wear in play. [...] The mask as such obviously had two functions: it had to hide, or rather replace, the actor's own face and countenance, but in a way that would make it possible for the voice to sound through. At any rate, it was in this twofold understanding of a mask through which a voice sounds that the word *persona* became a metaphor and was carried from the language of the theatre into legal terminology. The distinction between a private individual in Rome and a Roman citizen was that the latter had a *persona*, a legal personality, as we would say; it was though the law had affixed to him the part he was expected to play on the public scene, with the provision, however, that his own voice would be able to sound through. The point was that 'it was not the natural Ego which enters a court of law. It is a right-and-duty-bearing person, created by the law, which appears before the law" (Arendt 1990, 106-107).

The artificial *persona* enters the public stage, hiding our natural being, and presenting us as equals (Waldron 2000, 209). Through the mask, the play-character of the legal process can be recognized.

Plessner regularly refers to the book *Homo ludens* (1938) of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (Richter 2005, 178ff.). In a fascinating chapter about play and law, Huizinga writes: "Contest means play. [...] The playful and the contending, lifted on the plane of that sacred seriousness which every society demands for its justice, are still discernable to-day in all forms of judicial life" (Huizinga 2003, 76). Three play-forms are recognized in the legal process, namely the game of chance, the contest, and the verbal battle.

Huizinga gives some lively examples, ranging from the drumming-contest among Inuits to the potlatch. Whereas according to Plessner, man needs culture to live, Huizinga claims that man is also a *homo ludens* who produces culture by playing. Plessner suggests that society as such lives "in the spirit of the game." It is in playing that man reaches his highest freedom, because he then can gain a distance from himself. Too much directness would deaden the human soul (Plessner 2002, 91, 94).

Different terms are used by Plessner, Sennett, Arendt and Huizinga to denote the same phenomena. Whether it is called role, form, mask or play, it is artificiality and formality that bring a healthy distance into human interaction. The legal process is a prototypical example of artificiality and formality. Legal subjects are individuals who are acting with a *persona*, wearing a mask and playing a highly structured role.

Legal discourse

As I mentioned before, Plessner's thoughts on man as a role player has the interesting potential to mediate between his anthropological theory and social (sociological) theories. His philosophy can, for example, give an anthropological basis for the theory of adjudication as developed by Niklas Luhmann in his book *Legitimation durch Verfahren* (1969). I will introduce the gist of Luhmann's theory.

Luhmann's sociology of law is based on systems theory. An important element in his approach is the way it deals with the complexity of the world. Reality encompasses a chaotic amount of potential actions. In other words, there is a huge contingency. According to Luhmann, modern society is so complex that each of us can only control and understand a small part of it. In order to function in this immense complexity, a reduction of complexity must take place. This is precisely the function of systems. Fundamental to the systems theory of Luhmann is the distinction between system and environment (*Umwelt*). Each system structures a part of the world. It offers a limited number of action alternatives and makes the behavior of others predictable. Social systems are meaning systems of social action and create normative expectations. Particular social activities are associated with a particular system and are marked off from the systems environment. We can connect this to Plessner's notion of role playing and interpret a role as a part of the normative expectations in a certain system.

Luhmann regarded law as an autonomous subsystem of society. Society understood as a system, has a functional differentiation into various sub-

systems. These subsystems (law, politics, economics, etc.) have a certain amount of autonomy, i.e. they have their own rules and roles. Focusing on the typical civil law process, Luhmann distinguishes between three dimensions of autonomy within the legal process. First, there is temporal independence; the legal system determines its own pace and terms. Then there is judiciary discretion: the judge is not a robot that applies rules, but has some autonomy. This makes the outcome of a process uncertain. Third, there is also social autonomy: there is a difference between being legally right (the "legal truth") and being factually right. The legal process is separated from social life at large.

According to Luhmann, a role is a set of behaviours expected of a person in a certain position (such as judge or plaintiff). Parties themselves give a more specific interpretation of their role, also known as the process strategy. Because of their specific role (such as that of a plaintiff), the parties in the process do not participate with their whole person, or their whole self. When they lose the case, it is not the whole person that is affected, but only the person as a plaintiff, under a given article of the law, in this specific case. The decision is a "single binding decision" in a particular case (Luhmann 1983, 41). This makes the loss more bearable.

The legal process also includes a specific communication and setting (terminology, forms of address, clothing, physical setting, etc.). This creates detachment from the rest of society. The courtroom does not encompass all aspects of reality. A person who enters the courtroom must therefore choose a certain role and operate in accordance to it. The party that does not want to observe this distance will lose the case. Without autonomy and distance, the decision of the judge will be harder to accept in society.

Because of the different roles, each party is forced to study the situation of the other party, creating a certain distance from their situation and position. This factor also contributes to making the outcome more readily acceptable. By choosing an interpretation of their specific role, parties choose to play the game, thereby getting "trapped" in their role. When they lose, one can say that it has been their own choice to follow a certain process strategy.

The legal process can be seen as a trap (like a fishing pot), in which the conflicting parties are forced to reformulate their social conflict in legal terms. Everything that exists outside of the system of law, such as conflicts, interests, complexity, subjectivity, and notions of truth and justice, has to be translated into rights, rules, procedures and evidence that are accepted and acknowledged within the legal system. This is a reduction of complexity, since only those aspects of a conflict that are legally relevant are allowed to be included in the process. After the parties have been forced to focus on

the legally relevant aspects of the conflict and have given their views, the judge is obliged to make a verdict. In this process, a legal truth is developed. A judge's verdict requires yet another form of complexity reduction.

Integrating perspectives

Luhmann's theory of adjudication can be regarded as somewhat cynical and technical. At its core, the legal process has nothing to do with truth or justice, but only with the production of binding decisions. This is certainly a different discourse than the one of Plessner, who writes about law as a sphere associated with a specific class of values, as aforementioned. Justice is certainly one of these values (Plessner 2002, 95). There are, however, interesting elements in Luhmann's theory that can very well be connected to Plessner's anthropology.

According to Luhmann, the parties in adjudication are forced to study the situation of the other party because of the different roles they play and the strategies they follow. Likewise, in Plessner's social thought it is through role playing that man can learn about himself and others (Dallmayr 1981, 76). Social relations are characterized by a "reciprocity of perspectives." Man challenges and questions existing social arrangements and his relationship with others (Dallmayr 1981, 75). This can lead to a social conflict that can eventually be reformulated as a conflict in legal terms. This is a way to canalize the conflict, throwing a distance between the parties through which they can be reconnected. In the words of Chantal Mouffe, the battle between antagonists ("enemies") should become a battle between agonists ("adversaries"). Thus, antagonism has to be transformed into agonism (Mouffe 2000, 103).

Here, Plessner's notion of diplomacy can be introduced. Diplomacy is the art of solving conflicts in such a way that the dignity of the other party remains unaffected. The other party should be left with the impression that he is free to act or "surrender" on the basis of a voluntary decision, or should ascribe a victory of the other party to objective forces (Plessner 2002, 99). Tact is related to diplomacy and respecting the other person. It is also the art of not getting too close to the other and not being too open to the other. Indirectness is a uniquely human ability, while directness can also be found in other animals (Plessner 2002, 106-107). Just like civility, diplomacy and tact constitute a buffer against social conflict. However, conflict cannot always be avoided.

Our society has built the structure of the legal process that allow us to translate social conflicts into legal conflicts and then find an appropriate

solution for legal conflicts. This legal solution need not be a real solution to the social conflict. It is only an artificial solution to live with the conflict by forcing the conflict into an irreversible and final legal solution. Essential in Luhmann's theory of adjudication is that parties can more easily accept the loss of a case because they are playing a role without being identical with this role. They are therefore able to identify with the other party's position and arguments (*Rollenübernahme*). The forms of the process contribute to that. There is, however, another element of interest. Through his role, man is also like a mirror to other men. Through identifying with the other party's position and arguments, man can learn not only about the other party, but also about himself from the perspective of the other party (Dallmayr 1981, 76).

Social roles construct a social identity, but also a self that is being protected by the role that one plays. Inevitable social conflicts have the potential to disarrange the proper functioning of roles by hiding the self behind the roles. A shield against social conflicts is formed by civility, diplomacy and tact. Law can also be regarded as a medium to structure societal life and to formulate binding expectations, thereby avoiding conflict. However, the legal system is also a safety net. When social conflicts arise, they can be reformulated into legal terms, thereby reducing the complexity of the potentially comprehensive conflict. The function of the legal process is to bring individuals together by separating them at first. The "rules of the game" provide equal chances to each party. By forcing the parties to play a specific role with a limited action potential, the conflict is reduced to the level of role playing. The self of the parties, especially of the losing party, stays relatively untouched. The legal process also has the potential of letting the each party learn about the other party as well as themselves.

Concluding remarks

Plessner's notion of man's *Unbestimmtheit* has interesting parallels to Arendt's conception of the meaninglessness of the world and Luhmann's emphasis on the complexity of the world. The public domain canalizes this contingency by offering social roles. In addition, Sennett emphasizes the social importance of role playing. The social role can be regarded as an instrument to explore the world and the self as well as a buffer against "undesirable intimacy." The ambiguity of the human condition in Plessner's conception parallels the ambiguity of the social role.

Applied to a legal context, the social role can be a fruitful concept for understanding the functioning of the legal system in general, and adjudica-

tion in particular. Huizinga, Arendt and Plessner all agree on the acting-character of the law, i.e. its roles, rules and symbols. Every person involved in a legal process is playing a certain role. Using the concept of role playing, Plessner analyzes human role playing at an anthropological level, while Luhmann analyzes it at a sociological level.

There are, however, different threats to both the stability of the self and the stability and functioning of the legal system. According to Sennett, the increasing public exhibition of the private sphere and the strive for authenticity are a danger to society. After the fall of the public man, legal discourse has become a dominant and common form in contemporary liberal society. However, the more the modern citizen identifies with his comprehensive legal status, the more he is defined by it, and the more he loses his self in this role. The relationship between private and public identity falls out of balance. When man has the illusion of no longer playing any role, but to "be" a legal subject, he endangers his self. This equates to a reification of man into legal structures. The tension between man and his roles eradicates (Dallmayr 1981, 76). As a result, the self gets "sucked" into the legal system, leading to phenomena such as the loss of any distance between a legal process and the full complexity of social reality.

According to Luhmann, the legal system, and more specifically, the legal process, can only function when the "authentic self" is left outside of the courtroom. It is essential for role playing that there is a distance between the self and the role. The rejection of roles and the withdrawal into private "authenticity" makes society a hollow artifact (Dallmayr 1981, 76). Ceremonies and other forms should not be discredited in a society, as they keep individual personality and human dignity at high esteem. It is a meaningful way to protect the individual soul (Plessner 2002, 87). Man inevitably has to be a *Doppelgänger* to protect the self and society.

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17 Habermas's New Turn towards Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Matthias Schloßberger

Habermas's problems with philosophical anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s

It is quite common for opposing views to shape the evolution of a writer's theoretical approach. However, one might argue that Jürgen Habermas delineated his stance towards other authors or traditions of thought with exceptional clarity. One of the most important confrontations he sought out was his engagement with philosophical anthropology. From the late fifties to the early seventies he was very critical of this tradition. His primary opponent was Arnold Gehlen, who focused on the human being *as an agent and* held that anthropology should be unequivocally empirical and free of metaphysics. These ideas were not too far away from Habermas's own project of developing an anthropological underpinning for human socialization (and thus also for the development of morality and his theory of communicative action) by engaging with each individual branch of empirical science. Yet, the political implications Gehlen derived were directly opposed to Habermas's aims. Gehlen suggested that due to the indeterminacy and malleability of human nature, human beings need the protection of strict institutions. His recourse to human nature thus served to substantiate a normative political theory.

Habermas considered Gehlen's theory of institutions conservative and reactionary, which led him to attack it in no uncertain terms. Both the overlap between his subject matter and Gehlen's anthropological inquiries, as well as the similarity between his ideas and Gehlen's pragmatist answers increased his burden to provide a clear differentiation between himself and Gehlen.[1] Here, he criticized Gehlen's most basic anthropological assumption, namely the notion that human beings, unlike animals, are open to the world in the sense of being able to adapt to different environments. Habermas sided with Rothacker, who contended in contradiction with Gehlen that just like animals, human beings always live in certain environments (Habermas 1958), thus generally criticizing Philosophical

1 See Habermas 1987.

Anthropology as an attempt to ascertain commonalities among human beings. Habermas was concerned that the acceptance of anthropology as a foundational science of some kind might lead to the demand for it to also provide the standards for a social theory, which would undermine the idea of a developmental process of the species.[2] The objection to Gehlen spread from its main target to Plessner's and Max Scheler's anthropological approaches – since Gehlen's notion of human beings as open to the word originated in their work – even though Habermas ultimately had other crucial reasons to distance himself from Plessner. Thus, the shadow of Habermas's critique of Gehlen touched Plessner as well, although the latter had consistently and explicitly opposed Gehlen's theoretical claim that the lack that marks the human condition (*menschliche Mängellage*) necessitates compensation by way of strict institutions (Plessner 1963, 50). This created the impression of a strict opposition between critical theory and philosophical anthropology, even though Habermas's critique of Plessner was rooted in different a motivation. While Gehlen was seen to laudably and consistently emphasize the natural intersubjectivity of human beings, Plessner was casted as the philosopher of subjectivity. Habermas contended that Plessner derived all cultural achievements of the human species from some type of original subjectivity and thus could not properly understand the interrelation between symbolic mediation, work, and interaction.[3]

To this day, Habermas has neither revised nor modified his derogatory assessment of philosophical anthropology. Even though he used some of Plessner's ideas in his latest works on the ethics of the species and the future of human life as a critical part of his argument, he still did not reconsider his earlier critical stance on philosophical anthropology in general.

In this essay, I argue that in order to introduce certain ideas of Plessner into his philosophical approach, Habermas would have to revise some of his basic assumptions. In his most recent publications, Habermas himself seems to recognize that his approach so far is lacking a certain explanatory

2 See Lepenies 1971, 86. Wolf Lepenies clearly states that Habermas's objection goes too far, since he argues against anthropology in general while making use of it for his own theoretical approach. "We can detect a recourse to anthropological constants in both Gehlen's and Habermas's writings: However, while Gehlen reacts to those who would change not only the institutions but also the mind with a resigned reference to biology, Habermas confronts the revolt with the vision of a utopia based on anthropology; the realization of this utopia requires the immediate transition to a domination-free communication and it is judged according to its achieved degree of realization."

3 See the unofficial transcript "Probleme einer philosophischen Anthropologie" [Problems of a Philosophical Anthropology] of a lecture 1966/67.

power, but to date he has not clearly acknowledged the scope of the changes necessitated by this realization. I believe that it constitutes a paradigm shift away from the philosophy of language towards a philosophy of the expressions of living beings.[4]

I will proceed in three steps. First, I will present the problem and describe the position Habermas develops in his essay "The Future of Human Nature" ["Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?," 2001], highlighting his favorable reference to Plessner.[5] Subsequently, I will outline Habermas's original view of philosophical anthropology. Finally, using Habermas's understanding of Plessner's take on "laughing and crying" (Plessner 1941) as an example, I will show that his critical affirmation of Plessner does not go far enough to allow him the use of Plessner's philosophy of the living.

Habermas on the future of human nature: making use of Plessner's distinction between *being a body* and *having a body*

The fact that advances in technology make pre-implantation diagnosis possible gives rise to the question of whether it would be permissible to make use of such technologies, and whether we ought to do it or not. We are in a position to make irreversible decisions about the "natural" traits of another person (Habermas 2001, 14). There are two problems that need to be addressed: first, the repercussions such an intervention by parents or other persons would have for the self-conception of the individual in question, and second, "whether the fact that one was conditionally created and had one's right to existence and development dependent on genetic screening is consistent with the dignity of human life" (ibid., 20).

Habermas worries that the "knowledge of one's hereditary features as programmed may prove to restrict the choice of an individual's way of life, and to undermine the essentially symmetrical relations between free and equal human beings" (ibid., 23), as there can be no self-critical appropria-

4 The paradigm shift seems to announce itself in Axel Honneth's writing and his theory of recognition, as well (Honneth 1992). There is no explicit debate about the linguistic paradigm, but in the early eighties Honneth, in cooperation with Hans Joas, criticized Habermas for deriving intersubjectivity from language, rather than deriving an account of language acquisition from the understanding of expression. See for a clear turn towards the paradigm of expression: Meuter 2006, and my own attempt: Schloβberger 2005, about the experience of the other by understanding his or her expressions.

5 The citations within this chapter refer to Habermas 2001.

tion of one's own developmental history under genetically manipulated dispositions (ibid.,14). He realizes that this is where his post-metaphysical abstention – or arguably his programmatic relativism – reaches its limits: "As soon as the ethical self-understanding of language-using agents is at stake *in its entirety* philosophy can no longer avoid taking a substantive position" (11). After all, this question involves the "inconspicuous normative interplay between the inviolability of the person which is imperative on moral grounds and subject to legal guarantees and the natural mode of the person's physical embodiment which is something we cannot dispose over" (ibid., 20-21). He begins with a substantive statement articulated as an intuition: "On the one hand, we cannot, from the premise of pluralism ascribe to the embryo 'from the very beginning' the absolute protection of life enjoyed by persons who are subjects possessing basic rights. On the other hand there is the intuition that pre-personal human life must not simply be declared free to be included in the familiar balancing of competing goods" (ibid., 42).

It is crucial to note that Habermas falls back on a moral intuition. He does not try to hide that this question is very problematic for him. To the contrary, he has always been very clear on this point: "Only if they are neutral with respect to various worldviews or comprehensive doctrines can propositions on what is equally good for everybody claim to be, for good reasons, acceptable for all" (ibid., 10). The problem is that he did not previously develop a conception of human nature and of human life, or an anthropological account of the human species, beyond the statement that human beings are beings capable of language and reason. There is a reason for his passivity: his concept of the human being was based solely on the philosophy of language. According to Habermas, human beings are what they are because they live in an intersubjective language community. This has significant ramifications for the concept of human dignity, and Habermas himself is very much aware of this fact. According to him, the concept of human dignity in a strict moral and legal sense is bound to the symmetry of relations intersubjectively constituted qua language. Thus, human dignity is not something we possess by nature, but is rather a function of reciprocal recognition within interpersonal relations (ibid., 33). "As a member of a species, as a specimen of a community of procreation, the genetically individuated child in utero is by no means a fully fledged person 'from the very beginning'" (ibid., 35).

This is why Habermas insists on a distinction between the dignity of human life and the human dignity guaranteed to every person (ibid., 35). In order to substantiate his intuition that selective genetic manipula-

tions in the early stages of a human life are problematic because they are incompatible with the notion of the unavailability of a person's fate and therefore undermine character development, as the person experiences his or her own fate as determined by others, Habermas falls back on Plessner's anthropological theory. Because his theory of character development is based solely on the philosophy of language he has no concepts at his disposal to describe the early stages of human life – let alone the way human beings have related to their "living body" (*Leibkörper*) during the course of their whole life – and this makes Plessner's theory very attractive to him.

Accordingly, Habermas writes with reference to Plessner:

> A person 'has' or 'possesses' her body only through 'being' this body in proceeding with her life. It is from this phenomenon of being a body and, at the same time, having a body [*Leibsein und Körperhaben*] that Helmut (!) Plessner set out to describe and analyze the 'eccentric position' of man. Cognitive development psychology has shown that having a body is the result of the capacity of assuming an objectivating attitude toward the prior fact of being a body, a capacity we do not acquire until youth. The primary mode of experience, and also the one 'by' which the subjectivity of the human person lives, is that of being a body (Ibid., 50).

This argument from Plessner's theory seems very convincing to me. We acquire the structure of eccentric positionality, the interplay of *being a body* and *having a body*, in the course of our socialization. If we no longer experience our living body with all its deficiencies as something naturally unavailable, but rather as determined by others, this would radically change the way we relate to it – and the outcome would most likely be highly problematic, since knowing that one's own "nature" is determined by others would surely make it much harder to deal with it. Our lives would be characterized by a violent moment of heteronomy that could never be reversed or corrected.

While I find Habermas's argument very plausible, it seems quite problematic from the viewpoint of his own theory. In his previously espoused universe defined strictly by the philosophy of language, there is no room for a sophisticated concept of human vitality as suggested by Plessner's distinction between being a body and having a body. Although Habermas looked favorably upon Plessner's idea of "eccentric positionality" during the seventies, he went on to criticize it in a way that seems to miss Plessner's actual point. I will return to Habermas's stance towards Philosophical

Anthropology at a later point to explain why he fails in his attempt to provide Plessner's approach with a foundation in the philosophy of language.[6]

Habermas and the tradition of philosophical anthropology

Debates on philosophical anthropology during the sixties and seventies focused primarily on Arnold Gehlen, who seemed to pursue the project Scheler and Plessner had begun in the most thorough and topical fashion. However, the assumption that Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen together form the core of a tradition of thought called philosophical anthropology is highly questionable. All the while, there are reasons for grouping them together in this way. There are a number of striking similarities in each of their famous central works of anthropology (Scheler 1928; Plessner 1928; Gehlen 1940) marking them as, in fact, anthropological writings. All three authors make use of human-animal comparisons and refer to the same sources: They discuss Wolfgang Köhler's experiments with chimpanzees, Jacob von Uexküll's theory of environment (*Umweltlehre*), and other writings that describe human beings as open to the world. Furthermore, all three subscribe to an idea once succinctly articulated by Gehlen. The human being is by nature a cultural being (Gehlen 1950, 4).

However, this short list seems to already exhaust any unconditional commonalities. From here onwards, the three authors differ in the way they make use of human-animal comparisons and in their respective substantiation of the idea that the human being is by nature a cultural being. Though a more thorough examination will reveal other major similarities, these are restricted between Scheler and Plessner due to their common phenomenological starting point, and there are also a number of crucial differences. Both Scheler and Plessner start by positioning the human being as a living being within the chain of such beings. This approach should not be confused with a return to the pre-Darwinian Aristotelic Chain of Being (*scala naturae*). Rather, it attempts to discover interconnected moments on each level. It is also a phenomenological approach, both because living as such is taken to be a primitive non-derivative ontological category, and because the differing manifestations of life (roughly: plant, animal, human) are not seen as mutually reductive, either. This is not a rejection of the theory

6 It is interesting to see that this in particular made him more receptive to Plessner's ideas. Other authors with a very different philosophical background, such as Robert Spaemann, also mentioned this in a positive reference to Plessner (see Spaemann 1996).

of evolution. Philosophy is not charged with the burden of having to give a documented account of the actual transitions that occur in nature and that can be established within a complete history of evolution – even where they are no longer observable because certain links are missing due to extinction. Instead, it should demonstrate how certain characteristics are linked together on a given level of life and how those characteristics are integrated or taken up on the next level.[7] Concerning the sphere of human beings, this involves the discovery of conditionalities: intersubjectivity is only possible because human beings can understand each other via the expressivity of their living bodies. They live both with and within their living body. Even though they can relate to it as an object, they are not in complete control of it, as phenomena such as laughing and crying illustrate. Scheler's and Plessner's basic idea could be described in the following way: none of the moments that characterize a human being as such can be derived from any other such moment. To understand them, we need to conceptualize them as interlocking and interacting components of a structure that can only be described but not deduced.

Plessner's term for this basic structure is as apt as it is succinct: *eccentric positionality* (Plessner 1928). The human condition is eccentric, because similar to other mammals, human beings live outwards from their center (typically, they are not reflectively conscious of their bodies), but this pre-reflective being-in-the-world can always be shattered in a way that is very different from traditional reflective self-consciousness. A human being's reflective relation towards his living body is revealed in phenomena like shame: a being of pure reason could not be ashamed, since it has flawless control of its body. Human beings who are bound to their living body (*Positionalität*) feel the gaze of others. Not only are they incapable of escaping this scrutiny, but they also feel ashamed, because they realize the vulnerability of their living body no longer being within their own control.[8]

While Plessner used many ideas from Scheler's anthropological writings when developing an original approach, he did not remain committed to

7 Gehlen always rejected the idea of such a chain of stages and insisted on treating the human being as of a separate and independent natural design. See his seminal remarks in the first chapter of "Man: His Nature and Place in the World" as well as the posthumously published text "Über den Cartesianismus Nicolai Hartmanns" (1952).

8 Scheler, who does not use the terms centric/eccentric or positionality, but effectively describes the structure of the human condition in the same way as Plessner, used this example (Scheler 1957).

the metaphysical charge Scheler gave them. This is why he is much more attractive to contemporary thinkers than Scheler.[9]

One difference between Gehlen's theory and the approaches of the other two authors is that the human-animal comparison led him to the following contention, which is central to his theory: human beings are not governed by their instincts (*Instinktentbundenheit*). His description of human beings as naturally lacking (*Mängelwesen*) serves to underline this point rhetorically. His other thoughts, such as the idea that social institutions are needed as compensation – to safeguard the constantly endangered lives of human beings – build on this idea. Gehlen focuses on the question of how human beings can survive in light of the danger they face?

In Scheler's and Plessner's approaches, however, the human-animal comparison plays a very different role. They use it to show that the similarities between human beings and animals are linked to the differences between them. Their subject matter is the basic structure of the human condition. In Plessner's terminology, if certain beings live their life in an eccentric way because beyond merely living, they also experience their own experiences – or, if for such a being "the alteration from being inside his or her own living body (*Leib*) to being outside of the body [is] an irreducible double aspect of his or her existence, a real fracture in his or her nature" – what then follows from this? They live on both sides of the dividing line, as soul and as body (*Körper*) and as a psycho-physically neutral unity of those spheres (Plessner 1928, 292). The German concept of the living body is crucial for understanding this point. It describes not merely the combination of body and soul, but rather an encompassing unity, the idea that body and soul as concepts, i.e. as categories we use to orientate ourselves in the world, are derived from the notion of the living body. Closely connected to this is the concept of expression. The idea of expression or expressive behavior is complementary to what is called living body in the phenomenological tradition. What can be observed about the living body in its behavior is called expression. Only the psycho-physically indifferent living body displays an expression, as the unanimated body alone is not capable of this. When we perceive a child's joy in its smile, as Scheler's famous example puts it, we do not see muscle contractions and subsequently deduce a certain state of mind. Instead, we immediately observe psycho-physically neutral expressive behavior. It is precisely *in* the smile of a child where we perceive its joy (Scheler 1923; Plessner and Buytendijk 1926).

9 For a more detailed explanation see Schloβberger 2006. In contrast, Fischer 2008 argues that the approaches to anthropology by Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen are in fact closely related.

Thus, taking the psycho-physical indifference of perception (*psychophysische Indifferenz der Wahrnehmung*) as the starting point is a crucial choice: at first glance, we see neither a mental nor a physical phenomenon. All perception is perception of a psycho-physical *expression*. We only cultivate the two directions of perception (*Anschauungsrichtungen*), *psyche* and *physis*, and learn to differentiate between the living body (*Leibkörper*) and the souled or inspired body (*Leibseele*) in the course of our cognitive development (Scheler 1915). Human beings begin their lives within their living bodies facing outwards, and they only start relating to their bodies when the soul ontogenetically achieves eccentricity.

On the basis of this distinction, Scheler and Plessner examine the interplay within the fractured eccentric human condition by focusing on distinctly human types of expression (such as shame, laughter or crying) as reactions to the tension of being a body and having a body. While Gehlen engages in what he calls "empirical philosophy" (Gehlen 1956, 9), Scheler and Plessner use a phenomenological approach – broadly applicable, nevertheless clearly delineated.

Habermas called philosophical anthropology a "reactive philosophy," meaning an approach that is no longer *prima philosophia*, but instead merely digests the results acquired in the individual branches of science (Habermas 1958, 20). Although this description is quite apt for Gehlen's anthropology, at least according to his own self-conception, it misses the mark when it comes to Scheler and Plessner. Their anthropology is a structural theory of the human condition, which includes the living form that human beings inhabit. In this sense, their anthropology is transcendental, and similar to Habermas's conception of the human being within his philosophy of language. The crucial difference between them is the fact that for Habermas, the living form is irrelevant. This is apparent in Habermas's theory of early child development. The early stages of human ontogenesis, during which symbiotic experiences forge the first orientation towards the world, are anything but resolved the moment the infant acquires a system of personal pronouns, and they are not even assigned a foundational role.[10]

It seems as if Habermas does not realize that his theory is not actually concerned with living human beings. A thought experiment will illustrate this point. There may very well be ways of achieving intersubjectivity through the medium of language that are independent of the living form characteristic of human beings. Referring to the precedence of the life-world

10 For a critical account, see Nolte 1984, 529. According to Nolte, Habermas finds an aspect of nature in the early stages of ontogenesis, "which the subject can only master by repressing it."

will not change this fact, as Krüger suggests against Habermas, since the life-world itself is constituted by a linguistic-symbolic referential nexus, it remains unclear "what the life-world has to do with living."[11]

Habermas's original critique of Plessner

In an open letter on the occasion of Plessner's seventieth birthday, Habermas observed that Plessner manages to regard "the human species as a part of nature" without paying the "price of a philosophical naturalism" (Habermas 1972). He contends that in *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, Plessner gave due consideration to the lower stages without positioning the sociocultural life-form too low for allowing the sapient human subject to achieve some form of emancipation from the unfree life-form of an animal.

Habermas considers the notion of the "eccentric position" an apt characterization of the categorical distinction between human and animal forms of life. He explicitly states that Plessner's "ingenious interpretation" of the phenomena of laughing and crying supports this concept by exemplifying the idea that for human beings, certain situations create a need to balance being a body and having a body. The divide between the body-existence as a type of state [*zuständliche Leib-Existenz*] and object [*gegenständliche Körper-Existenz*] must constantly be negotiated. Yet, in certain extreme situations, we are no longer capable of this feat. Here, the body takes over in the form of laughing or crying, stepping in for the person who no longer is able to control his body.

This provides the staring point for Habermas's critique on Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology. He suggests that we laugh and cry about something, and that this ability thus sets the distinction between human beings and animals. Plessner and Habermas agree on this, but are led to this view by very different arguments. Habermas argues that animals can neither laugh nor cry because they do not possess language. We laugh and cry about something, and for Habermas this suggests that laughing and crying are propositionally structured. Only beings capable of language are also able to laugh or cry. This places Habermas in opposition to Plessner, who does not afford language such a fundamental role. Instead, he considers the interplay between being a body and having a body, another characteristic trait of human beings, to

11 See Krüger 2006, 192: "The point is not that the philosophy of nature and the living is romantic, but that the confusion of language with the participants' perspective of I and you is a hermeneutical projection."

be of crucial or basic importance. If an entity's way of being is realized in this structure, then this entity is capable of language due to the intersubjective disposition of this structure. This is in fact what eccentric positionality is meant to convey. Habermas is therefore mistaken when he tells Plessner: "Now, you don't derive intersubjectivity from language, but from the eccentric position." This claim is problematic for two reasons: first, the idea that language precedes intersubjectivity, or that intersubjectivity can be derived from language, is not very convincing, and second, the point in question is not actual derivation but rather the logical sequence of conditionalities.[12]

Habermas's argument turns out to be circular: children need to experience other beings – i.e. recognize that there is another being which is similarly to oneself and alive – before they can learn to make use of "I" and "you."[13] Habermas's claim that laughing and crying are similar to language because we always laugh or cry "about something," is equally questionable: the idea that all types of propositional knowledge have the character of language puts Habermas at odds with Husserl and every other writer in the phenomenological tradition. Consequently, he holds that the twin aspect of the living body and the body as object manifest solely within language, as well. This leads him to reject the idea that the eccentric position – what Plessner might call the intersubjective existence of a being living in the tension between being a body and having a body – is a precondition of a capacity for language; instead, he claims that language is a condition of a possible tension between being a body and having a body.

However, Habermas profoundly misjudges the character of strong affects like laughing and crying. Granted, one might argue that we laugh or cry "about something." But this kind of intentionality does not necessarily take the form of propositional knowledge: even though we cry "about something," we are often not even consciously aware of this "something" that is the reason for our agitation. And even when we know all the reasons, the emotional turmoil is still an independent phenomenon in its own accord. Habermas's position would imply that all emotions are only epiphenomena of insights we might rationally express. The utter absurdity of such a characterization

12 See also Hans Joas and Axel Honneth's criticism (Joas and Honneth 1980), in which they point out that there is no doubt at all about the fact that one's self-identification with one's own body takes ontogenetic precedence over the acquisition of a system of personal pronouns. It is not surprising that Habermas never took Plessner's "interpretation of mimical expressions" from 1926 into account: had he considered this work and the radically intersubjective theory of Scheler, he would have realized that there are stronger arguments in favor of a priority of intersubjectivity beyond the linguistic paradigm.

13 For a more detailed critique, see Schloβberger 2005.

provides us with another strong motivation for a fundamental revision of the linguistic paradigm. Without such a revision, Habermas cannot legitimately make use of a concept of human nature or account for the need to protect its unavailability in his opposition to liberal eugenics.

In summary, reconsidering the linguistic paradigm is not only necessary in order to explain the constitution of intersubjectivity, but also because it is of crucial importance to the field of ethics. Certain central ethical intuitions cannot be rephrased without taking into consideration that human beings are alive in a very particular way. If the distinct subjectivity that is integral to the rationality of human beings were language-based, phenomena such as humiliation would be inexplicable. The effectiveness of some of the most invidious types of humiliation depends on strategies of shaming that rely on the special way we relate to our living body. We experience the deliberate exposure of our living body in front of others as humiliating. This does not constitute a problem for beings whose intersubjectivity is based solely on language. Even if there were a coherent and consistent language-based theory of intersubjectivity, it would still be at odds with human behavior.

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Part III
Technology

18 The Quest for the Sources of the Self, Seen from the Vantage Point of Plessner's Material a Priori

Petran Kockelkoren

The sources of the self

The philosophical quest for the sources of the self is as controversial today as the search for the sources of the Nile once used to be, and is in danger of coming to the same swampy end. Why is there so much recent interest in the sources of the notion of self? A lot is at stake: the notion of self belongs to a cluster of closely related concepts such as subject, author and agency, which are subsequently further qualified with epithets like autonomous, original, or authentic. The possibility of aesthetic and ethical discourse is predicated on these concepts. No moral ascription is possible without the idea of free agency. Similarly, no aesthetic creation seems possible without authentic self-expression. All the same, these crucial concepts came under fire in the second half of the twentieth century (in poststructuralism and postmodern criticism). There was provocative talk about 'the end of the author' (Roland Barthes) and 'the death of the subject' (Michel Foucault), which called into question the principles of modern ethics and aesthetics. Conservative corrections, most prominently Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989), were published to counter the dreaded loss of self.

The notion of self has also undergone drastic changes in our everyday experience. The modern notion of self is relatively recent, but has nevertheless become firmly anchored in the popular imagination. We believe that each of us has a highly particular influence on his or her own destiny. We behave as though we are free to organize our lives as we choose. Moreover, we like to believe that our lives form a constant entity that we direct with the aid of today's media at our disposal, such as all kinds of photographic, video and audio technologies plus social networks such as Hyves, Facebook and LinkedIn. Despite all that, there is little individual about the inner worlds that we put on show. Our cherished interiors are furnished with the clichés of our era. The outside world of trendy brands and status symbols is internalized via the media, arranged to appeal to its particular target group, and then put on display as a highly individual creation. At most, the

self appears as a more or less consistent collage of consumer choices that collectively define our 'lifestyle.' Given this development, it is no wonder that so many fear the death of an authentic self in today's society.

Nevertheless, the conservative philosophical approach and its celebratory consumer variant are both inadequate for addressing this issue. They both regard the self first and foremost as a story that is told or as a narrative construction. Almost all philosophers and psychologists erroneously treat the self as a narrative, as an exclusively linguistic construct, virtually excluding the body as even being a part of our self. In the mainstream view, the self is no more than a narrative grafted onto a body. Although Charles Taylor, along with some others, claims to pay attention to the material and physical aspects of the construction of self, his historical account of changes in the notion of self is confined to thinkers who discuss the body, as though they were the ones who exert the most influence on the construction of the self.

For example, in the concept of the self that Paul Ricoeur has developed in his influential hermeneutic philosophy, the self makes its appearance in three stages. First, there are all kinds of implicit motives for action at the level of everyday affairs. At the second stage, these motives are embodied in a narrative in conversations with others. That is the stage at which the actions crystallize, as though they were intended as they are put into words. Thirdly, people identify with the narrative that is being constructed in this process. Thus, the identity that functions as the source of our actions does not exist right from the start, but only takes shape through later explanation to others. The ascription of the action takes place once the self produced through narrative is itself projected backwards in time and celebrated as the source of action. This reversal is situated entirely in the medium of language. Ricoeur places strong emphasis on the narrative identity. He does, admittedly, pay attention to the tension between a corporeal self and the self constructed through narrative, but the release of this tension – in which the physical self is eventually identified with the narrated self – presupposes the mediation of talking to others (which is also the commencement and touchstone of ethics for Ricoeur), and that mediation chiefly takes place in language.

By giving priority to language or the narrated self, Ricoeur is in good company. The psychoanalytical tradition sets out from the same premise. For Freud, the body is the source of all kinds of impulses and instincts that can disturb the formation and presentation of the public person. However, if rational light is shown on the preconscious instincts by bringing them to the surface, they lose their disruptive force. One of the most prominent

followers of Freud, Jacques Lacan, gave the Freudian position an even more radical twist by claiming that the self is a linguistic construct, including the unconscious. So here, the notion of self belongs entirely to the symbolic universe, including the presumed vaults underneath it. The inherent tensions cannot be cured in therapy, but at best, be socialized. That calls not for therapy, but for political engagement with the social production of the symbolic order.

This very outline of the predominance of the narrative notion of self indicates the problem that we shall tackle in this chapter. How is a narrative view of the self linked to the body? The body grows and ages, but it still seems to be or belong to the same person. At any point in time, the identity of the person is constantly reaffirmed in the stories that are continually woven around the body. The metaphor most frequently used by philosophers and psychologists today to describe the relation between language and body is that of inscription: the narrated self is inscribed on the body, which confers physical continuity on it. The metaphor of inscription is derived from scratching resistant material with a stylus or a gouge. The body is thus supposed to offer resistance to inscription. In the following sections, I would like to use the work of Helmuth Plessner to combat this view.

Plessner developed the philosophy of human eccentricity. In his view, people are artificial by nature. They arrive at a notion of self not only by means of language and image, but above all, through technological mediation. The self-explanatory narratives form derivatives of prior material mediations. That means that the origin of our 'inner' life today is, to a large extent, due to the mediatory technologies by which we can conceive, store and maintain an inner world. In Plessner's anthropology, our interiority thus depends on the technologies with which we evoke and maintain it, and the way that is done changes depending on the media in vogue.

One of the first and most important technologies of the production of self was script and the book. Those who take the book as the model for their life story, tend to narrate it in chronological order. The book format, however, can hardly do justice to the constant alternation of good intentions and regrets. The flashbacks and montages of film offer a better medium for the private inner life than the book. One could even argue that it was the technology of film that first made it possible to bring our turbulent inner selves to life. In the last few years, people have started to tell their life story on a website, which may include texts, photos and clips. This makes the self look like a ragged network and leads to a decline in private interiority. The subject or the self is no longer regarded as the driving force of history, or as the source of signification and the exercise of power that it was taken

to be for so long. We are exposed to all kinds of media influences beyond our control. There is no innate original self anymore; no one rules his or her own production of self.

Seen in this light, one might wonder where the cult of the self comes from and why it is so persistent. It is almost inconceivable that my form of self-awareness represents just one possible historical form, that I am not just 'I' but an internalized cluster of rules for the use of media. We have diligently practiced to make our feelings and thoughts conform to the regulations of the media culture. Yet, all of our hard-won psychological interiors will probably be a thing of the past in a century from now. People will no longer experience themselves as we do now. Under the influence of new media, they will create different kinds of selves.

Once we realize that the self is not innate, but rather a culturally malleable construct, the demand arises for research on the preconditions of such constructions. The form that the self assumes in some place and time or other depends, at least in part, on the media from which it emerges. In today's digital media culture, a new and unprotected form of being oneself is manifested: a malleable self that can be transformed to suit the context. This self no longer expresses its pre-existing interior, but balances on the boundaries and interfaces of the media and a plurality of (sub)cultures. It slips through the cultural chinks and breaks down the historically erected partitions between them. The so called private interior is turned inside out to take part in the media flow. Today's material conditions no longer call for singular self-expression, but pluralistically mediated productions of self.

Helmuth Plessner wrote about the scenario for the future mediated production of self with his philosophical anthropology. In this contribution, I would like to argue for the merits of this vantage point. After making the diagnosis sharper by deriving the evil of the so called loss of self from linguistic deception, I shall introduce Plessner's material a priori as a framework in which supposed evils and their solutions can be seen more clearly. I shall then proceed to show how the modern notion of self emerged from material conditions and how a constantly changing production of self can be continued under new conditions, thereby demonstrating the applicability of Plessner's anthropology to technological culture in the digital era.

The linguistic deception

The skin seems to form the barrier between inner and outer world. At first sight, that boundary coincides with the difference between the private and

the public domain. The inner self is located in the private quarters behind the wall, whereas the public self is our showcase to the outside world. This way of thinking, which sees the self as an entity enveloped by the body, is widespread. We talk about self-expression as if there is a self inside us that passes its feelings and thoughts through a hatch to the outside world, which then receives and interprets the linguistic signals as expressions of an inner life. The strict association of private with interior and public with exterior, however, is only a relatively recent phenomenon. It dates back to the Renaissance, on the eve of the modern era. We are still saddled with it, but by now this form of awareness of self has already shown some signs of considerable wear and tear.

Friedrich Nietzsche created a major rift in the modern notion of self. He attributed the awareness of self – the idea that there is an I inside me that is the source of my actions and also the point of reference of my experiences – to what he called the 'phantom pain of language.'[1] Phantom pain occurs when you have lost an arm or leg but your brain makes it appear as if you still feel an itch or pain in the absent limb. According to Nietzsche, the awareness of self is anchored in language. Every time you speak you say 'I.' You adapt the verb to the personal pronoun: 'I' do this, 'I' experience that. That is why you think there must be a real referent, that there must be an 'I-core' persisting within that remains intact even when you are silent. But this perception is an illusion. When being silent, you experience the phantom pain of language, as the presumed referent pronounced previously still itches afterwards. You might as well search for the 'it' of 'it's raining,' as if it were to exist independently of language. Awareness of self, according to Nietzsche, exists only in language. It is a by-product of speech. So how can it be the source of linguistic utterances?

The inner self is the exclusive product of language. The self may be the product of speaking about it, but it is not its source. Let us go back to the metaphor of the hatch, but this time place it between a shop and the shop window. Suppose that the shop window is the showcase of the interior, represented by the dark shop behind it. You are standing on the pavement in front of the shop and attract the attention of by-passers to the wares on display. These are the books you have read, your favourite CDs and films, your brand-name clothes, and all kinds of electronic gadgets that function as status symbols. You claim that the items on display are only a poor sample of all the things in the shop, but unfortunately the door is

1 Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche* (2002), 209, with reference to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke* (1980), vol. 3, 591ff.

locked and the by-passers cannot go in. To give them an idea of the contents of the shop, you place a ground plan of it in the window. In your stories you relate the trophies in the window to what you claim are the laden shelves inside the shop that you have indicated on the ground plan. This double display of the interior (as self-expression in the public domain and as representation of what is on sale inside) works excellently as a strategy to arrange all your narratives about yourself. However, there is no need at all for the shop behind the showcase to really exist for this strategy to be successful. The representation as a ground plan plus your story is enough for the mutual understanding of inner and outer sides. The interior is an internalized by-product of the language of the street. The so called inner self is reproduced time and again in conversations, but there is no need to attribute an existence to it outside those conversations.

This example is not completely of my own invention. It too is the retelling of a story, based on one of the famous parables from *Philosophical Investigations* of the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). In section 293, Wittgenstein supposes that everyone has a box with something inside it, but no one can look into anyone else's box. It is only through discussion that they can find out what the similarities and differences are in the contents of other peoples' boxes and ones own box. After a lot of discussion it is decided that what is in all the boxes is a beetle. Well, Wittgenstein says, there is no need for such a thing as a pre-existing beetle to be in every box in order to arrive at that conclusion. After all, it is the discussion that creates the referent of what we call a 'beetle.' The illusion of an inner self is created in the same way. It requires other people, and simply cannot be done with a private language. Wittgenstein wants you to suppose that you experience a certain feeling today and write that in your diary. Tomorrow you have the same feeling and you write that you had the feeling 'E' again. But how do you know that it is the same feeling? If you have changed since yesterday, you cannot know it. You might hold a different feeling to be the same one. If you want to catch yourself at it, you are like a man who says 'this is how tall I am,' while he places his own hand on his head. There is no possibility of comparison. It is akin to wanting to verify the veracity of a certain newspaper by buying another copy of the same edition. A private language is ruled out.

Wittgenstein's aim in philosophy is 'to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.' A trap to catch flies or wasps has the form of a bottle into which the insect can fly, but from which it cannot escape once it is trapped. The awareness of self is trapped in a similar way in the cocoon of language that has been spun around it. Can the self be freed from there? No, it cannot,

because it would vanish outside the bottle or outside the figments of the imagination in which it occurs. Wittgenstein tried to achieve that, but had to pay the price of silence. Silence prevails where there is no self being produced.

The inner nature of the so-called inner life may be a linguistic illusion, but we can still talk about it and refer to it as though it really does exist, and that is why it is still kept for all practical purposes. When Sigmund Freud described the inner life in terms of a basement where the unconscious id (*Es*) takes shelter, a ground-floor level for the ego (*Ich*), and an attic room for the superego (*Über-Ich*), was he describing an existing psychological structure, or was this an interior design proposal? He claimed to have borrowed his metaphor for the inner life from his archaeological interest in stratified excavations and the technology of pumping minerals from deep below the earth's surface. The fact that he is using metaphors makes his proposal of arranging all impulses and instincts along those lines no less useful as a social strategy for understanding, as history has proven it to be. His post-Victorian model of personality couched in industrial metaphors prevailed all way until late into the twentieth century and did not lose its validity until the emergence of digital technology.

There is in itself nothing wrong with the fact that a determinate self – whose form is necessarily bound to its era – is produced. But philosophical objections can be raised above all to the reification of the notion of self, which produces the impression that an independent agent hidden inside oneself must correspond to that notion of self. Does it really matter though? I argue that it does: this seemingly trivial mistake – that can be tremendously useful in our communication with one another – inevitably leads to misplaced motives driven by self-delusion. The notion of self that is produced solely by language gets in the way once we want to account for miscommunication and the physical unease that inevitably arises from the friction between language and body.

Compare, for instance, the way humans relate to their surroundings with the bodily way animals relate to them. If a fox hears rustling in the undergrowth, his body puts him in a state of extreme alertness. The hormones that are released in his body make him ready to fight, mate, or run away. The fox may be err and react to false alarms, but there is no doubt that his reactions are an adequate response to real stimuli whose promises can be redeemed. It is astonishing to see how differently we humans react in comparison. As long as our linguistic relation to the world around us remains pragmatically embedded in our actions, we stay close to an appropriate physical response or satisfaction, but as soon as language is reified, a dramatic separation

occurs. Our mouth waters as we leaf through a cookbook; erotic images excite us; ideological and sectarian icons enrage us. The body dangles like a puppet from the strings of language, the hopeless victim of the production of an internal secretion that no longer corresponds to a real environment but exclusively to the symbolic order. Instead of being the master of our own fate, we often feel at the mercy of the caprices of our own body as it revolts against linguistic disciplining. According to Freud, this is inevitable and cultural discontent forms a part of the human condition. According to others though, including Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, it is at least necessary to first undo the reification of notions in order to free the body from the cocoon of language. Plessner's philosophical anthropology points in this direction as well.

The material a priori of the production of self

In Plessner's anthropology, the self is not superimposed onto the body. To the contrary, the self is an emergent phenomenon. The notion of self is an indication of a certain stage in the increasing complexity of how life organizes itself. Plessner describes that process and its stages in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928).

Plessner studied and obtained his doctoral degree in biology. His main interest was in how life organizes itself. This means that the starting point of his philosophical biology was the living body. He began his analysis from the ground up and not from the observatory tower of linguistic reflection. In discussion with some of his colleagues, he found himself in the phenomenological-hermeneutic camp because it offered him the best concepts to account for the pre-reflexive relation between organism and environment. Plessner thereby anticipated the work of Merleau-Ponty. He borrowed Husserl's idea of the intentionality of consciousness, but he also recognized that intentionality at the pre-reflexive level, in every relation between an organism and its environment. The organism constitutes itself in and through its intentional relation with its environment. Equipped with only this modest toolbox at the time, he – like Husserl – engaged with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

In his critiques, Kant had shown that human knowledge consists of the imposition of categorical patterns on sense impressions. Sense impressions are indeed pre-sorted, since our mind supplies the conditions of space and time to every experience, but in other respects they remain undifferentiated until reason steps in. Reason, for example, imposes the category of causality

on perception. In Plessner's first major work, *Die Einheit der Sinne* (1923), he criticized this Kantian dichotomy of categories of reason and amorphous sense impressions. Plessner declares the intentionality of Husserl to apply to the senses as well. The senses already arrange the world synthetically before reason intervenes.

Plessner's interjection is not a frontal attack on Kant, but a proposal to extend Kant's work to the level of the senses. In doing so, he falls in line with Kant's *Critique of Judgment* [*Kritik der Urteilskraft*], in which Kant argued that the unity of experience is not simply given a priori, but has to be actively created. Reflection on the unity of experience belongs to the field of aesthetics, the subject of this third *Critique.* Aesthetics targets, first and foremost, the level of the senses. Plessner is in agreement with this. There is no overarching guarantee (in the idea of God or Being) for the unity of experience, nor is there a pledge for it (nature). Unity is, at most, an aesthetic regulatory idea that, according to Plessner, is already aimed at the lowest levels of organic complexity, but can never be fully attained.

In *Die Stufen* from 1928, Plessner resumes the idea that all life opposes chaos and infinity by creating unity. An organism already creates unity at an elementary level by an intentional act of boundary realization. Every form of life – albeit at different levels of complexity – actively maintains the boundary with its environment. Boundary maintenance proves to be a task of all life which is constantly under threat. In the last pages of this book, which deal with human beings, Plessner crowns his philosophical work with his ideas about the ultimate unattainability of unity. People long to return to an overarching or supporting unity, but they will never find it. They long to return to God or Nature, but can only build such a 'home' themselves as a temporary platform above an abyss. We have to wrest our home base from the underlying mediations that link us with the outside world and our fellow human beings and we better be satisfied with that precarious achievement.

Plessner sees self-awareness as an outcome of the growing complexity in how life is organized. He reconstructs the requisite steps leading up to it. *Die Stufen* deals with the continuity and discontinuity between plants, animals and human beings. The intentional relation with the environment is first formed in the plant. Plessner called the intentional basic act 'boundary realization.' The plant interacts with its environment across the boundary, or to put it more precisely, the plant distinguishes itself from its environment by means of boundary maintenance, while the environment is itself constituted by this very act. A dynamic equilibrium is sought in the interaction between the two. For example, petals open when the sun rises

and close when it sets. Plessner calls this active maintenance of interaction – at different levels of complexity, depending on whether it is a plant, animal, or human being – the positionality of any life form.

The positionality of animals differs from that of plants in terms of intentional mediation (mediation in the phenomenological sense, not to be understood as 'deliberate or intended' retroaction). This primal mediation gives the animal a centre from which to operate in relation to its environment. However, the animal is incapable of distancing itself from its own centre, i.e. observe or direct itself from a distance. That requires a further act of mediation, which leads to the emergence of the human from the animal as well as to the rise of the specific human world. Unlike animals, people do not coincide with themselves, but are in a position next to or above themselves. This is because of their constitutional relation to self or 'eccentricity.' This is also why they have no *direct* access to the world, which is very specifically and contextually 'their' world, but at most only a thoroughly mediated one that always remains incomplete. The requisite mediations take place through language, image and technology.

Plessner worked recursively. Observing a great diversity of life forms and using a limited number of categories – intentional boundary maintenance, mediation and positionality – he derived the supporting categorical framework of nature. The framework of categories makes it possible to reconstruct the world of flesh and blood in all its diversity. Plessner calls his framework of categories the 'material a priori' of the different life forms. He differs from Kant in that Kant traced categories that enable the 'knowledge' or 'understanding' of nature, while Plessner tracks down the conditions of possibility of a cognizant existence. What are the categorical conditions that must be met if a self-reflexive life form is to emerge from nature? Plessner was proud of having supplemented Kant's cognitive a priori with the material a priori of the human cognizant life form.

In Plessner's system, human self-awareness is an a posteriori effect of how life organizes itself, but not its transcendental origin. Plessner does not fall into the trap of the reification of the self vis-à-vis the mediations of which it is the product. The relation to self can be culturally elaborated in many different ways. The so-called autonomous self is a historical phase of the self that depends on modern techniques of representation. First there are technical and visual relations to the world, from which a specific sense of self emerges that is narratively constituted in the modern period. That 'self' takes over and claims to be able to deliberately handle the underlying mediations – on which that 'self' depends for its own survival. In opposition to this modern self-delusion, Plessner gives priority to the mediation in its specific, material form.

He explains at the end of *Die Stufen* that human eccentricity inevitably leads to a division into an inner world, outer world, and a shared world. This is followed by the famous three primary laws of the eccentric life form: mediated immediacy, artificiality by nature, and the utopian standpoint. Taken as a whole, this means that the boundaries between inside and outside are not fixed, but they rather have to be redrawn anew in each historical period, depending on the negotiations between people and their mediatory instances. Plessner hereby anticipates philosophies of mediation that were developed much later, such as those of Bruno Latour and Don Ihde. Right from the start he defends a plurality of cultural possibilities. People should not allow themselves to be deceived by religious or philosophical promises. There is no happy end around the corner, no final oneness to be expected. Self-articulation remains a tricky enterprise. Whether we like it or not, we have to interact with the material conditions of our day and confine ourselves to that.

The persistence of the modern subject

'More is thought than people think,' Plessner wittily remarked. There is no one in your head who does the thinking. Plessner's material a priori formally clarifies the emergence of self-awareness from how life organizes itself and goes on to demonstrate that material mediation is a necessary condition of human self-articulation. On the basis of those premises, it then becomes possible to explain – with an appeal to specific historical mediations – how the modern 'autonomous' subject (the 'somebody' who thinks in the head) could arise and maintain its currency for a while. After all, every philosophy – and in the last resort the philosophy of human eccentricity as well – derives most of its validity from the artefacts and media that are popular in its cultural context. The modern autonomous subject received philosophical expression from René Descartes, who fell back on the camera obscura that was making such a furore at the time. The elaboration of this example will serve to show the usefulness of Plessner's material a priori and demonstrate where the representational model of knowledge that is under review comes from.

The modern era began when Descartes pronounced the autonomous status of the subject: *cogito ergo sum*. But this pronouncement was preceded by discoveries in the field of instruments. The rules of drawing by using linear perspective were developed by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1425, after which Leon Battista Alberti recorded them ten years later in *De Pictura*,

his treatise on painting. Linear or centralized perspective is based on a one-eyed vision focused on a field of intersection – usually a pane of glass – placed at right angles to the line of vision. If you then fix your gaze, or keep your head still with one eye shut, and transfer the lines that you see to the glass, this procedure automatically results in a reconstruction of three dimensions on the plane surface. In *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927), the art historian and neo-Kantian Erwin Panofsky demonstrated that centralized perspective is not a faithful reproduction of what we see, but forms a specific regime of vision that is imposed on the impressions of the senses. That regime not only encapsulates the world within a specific representational form, but it also manoeuvres people into the position of becoming remote viewers. The world as a scene that can be externally calculated and the concomitant spectator have been created by this new way of viewing since 1435. It then took only a small step for Descartes in 1637, when he decked this spectator out philosophically as an autonomous subject.

The pane of glass plus the addition of a visor to keep the head still became the standard equipment of Renaissance artists. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the production of the objective world and of the corresponding spectator/observer was taken over by the camera obscura, the new mediatory instrument for viewing. This enabled the material automation of the production of the modern subject. This material view of the genesis of the subject goes further than Panofsky as a neo-Kantian could go, but it is defensible in Plessner's terms. After all, for its articulation, the subject depends on mediations that cause that subject to interact with the material world.

The camera obscura consists of a black box with a small aperture in one of the walls that functions as a single eye or lens. An image of the outside world from a centralized perspective is projected onto the opposite wall. If the image that appears in the box, darkroom or tent is traced, the result is a representation from a centralized perspective. The camera obscura replaced the pane of glass and visor as an instrument for artists. They took it outdoors to represent landscapes in perspective. In the nineteenth century, it became possible to record the images in a small-format camera obscura on photosensitive film. This camera became the popular successor to the camera obscura. Each of the remediations in this outlined history reproduced the spectator subject.

The camera and television still reproduce the autonomous subject of the Renaissance every day, but by now of course, a number of rival technologies have emerged, each of which produces a different type of subject. In their

book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Bolter and Grusin distinguish the remediated self, the virtual self and the networked self in relation to contemporary digital technologies (Bolter and Grusin 1999). This brings us to the end of the exclusive appeals to the Cartesian notion of self.

Regardless of all that, the roots of modernity still lie in the process of the production of self by viewing instruments such as the camera obscura, the camera and television, as I outlined above. Even though they have become outdated, their influence seems to be fairly ineradicable. In that respect we, are still faithful heirs to Descartes. He not only proclaimed the modern observing subject – as the hub in his new scientific method – but also engaged in science himself. Among his writings is a treatise on optics, in which he compares the eye with a camera obscura. The modern ideal of knowledge is based on that comparison. There lies the origin of the predominance of the representational model under scrutiny, as can be seen once we rewrite history from the perspective of underlying material mediation.

For Descartes, the camera obscura is a model for the acquisition of knowledge (Bailey 1989). The eye works like a camera obscura. The lens of the eye is the aperture in the black box. An image of the outside world is projected onto the retina, leading to the production of a representation of the outside world within the head. But who reads that image on the screen of the retina? Perhaps a homunculus, a miniature counterpart of ourselves located in the middle of our head? Descartes drew a methodological distinction between the body – that he conceives in mechanistic terms – and the soul. Still, the two domains have to be brought together and in contact with one another. Descartes claims that this takes place in the pineal gland in the middle of the head. That is the small chamber where the homunculus resides and from where it observes the world and gives names to everything. That is the cockpit where the homunculus pulls the levers to set the body in motion. Each of us has his or her own representation of the outside world in the head, depending on perspective. If we move our bodies through space an take up each other's spatial positions, we can assume one another's perspectives. Knowledge is thus based on reciprocally compared and corroborated representations of the world that we perceive somewhere outside ourselves, but that is duplicated inside us via words and images.

Until the late twentieth century, certain knowledge consisted in the correspondence between the object and its representation ascertained by the spectator. By now however, that ideal of knowledge has been replaced by a pragmatic approach that firmly embeds language in transactional practices and in the cultural contexts in which they take place. The representational model of the remote observer has been replaced by that of

knowledge acquisition through involvement in which language use can also develop dynamically. Plessner certainly contributed to the correction of the Cartesian anthropology, but over and against that he also developed a philosophical anthropology in its own right in which the mediated existence of human beings occupies a central position. Moreover, Plessner also shows how philosophy serves to create an equilibrium in human existence amid the constant changes of the mediatory substratum of artefacts and media. The validity of a philosophy depends partly on the media from which it borrows its problems and metaphors. This gives his philosophy an intercultural importance too. Technology is not a universal influence for Plessner, as it was for his contemporaries Jaspers and Heidegger. Plessner can culturally differentiate; he was the first to formulate a philosophical anthropology that offers insight into cultural variation on the basis of material mediation.

Material mediation in cultural plurality

The philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner proves to be extremely topical in the philosophy of technology and in the discussion of cyborgs. This theme is raised for discussion by several participants of this volume. In contrast to the dualistic view, they argue that the human body is thoroughly ambivalent (laid out for mediation). Our natural alienation in our bodily relation is discussed by Maarten Coolen in this volume. Dierk Spreen argues in his chapter on the cyborg that alienation of the body is constitutive of human identity and that "attributions of agency have to be negotiated over and against the implanted brain chip." Security policy gains new field as criminals may hack into the body. Hans Peter Krüger uses these examples to show that the boundary between the private and the public domain has to be redrawn time and again; for Plessner, the limits of the community are at stake each time we engage in this process. Although the cyborg hardly marks a radical break in the Plessnerian view, since people are artificial by nature anyway, Jos de Mul and Peter-Paul Verbeek wanted to widen that framework by adding an extra, trans-human stage to the *Stufen*.[2]

Plessner is rightly being rediscovered today and deployed as a philosopher of mediation because he emphasizes the reciprocity of body and community even more than Merleau-Ponty does with technology

2 See the chapters of Coolen, Spreen, Krüger, De Mul, and Verbeek in this volume.

as the mediatory third party. I am therefore all the more surprised that Joachim Fischer saw so many obstacles on this path. He praised Plessner's anthropology as the navigable middle course between the biologism of Darwin and the culturalism of Foucault. He immediately placed my contribution in the rejected Foucault camp. That is probably only possible if Foucault's work is reduced to the initial stage of *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), in which Foucault exposes the anonymous power mechanisms that are at work in (self)disciplining through language. But later – particularly in *Surveiller et Punir* (1975) – Foucault points to the disciplinary power of material mediations with the famous Panopticon of Jeremy Bentham as the paradigm. Moreover, he focuses his attention on all kinds of insidious forms of bodily disciplining that are inherent in the appropriation of military and medical technologies. This focus on materially mediated biopolitics led him to raise the question of 'care for oneself' (*Le Souci de soi*) once again in the final stage of his work, starting with the second volume of his trilogy on sexuality (1984). How can autonomy be acquired in negotiation with embodied technologies? We also came across the same question in applications of Plessner's philosophy of mediation to the example of the implanted brain chip. Autonomy is not innate, but has to be wrested from the mediatory media that drive and support the production of the subject. That is why I seek to form an alliance with Plessner and the late Foucault. In my book *Technology Art, Fairs and Theatre* (2003), I propose a reconciliation between Plessner's anthropology and Foucault's recommendation of practices of care for oneself vis-à-vis material mediations. But would that lead to the culturalism that Joachim Fischer fears?[3] Which form of culturalism is he afraid of? There is something important at stake in the anthropological discussion. In the modern tradition, the notion of culture is mainly identified with the symbolic order: the superstructure of texts and art. That did not change when postmodernism came into fashion at the end of the twentieth century, because that philosophical current was nourished mainly on linguistics and semiotics. The same holds true for poststructuralism, to which Foucault is often ascribed, which was integrated in postmodernism as one of its tributaries. In that vision, cultures are taken to consist of interlocking networks of signs and texts. Those texts have abandoned the modern media of books and other printed matter and are now found dispersed in the street, in advertising, status symbols, designer clothing, and so on. Moreover, it is impossible to distinguish pure styles any more, eclecticism rules, with a complete

3 See the Fischer's chapter in this volume.

cultural relativism as the result. This form of culturalism – Fischer seems to regard Foucault as an apologist for it, if not its founder – falls under my criticism of the exclusively linguistic view of culture, cultural identity and cultural self-awareness. My initial diagnosis of linguistic aberrations mainly targets postmodern lifestyle identities, whose production is entirely semiotic. In this respect, I share Fischer's preoccupations, but my solution lies in a different direction.

The major philosophers of technology of the last century – the Frenchmen Jacques Ellul, the German Martin Heidegger, and the American Lewis Mumford – all propagated a monolithic and universalist view of technology. Although technology today is considerably more differentiated and available in a large variety of subcultural forms of manifestation, there is still a fear of the global levelling of cultural differences. Everywhere where Philips, Sony, McDonalds and Nike enter with their goods and services, local traditions and rituals die out and are replaced by a universal TV language. People watch *Dallas* everywhere; the world is becoming the same everywhere. I would like to deploy Plessner's anthropology of material mediation against this incorrect view. The world is only becoming the same everywhere with regard to the semiotic field. If artefacts and media are taken to be nothing but signifiers and sign transmission stations, then everything does become the same indeed, but that is exactly what I am arguing against by using Plessner. Artefacts are embedded in the body and the senses, and in that social process, they interlock with local practices, context-bound idiom and signification. That means that the cultural production of self is also characterized by a contextual differentiation. It is not even ruled out that the embedded artefacts may in turn become involved in a culturally innovative refashioning process and undergo cultural differentiation (for example, video art in China is different from that found in Europe or the United States). Hence, the world is not becoming the same everywhere. You can only think that if you remain bogged down in semiotic culturalism.

There are few philosophical anthropologists whose work has managed to stand up to the rightly anti-essentialist critique mounted by the postmodernists. The work of Helmuth Plessner displays less existential pathos than Heidegger, for example, (which is why it eclipsed earlier), but as the ripple of semiotic postmodernism recedes, it becomes all the more topical for its sober emphasis on the cultural diversity of our mediated existence.

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19 The Brain in the Vat as the Epistemic Object of Neurobiology

Gesa Lindemann

Neurobiology, science studies and philosophical anthropology

Neuroscientists have developed a fascinating imaging technique. They produce pictures that, they claim, show which regions of the brain are active when we feel, when we perceive other persons, or when we make decisions. It is the aim of many neuroscientists to explain such mental phenomena by reducing them to neuronal events. The crucial step for fulfilling this objective would be to build an explanatory theory of the brain. Constructing such a theory is therefore a long-term aim of neuroscience, the achievement of which requires specific research strategies. Contemporary approaches in neuroscience deem it necessary to examine the activity of individual cells, of small cell groups, and of the dynamic organization of large neuronal networks. This activity is identified with the brain's internal processing of signals (and information). According to the self-interpretation of the researchers, "invasive electrophysiology" is the branch of research concerned with how the brain processes signals in detail, and it is this kind of research which will lay the groundwork for an explanatory mechanistic theory of the brain. Other types of signals like fMRI do not have the same reputation of being relevant for an explanatory theory of the brain. Changes in blood oxygen level, for example, are evaluated as an indication that energy-demanding neuronal activities have occurred in corresponding areas, which is why more energy has been used and therefore more oxygen consumed. Assuming that this is the case, such a measurement would offer indications as to where to presume increased neuronal activity, but it could tell us nothing about what has actually occurred in these areas.

During invasive electrophysiology, electrodes are placed into an organism's brain. These electrodes detect and transmit the electrical signals of individual cells and smaller cell groups. For ethical reasons, such research is not conducted on human subjects for purely scientific purposes, but only on animals.[1] The most frequently used animal subjects include mice, rats,

1 This technique is used on human subjects only when electrodes are introduced into the brain for therapeutic reasons, for example, in treating people with epilepsy. The electrodes are

cats, and macaque monkeys. Macaques are used almost exclusively for the analysis of higher regulatory functions, including complex learning processes. This was also the case at the institutes where I carried out my observations.

According to the scientists' understanding of their own findings, electrophysiological research provides a mechanistic account of the brain and its functions by using a third-person perspective.[2] An explanatory theory of mental phenomena like attention, memory or decision-making will thereby be achieved.

In this article, I argue that it is impossible to give a valid account of the experimental process, as long as only a third-person perspective is adopted. A close examination of the research process instead reveals that, in practice, neuroscientists adopt a "second-person perspective." They treat their counterparts as expressive beings that must be understood thoroughly before they can be handled properly.

Understanding the expressivity of others is usually used as a framework for the analysis of social persons. We expect that our counterpart is not only a physically perceived entity, but also a meaningful one. By this we mean that there is a self that expresses itself, its intentions and expectations, through gestures and speech. This can be described as a "second-person perspective," which is usually restricted to an analysis of interactions among symbol-using beings – like humans (Bohman 2000). Using the approach of Helmuth Plessner (1928), it becomes possible to adopt the second-person perspective also for the analysis of the interactions with beings and among beings, who do not use symbols. It enables us to show that in order to perform their experiments, neuroscientists have to understand their research subjects, but do not need to treat them as self-conscious social actors. In particular, Plessner's theory allows an understanding of a crucial feature of neurobiological brain research: the epistemic object of such research is the isolated brain as a system. During the experiment's initial phases, the interaction between the experimenter and the organism is crucial, but in the phase of preparing and analyzing data, it is the brain which becomes

then used to stimulate certain areas of the brain electrically. However, these same electrodes can also be used "in reverse," that is, to record the electrophysiological signals of neurons. The areas of the brain involved here are not determined according to the criteria of scientific research but rather by those of therapeutic treatment. Research and recording based on scientific criteria in the narrower sense of the term can be conducted only on nonhuman organisms.

2 Wolf Singer, one of the leading neuroscientists, who is also engaged in discussions with philosophers, states this in several publications. See, for example, his essays in Singer 2002.

the system of interest. The epistemic object of neurobiology is treated as if it were a brain in the vat.

I will develop my argument in three steps. After a short description of Plessner's theory of positionality, I present a description of research practices in monkey labs and finally I offer an interpretation of these practices.

Expressivity and expressive realization as an attribute of positionality

In terms of methodology, Plessner generalizes the use of a second-person perspective. Usually, a second-person perspective is adopted in order to understand social phenomena, like symbolic interaction. Plessner extends the use of the second-person perspective by applying it to beings that do not use symbols but are simply alive or are simply conscious. Understanding symbols or understanding interactions mediated by symbols is only one form of understanding. According to Plessner, the most basic event for understanding is the event of being alive.

Plessner uses the term positionality to denote the capacity of living things to realize their own borders, a quality which distinguishes them from inanimate things. A living being delimits itself from its environment and mediates all of its contact with that environment through these self-drawn borders. Living beings regulate contact with their environment and maintain themselves vis-à-vis that environment as self-organizing entities. Plessner thus asserts that biologically observable and experimentally determinable phenomena must also be comprehensible in terms of his theory of positionality. If this is the case, we can, conversely, also regard such biological phenomena as the realization of being alive. Plessner views expressivity coming into play even at this level. Living organisms produce their own borders – a fact that is evident on or in the organism itself and can therefore be observed. The production of one's own borders is an expressive phenomenon insofar as being alive is not strictly identical to the produced phenomena, which can be observed directly. According to the theory of positionality, the observed phenomena must be treated as indications of the fact that the organism is alive. In other words, the reason to interpret phenomena in such a way is that they are an indication of the activity of life, which appears only indirectly. Being alive is an attribute that has to be concluded from the observed phenomena.

A further complication arises for living things that possess consciousness, or in Plessner's words, that exist on the level of "centric positionality."

According to Plessner, conscious living beings are able to relate to the fact of their border realization and can therefore regulate their external appearance independently. We can distinguish here between two dimensions of this relationship of the living being to its environment: 1) perceiving the external field and 2) affecting the external field. Both of these dimensions are realized expressively. The organism appears as a being that perceives and affects. We should not equate expressivity solely with affecting, as perceiving is also realized expressively. Thus, through observation we are able to determine that an organism, first perceives its environment, then affects its environment; and subsequently mediates between the two. How an organism coordinates this perceiving and affecting is left to the organism itself. As part of this process, an organism develops expectations about the future course of events and acts in accordance with these expectations. To the extent that an organism regulates itself in this way, it alters its own appearance according to its inner state and thereby regulates its own expressivity. For Plessner, understanding a conscious organism makes reference to its inner states and to how it regulates itself based on its relation to the environment.

"Eccentric positionality" designates a situation arising from the performance of self-regulation, in which an organism is able to distance itself from this performance and is thus capable of relating to it. On the level of eccentric positionality, an organism is able not only to develop expectations and regulate its behavior accordingly, but also to relate itself to its own performance of self-regulation. In other words, it can comprehend itself as an organism that other organisms develop expectations about. Eccentric organisms adjust their own behavior according to the expectations others have of them. For eccentric organisms, the environment is also populated by other expecting organisms, whose expectations must then be anticipated. When referring to the circumstance of organisms existing in this kind of mutual relationship, I use the term "*personale Vergesellschaftung*" (Lindemann 2009, chap. 2). It may be translated as "sociation[3] to social persons." Thereby I mean that a being becomes a social person within and by the process of sociation. This circumstance must also be realized expressively. There is, however, a further and decisive feature we must consider here. If sociation to social persons is realized expressively, it can only be observed in the relation

3 The German word "Vergesellschaftung," translated from German into English, means "sociation." See, for example: Wolfgang J. Koschnick, *Standard Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (München: Saur, 1993), vol. 2, part 2, 2021.

of organisms to one another. Eccentric positionality and sociation to social persons cannot be realized by an individual organism alone.

Eccentric positionality and sociation to social persons refer to highly complex relationships which show a structure that is different from the agency of (conscious) living beings. By using Plessner, we can also differentiate these forms of agency from the agency of inanimate artifacts; that is, from entities which cannot die and which are not considered to have expectations. Artifacts are assumed to break down, but they are not assumed to display an autonomous activity which ceases such that it would be meaningful to describe the process as dying. As a result, reference to Plessner allows us to develop a highly differentiated concept of agency, which is neither flat (like Latour's 2005) nor dichotomous.

Plessner's theory provides a fresh perspective in another respect as well. Hans-Joerg Rheinberger (1992a, 8of.) has offered an intricate analysis of representation in science. He shows that far from representation being a means of portraying a pre-existing reality, the experimental process produces the represented reality. In these terms, brain activity as it occurs in neuroscience would be conceived of as an epistemic object which is not external to representation. To the contrary, the experimental system would be the condition of existence of brain activity as an epistemic object. The brain as an epistemic object is represented by traces produced by recording devices, but these traces do not represent nature. Instead, it is the experimental system which produces brain activity as an epistemic object by representing it as traces.[4] Applying Rheinberger's framework, the process of representation refers above all to the activities of neuroscientists and artifacts. But there is another actor in the field: the monkey organism. Plessner's theory demands that we always ask ourselves the following questions: What is the role of the living organism in the experiment? What is the significance of its expressivity? Is there anything indicating that its expressivity has to be understood?

My data suggests that in many fields of neurobiology, the living organism cannot be transformed completely into a technical and/or epistemic object. The experiment is persistently concerned with the present activities of the living organism. It is only during the final stage of data analysis that neurobiological experimenters can create an epistemic object.

4 For an analysis of visualization techniques, see also Don Ihde (2006) and his concept of revolutionary visualizing techniques.

Experimental practices

In neurobiology, the whole experimental process, from designing the experiment to data analysis and publication, can typically take up to 5 years. An experiment is conducted in four stages:

1. Designing the experiment
2. Integration of the subject into the experimental setup; in the case of monkey subjects, this includes teaching them the desired task
3. Recording neuronal activities while a subject performs the task
4. Collecting and analyzing the data

In the next paragraphs, I will give a brief overview of the specific tasks and challenges a researcher must face in each of the four stages.

Stage 1: Designing the experiment and preliminary procedures

Based on existing knowledge, a research question is somewhat precisely defined and a target area is identified, e.g.: Which brain region's neuronal activity is relevant for short-term memory, motor control or visual perception (or even more specifically: for perception of color or shape)? Often the target area is called the "region of interest." With reference to Rheinberger's distinction between technical and epistemic objects, a region of interest shows properties of both. Based on certain postulates about how neuronal signals are processed, electrodes of a certain shape and sensitivity must be used. A technically stable connection must be established between the cells of the region of interest and the measuring and storing devices. This connection has to function in the same way reliably and repeatedly. In this sense, the region of interest has the characteristics of a technical object (see Rheinberger 1992b). At the same time, it is unknown which events will occur, and which pattern of neuronal activities will be detected in the region of interest. The brain, particularly the region of interest, will be transformed into an epistemic object when the recorded data is analyzed.

Stage 2: Integration of the subject into the experimental setup

Integrating a monkey subject into the experimental arrangement is a complicated interactive process. In particular, two aspects are important here: First, during this phase, the monkey is recognized as a conscious organism which has to be motivated to participate actively in an experiment. Second,

the monkey exists not only as an organism, but also as a technical object which can be connected to several technical devices in order to perform the experiment. Both aspects are of crucial relevance for an understanding of the integration process.

The monkey in the chair

The first step in a subject's integration into the experimental setup is to get him/her into a so-called "restraint chair." According to the necessities of the experimental design, a monkey chair restricts the subject's movements. To limit mobility, a very common device is a metal collar around the neck of the monkey, which can be connected to the chair. However, some experimenters do not use a collar and prefer instead for their subject's body to be enclosed in a Plexiglas box with only its head protruding from the top. The initial steps of familiarizing the monkey subject with the experimental setting are done either by a lab technician or by an experimenter – usually a PhD student.

It is a long, step-by-step process in which a subject learns to leave the cage, being moved into a chair, being brought from the monkey room to the lab where the experiment will take place, and finally learn and perform the task for hours at a time. It should always be the same person who handles the monkey, and there should never be more than three persons involved. In every step of this learning process he will be rewarded, by being given fruits, nuts, raisins, water, juice, etc. The first lesson the subject must learn is that it is the experimenter (or the lab technician) who provides these fluids and delicacies.

A lab technician describes how he gets a monkey into a restraint chair:

> The first step is to go into the room, so the monkey gets used to the presence of someone new. I feed him fruits, candies and treats. The animal becomes accustomed to the presence of the new person. Once the monkey has grown familiar with the new situation, he is anesthetized and fitted with a collar. The next step is to hold a pole into the cage and latch the pole to the collar. When the monkey becomes anxious, he again receives fruits, candies and treats. When he comes to tolerate it, he[5] is taken out of the cage. […] When a monkey is taken out of the cage, all the other monkeys will look at him. The monkey becomes anxious. To calm the monkey and make him 'confident in the process,' I offer fruits, candies

5 At most of the institutes I observed, the Macaque monkeys were referred to as a "he" or a "she" and not as an "it."

> and treats to all the monkeys in the room. […] Then the fruits are placed in the chair. One has to pull the monkey into the chair 'gently but firmly.' Usually we are stronger than a monkey. […] It takes 5-10 minutes. Once the animal is in the chair, it gets something special, again fruits or something (Field notes, G.L.).

The lab technician understands the monkey explicitly as a being who perceives his environment, experiences his own states (e.g. he may be anxious), and acts in response to his perceptions. Furthermore, the monkey is treated as a being with expectations. The subject is used to a routine, i.e. he or she has developed concrete expectations concerning the course of events. Even the occurrence of a new person in his environment is considered a breach of his expectation pattern. In such cases, the subject has to learn that the new situation is not harmful, and then gradually develop new patterns of expectations.

I interpret this account as an indication of the lab tech recognizing the monkey as a conscious being. It is not an ascription which can be withdrawn voluntarily. For all practical purposes, the monkey must be recognized as a conscious subject by the lab technician and/or by the experimenter. The methods adopted by other lab technicians or by experimenters differ in detail. I found no evidence, however, to suggest that for practical purposes a lab technician or experimenter does not recognize a macaque subject as a conscious being – expecting a certain course of events and regulating his/her own relationship to the environment.

The second aspect of the monkey being treated as a technical object becomes obvious by looking at the surgical preparations of the monkey's head. Determining the region of interest in an individual monkey brain means determining where a so-called "recording chamber" will be implanted on the skull. A piece of the cranium must be removed under sterile conditions equivalent to those in neurosurgical operations on human beings, leaving an opening approximately 1.5-2.0 cm in diameter. The recording chamber is then placed through this opening. An electrode matrix can be attached to the chamber and rendered immovable. Usually the matrix is only placed on the chamber during recording sessions and removed after recording.[6] The recording chamber is implanted in such a way that the regions of interest are easily accessible by perpendicular entry of the electrodes into the brain.

6 Only sometimes electrodes are implanted chronically.

In order to ensure that the activities of the same cells or cell groups are recorded consistently, the electrodes must firmly stay precisely in the same position all throughout the procedure. Presumably, an organism would not sit as still as is required. The recording chamber must be placed on the skull such that a head post can additionally be attached to the monkey's head. The post serves to mechanically fix the head during the experiment. The head post is the first indication of the necessity of persistently transforming the organism into a techno-epistemic object.

The monkey in the chair facing a task

The next steps are concerned with familiarizing the monkey with the lab itself and to get him/her to learn the task. The latter consists of two parts: First, the chair is placed in a box, which serves as a faraday cage, in front of a monitor. Now the subject must learn to treat the events displayed on the screen as a problem, the solution to which requires him/her to take action. Second, the subject has to learn to work for an extended period (3 to 4 hours). This learning process is called "training." A monkey who is being trained is "working." A monkey who performs many consecutive trials without a break is "a good worker." To illustrate these terms, I will describe a task in more detail.

The "delayed match-to-sample" task is a variable experimental design frequently employed in monkey labs worldwide. This experiment involves presenting a subject with two visual stimuli in short succession. The first of these is the "sample stimulus," for instance the image of a banana. The second, the "test stimulus," presents either the same image – a banana again – or another image, for example, a cherry or an umbrella. If the same image appears, there is a match, or correspondence, between the test and sample stimulus. If a different test stimulus is presented, there is a non-match, or non-correspondence. The monkey's task is to indicate through his/her behavior whether s/he has comprehended the difference between a match and a non-match. The macaque is presented with various options, depending on the experimental design. The subject can press two different buttons (for example, the left one for a match and the right one for a non-match). Each of the individual sequences lasts only a few seconds and is repeated hundreds of times in every session. Well-trained laboratory monkeys are even capable of engaging in up to two thousand individual trials per session. For each correct answer, the subject receives a reward in the form of a drop of water or juice. The sequence within each individual trial as well as the succession of individual trials in a session is timed in milliseconds. The reason for this is that signal processing in the brain is assumed to occur at a comparable or even faster velocity.

The monkey in the chair working for a reward

Learning a particular task can often be a complicated interactive process in which the reward serves two separate functions. 1) It is through the reward that the subject is induced to participate in the experiment at all. 2) However, the reward also has a cognitive-interactive function.

Regarding 1: By and large, macaque subjects are not motivated to take part in the experiment on their own accord. Their interest in participation must be induced indirectly. During the work period, they are given no fluids as part of their daily diet. In the researchers' jargon, the macaques have to "earn" their fluids through participation in the experiment. In the eyes of the experimenters, deprivation of fluids does not constitute a negative sanction, but instead increases their receptivity for positive reinforcement. The experimenters strictly reject negative reinforcement in the form of punishment. Although deprivation of fluids may be seen as a drastic measure, it does not have a conditioning effect that could unambiguously alter behavior. It is left up to the monkey subjects whether and to what degree they are motivated by this measure to participate in the experiment.

Occasionally, a subject sits in a chair in front of a stimulus and does not work. When discussing possible solutions, scientists and lab technicians take into account the fact that a subject does not react only to the stimulus in the lab. In order to understand why a subject is not motivated to participate in the experiment, scientists and lab technicians always refer to the situation of the subject as a whole. As a starting point, they take the behavior exhibited by the monkey. Lack of motivation could be caused by restraining devices. If that is suspected, the experimenter will examine them and check whether they could make the subject feel too uncomfortable, and whether adjusting them helps to increase the monkey's motivation. If the subject does not display any signs of distress, s/he will be suspected to have fallen back on other sources of liquid. This opportunity may be offered by the housing conditions. Some monkeys live in groups in spatial cages which are cleaned with water. Finally, a subject can try to drink as little as possible.

Although the monkey is made thirsty by rather rigorous methods, no one believes that his/her behavior is simply externally determined. To the contrary, the monkey is supposed to have a choice in how to react to the situation. This becomes more obvious when other reasons are discussed. If a subject not only works poorly but is anxious or somehow agitated, it is an indication that the monkey is having trouble with cage-mates. Researchers discuss, in accordance with their interpretation of the monkey's situation, how s/he can be efficiently motivated to resume participation in the training or the experiment. If the social situation is believed to be the problem,

it is exhaustively discussed: Which individuals are compatible with which others? Which individuals would fight with each other, etc.? Especially in the case of group housing, falsely estimating relationships among macaques can have severe consequences, since their fights can lead to serious injuries.

If an organism is treated in this way, s/he is recognized as a conscious being. As such, the macaque subject cannot be controlled directly, but her/himself steers how s/he is controlled by external means. It therefore seems appropriate to assume that the macaque subject is expected to follow a motive. It is up to the macaque to decide whether s/he allows him/herself to be motivated.

Regarding 2: Beyond this function, the controlled administration of fluids also works to permit a clear interactive understanding on the behavioral level between subject and scientist. Scientists expect that, within an extremely controlled situation, the macaque subject will regard a sequence of images on a monitor as a task to be accomplished. It is impossible to explain this to the subject verbally, but must be demonstrated by giving or withholding a reward. Since the macaque subject is almost certainly thirsty, s/he is supposed to be interested in fluids and in anything that will result in him/her receiving them. Whether the subject is able to perform the cognitive task can then be inferred by his/her behavior. Pressing a button or releasing a lever indicates the subject's response to the image sequences. If subjects react randomly, their behavior is evaluated as non-comprehensive. For example, one experimenter assessed the situation as follows: "He doesn't understand yet." If, in contrast, the subject does not press the buttons randomly but in the desired manner, the monkey has demonstrated that s/he understands what is happening. Conversely, administering the reward demonstrates to the monkey that s/he has performed correctly. "I ask Ms. Miller (laboratory technician), 'Why don't you wait until the monkey has answered correctly four or five times? Then he could receive more water at once instead of a small drop for each correct answer.' Ms. Miller, 'That's not possible. How would the monkey know that he has answered correctly?" (Field notes, G.L.).

For a macaque subject to be admitted for an actual experiment, three conditions must be satisfied: 1. The subject must demonstrate that s/he has understood that the sequence of images or other stimuli is a task that needs to be accomplished. 2. The subject must demonstrate through his/her answers that s/he understands what is happening and what is expected of him/her. 3. The subject must demonstrate a continuous readiness to participate in the experiment. If any of these three criteria is not met, the subject is not admitted to the experiment.

Stage 3: The experiment

The actual experiment begins – like the training before – with the subject being fixed in the chair. Then, the electrode matrix has to be placed on the recording chamber. The subject is presented with the stimuli and performs as it has been trained to do. During an experimental session, a subject performs up to 2000 single trials. While the monkey is performing, the experimenter lowers electrodes into the subject's brain; s/he does not notice this, as the brain tissue is not sensitive to pain. Neuronal activity is represented through both visual and auditory means. Visually, the neuronal activity of several cells – the local field potentials – appears as an irregular curve that flickers on a monitor – a so called oscillator. The activity of individual cells is represented as a succession of discontinuously illuminated dots, which can also be depicted through sounds. The auditory representation of neuronal expressivity is similar to the static on old shellac records. In this way, the organism acquires a new technically mediated expressive surface: It exhibits behavior (eye movements, pressing buttons, moving levers) and neuronal activity (spikes, local field potentials).

In order to prepare this data for further analysis, measuring devices specifically designed produce traces which are electronically stored. Certain curves indicate eye movements of the subject. Other curves indicate the local field potentials and discrete dots indicate the rates of spikes. In the neuronal data, the onset of stimulus and the time of the subject's response (pressing a button, releasing a lever, etc.) are recorded.

Stage 4: Data analysis

The process of data analysis consists of four steps: first, sorting out the remaining artifacts and evaluating the data's quality; second, organizing the data in sets[7]; third, transferring the data into an artificial multidimensional space and analyzing it; fourth, writing, discussing and publishing a paper.

Well-organized datasets are malleable, so that they can be readily tailored towards the specificities of the analysis. As such, they are a prerequisite for the next step. The acquired data is then transferred into an artificial multidimensional space in which the gestalt of the curves is analyzed, as well as their relationship to perceptual and behavioral events: Onset of stimulus, eye movements, performing a correct or incorrect response – all of these events may or may not be correlated with a particular pattern of neuronal activity.

7 For a more detailed description, see Lindemann 2009b.

During the training and the experimental session, researchers are dependent on monkeys as organisms developing and regulating their own relationship to their environment. In contrast to this, every operation in the artificial space is under strict control of the scientist. Of course, technical problems might come up at times. Sometimes an analysis requires more computer power than is available, and the analysis has to be split up, which in turn can cause further technical problems. Perhaps a computational cluster does not function or an analysis is not properly constructed. But there is no need to establish a trustful relationship with computers and analytical tools. They are not wilful beings with their own interpretation of their environment. To the contrary, the elements of the artificial space can be constructed and reconstructed only by paying close attention to mathematical logic and technical restrictions. There are no needs of living beings to be paid attention to.

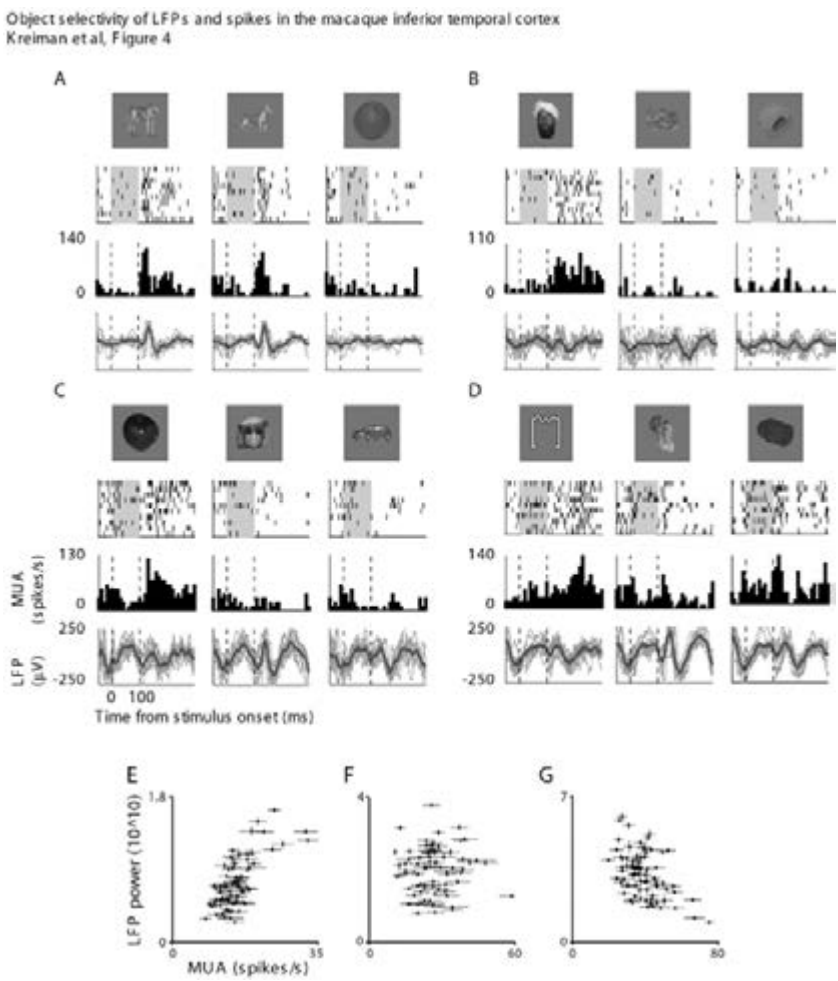
With reference to the distinction between technical and epistemic objects and their relationship to the organism, it makes sense to describe the brain as it is malleably represented in the artificial multidimensional space as the epistemic object of neuroscience. It is no longer the brain as an organ of the organism that is of interest here. Instead, it is the brain as a mechanical system, which perceives the stimulus and responds to it appropriately. Not the organism as a whole, but the brain itself is attentive and memorizes a stimulus.

Interpretation

For all practical purposes, the experimenter recognizes the monkey as an actor who treats the experiment as an element of his/her daily routine in a multi-interaction setting and not as an isolated episode. The scientist assumes that the subject (made thirsty through deprivation of liquids) will participate in the experiment only because s/he expects to be rewarded with water or juice. Since the direct reaction to a series of images or stimuli results in the macaque subject receiving this reward, the scientist further assumes that the subject will respond directly many hundreds of times to the sequences of stimuli as a problem presented to him/her.

This description of the experimenter's interpretation of the monkey is based on an understanding of the monkey subject as an organism having expectations and acting accordingly. These are the features of centric positionality. The organism reacts directly to the stimulus, regardless of whether this occurs through cognitive learning or merely out of habit, i.e. without

Figure 19.1



This figure illustrates the reactions of the epistemic object to stimuli, which are presented in the first line. The second and third lines show "spikes" and the fourth line a computed version of the trace of a smaller group of cells, known as "Local Field Potential" (taken from Kreiman et al. 2006, 438).

any cognitive exertion. In assuming this, the experiment also systematically excludes a level of self-regulation that would make it impossible for us to classify the organism's behavior. Scientists assume that when an organism acts within the experimental setting, it regulates its behavior according to the stimuli presented to it. In this way, an organism's behavior can be understood as a response to a specific stimulus.

If the organism, in contrast, were to relate to itself as part of the experimental setting, it would regulate its behavior according to its own incorporation in the experiment. In other words, it would no longer react spontaneously as an organism, but instead as an organism that understands itself as part of an experimental setup, within which expectations have been placed on it. If this were correct, an experimenter could no longer unambiguously attribute the subject's behavior to the organism; rather, s/he would always also have to understand this behavior as that of an organism relating to itself as a being that has expectations placed on it. Such an organism would no longer be characterized merely as a consciousness aware of its surroundings and acting accordingly; rather, it would also have to be understood as a self-consciousness, that is, as a self-conscious being in relation to another self-conscious being.

Understanding an organism solely as a conscious self renders that organism unambiguously. For if a subject reacts not only to the stimulus in the experiment, but always also relates to itself as part of the overall experimental setting, it would give rise to a specific kind of doubling. When the subject responds correctly, this can mean that it has understood what is going on and has answered accordingly. However, it can also mean that it has correctly responded because it wishes to present itself as a good or virtuous subject that does not want to disappoint the experimenter. And if the subject answers incorrectly, this may mean that it has not understood the task (stimulus-related), that it is no longer motivated to take part in the experiment, or it has lost its concentration (stimulus-related, spontaneous reaction to the situation). However, it may also mean that it has understood the task correctly, but has answered incorrectly because it wants to show annoyance with the experiment or wants to annoy the experimenter, that is, to disappoint the latter's expectations. Such behavior can no longer be understood in the sense of a spontaneous self-regulation, but rather as the behavior of a social person, an eccentric being, relating to itself as the performance of self-regulation.

The consequences of this are the following: If we assume that spontaneous behavior does not appear in pure form here, but rather that, in the sense of eccentric positionality, a spontaneous consciousness is accompanied by a distance to itself, we are unable to unambiguously correlate the organism's behavior to its regulating function (which cannot be directly observed), or to correlate these to neuronal activity. It is then impossible for us to identify unambiguous neuronal patterns. While we could indeed identify neuronal patterns, we would no longer be able to clearly determine what circumstances we should correlate these neuronal patterns to. It might be

a correlate for a direct reaction to the stimulus or a direct reaction to the situation. However, it might also be a correlate for how the subject related to itself as a component of the situation in which it was presented with a task.

I use the phrase "the necessity of the organism's centric positionality in the experiment" to describe the circumstance in which the experimental interaction is constructed such that a subject reacts *in* an experimental situation, but does not relate to this situation as such. A centric organism can develop expectations with regard to the course of the experiment. This can certainly include a subject habitually reacting to particular stimuli only in a particular situation, but outside of the habitual setting, it no longer reacts to the stimuli in this way. What is essential here is that the subject in no way relates to the expectations of the researcher implicit in the experimental setup. The centric positionality of the organism incorporates the organism into the experimental order and allows the researcher to control it. The centric organism is a rational actor who displays his/her order of preferences and acts accordingly in a calculable way. The intricate relationship between monkey subject and experimenter is always managed in terms of the monkey being a centric organism. It is essential for an experimenter that s/he not be compelled to pose such questions as: Will the subject annoy me? Does the subject alter its behavior arbitrarily when dealing with other experimenters? Does the subject give incorrect responses at times, even though it is attentive and has understood what is going on?

The necessity of the organism's centric positionality exists also in experiments performed with human subjects, although incorporation of human subjects in parallel experimental arrangements occurs in a different manner. The actual experiment is framed by a communicative process in which the subject is thoroughly informed in advance what is about to happen to him during the experiment, and the subject has to communicate that s/he has understood the message about what is to take place in the experiment.[8] Only after informed consent has been obtained does the human subject actually participate in the experiment. The subject expects that the experimenter does not make some nice sounds but that the experimenter expects the subject to understand the given information. Such a chain of communications includes mutual expectations and can thus be identified as the relationship of eccentric beings. Rather than using thirst and reward, the experimenter has to *trust* that the subject, in answering the "questions," responds solely to the stimuli of the experiment. Therewith, the experimenter assumes that for all practical purposes of analysis, the experimental subject exists as a centric

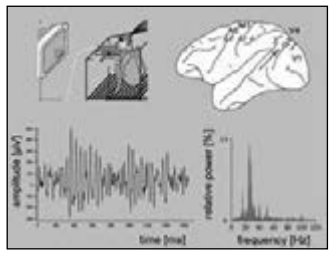
8 For a more detailed description of performing such agreement, see Roepstorff 2001, 761f.

organism, which responds directly to stimuli. Paradoxically, this holds true, although experimenters have to rely on a particular form of how subjects understand themselves as a part of the experimental situation as a whole: The experimenter trusts the subject as a subject, who always understands him/herself as a cooperative subject. Experimenter and human subject constitute communicatively, i.e. as eccentric beings, the experimental framework. Once they move into that framework, the experimental subject has to be treated as a centric being for the same reasons as the monkey subject.

Now we can describe more concretely what is meant by adopting a second-person perspective in understanding biological phenomena. The starting point is sociation to social persons: At least two or three actors (Lindemann 2005) relate to each other such that they anticipate the expectations of the other and behave accordingly. These organisms must not only have minds, but also be mind-reading organisms. By keeping the subject in the state of centric positionality, the research interaction is dissocialized. The researcher recognizes the subject as someone who expects something concerning the course of events in a certain situation. But the experimenter does not recognize the subject as expecting that the experimenter expects the (monkey) subject to do something. Since I have extended, following Plessner, the second-person perspective, it becomes obvious: The monkey subject is nonetheless understood and recognized as a conscious being (centric positionality), but not as a self-conscious social person (eccentric positionality). So far, such differentiations have been overlooked in the analysis of laboratory life. Adopting a new conceptual framework has made the analysis sensitive enough to see them.

Nevertheless, formulating an unambiguous regulatory phenomenon will not suffice on its own. The brain itself must be conceived in a particular way. It must not be understood as an organ of the organism, but instead it has to be transformed into an epistemic object beyond the organism. What is the difference between the brain as the epistemic object and the brain as an organ of the organism? If one were to assume that the brain itself did not react to its environment, but the organism reacted using its brain as a means of steering its response, the analysis would be confronted with a new degree of freedom. The brain as an epistemic object of neuroscience is not easy to analyze, because "plasticity" is one of its crucial features. A brain adapts to an environment; and as such it does not always react in exactly the same way. The brain, as the organ of an organism, would be even more difficult to analyze. It would be the plastic organ as used by the organism that formed the reaction. As such an organ, the brain could even be used differently in solving the same experimental task.

Figure 19.2 Monitor Monkey Brain



I think that understanding the brain as the organ of self-regulation would result in two problems. The first of these is experimental in nature and easy to solve. There might not be only one pattern signifying a certain state – like being attentive or memorizing something or reacting – but instead a variety of patterns or a certain type of pattern. The second problem is of conceptual nature. In order to identify a pattern or a type of pattern, it is necessary to construct an unambiguous relationship between, first, neuronal patterns and how these patterns are related to the functioning principles of the brain, and, second, the state the pattern is considered to signify (working memory, for example). If it is assumed that the brain is the organ of self-regulation, the neuronal pattern can signify the state in two ways. First, the brain can be considered as the (mechanical) system in question, in which case only its internal functional principles are relevant. Second, the brain is seen as a system which serves as an organ of the organism, therefore its functional principles are of relevance only with reference to its relation to the organism as a whole.

My conclusion is that in order to make unambiguous sense of a detected pattern, it seems necessary to make a decision about the assumed positionality of the research subject. Experimentally detected patterns are only related to the brain as the system in question, and not to the brain as a means by which an organism steers itself. This seems to be an implicit precondition for identifying patterns of correct/incorrect answers. If the decision were not made, the way in which the actual documented traces of brain activity should be read would become an open question: as an indication of the brain as a system or of the brain as an organ in the service of the organism? The discussion on the brain in the vat, inspired by Hilary Putnam (Gere and Gere 2002), echoes philosophically the research perspective adopted by neurobiological research, which isolates the brain from the living organism and treats the brain itself as the system in question. In fact, it seems that the epistemic object of neurobiology is the brain in the vat and not the brain functioning as an organ of the organism.

Figure 19.2 is part of a PowerPoint presentation of a neurobiologist. It illustrates perfectly the steps from the behaving organism in front of the stimulus (upper left side) and the target area (upper right side) to the signal traces of the brain (lower left side) and, after the transformation of the signal into frequency space, the traces of the brain as an epistemic object (lower right side). The story starts with the organism and ends with the brain in the vat.

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20 Switching "On," Switching "Off"

Does Neurosurgery in Parkinson's Disease Create Man-Machines?

Johannes Hätscher[1]

Introduction

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disease only occurring among the human species. On a pathophysiological level, a selective process of cell destruction is observable (Braak et al. 2004). It progresses from the enteric nervous system (neurons in the stomach and intestine) to the central nervous system in a stereotypical manner (ibid.). Once it reaches the symptomatic stage, the clinical phenotype of a complex, yet incurable movement disorder along with a variety of psychosocial consequences emerges. The chief symptoms are tremor (involuntary movement of the hand), rigidity, akinesia (inability to initiate or slowness of movement) and postural instability (inability to keep one's body in a stable or balanced position). As a consequence, the human body begins to take on a life of its own: "The first and most natural instrument of man" (Mauss 1989) defies control by its owner. There is a general decrease in the ability to catch artefacts, walk, speak, and perform gestures. Habitualized motoric skills in private and professional settings decline.

Medication, most notably levodopa, provides significant relief from symptoms in the early stages. However, long-term use is complicated by fluctuations that result in periods of severe symptoms during periods when the drug level is too low (*off* periods) and periods of improved symptoms when the drug level is sufficient (*on* periods). Moreover, involuntary movements (dyskinesia) can be induced during *on* periods. These fluctuations and dyskinesia become more and more irregular and uncontrollable by medication adjustments. In this stage of Parkinson's disease, an increasing number of patients decide for a new Parkinson's disease therapy: deep brain

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stimulation. An electrode is implanted into a specific region of the brain, the subthalamic nucleus. It is electrically driven by an impulse generator with a battery implanted in the patient's chest. After successful insertion, fluctuations, dyskinesia and tremor can be significantly reduced, often allowing patients dramatic improvements in overall mobility. Following evidence-based medicine, the therapy is considered a potent treatment in advanced Parkinson's disease (Deuschl et al. 2006).

However, the renaissance of functional stereotaxy in the therapy of movement disorders comes along with clinical reports of adaptation problems in the peri- and postoperative situation (Ceballos-Baumann, Gündel 2006). Amongst the transient neuropsychiatric and psychiatric side-effects reported are mania, hypomania, apathy, anxiety, depression and hypersexuality, pathological gambling and impulsivity. Suicides also occur occasionally. The "burden of normality" (Wilson et al. 2001), identity crises and difficulties in integrating the implanted artefact into schemes of the self and the body, or the spouse's perception of the patient, rank high among the psychosocial adaptation problems (Schüpbach et al. 2006). Continuous quarrelling or even break-ups are interpreted as a maladaptive postoperative transformation of the partnership or family network.

Anthropological thinking in the field of neurosurgery

I started to investigate these problems from the perspective of social psychology and the sociology of family (Hätscher 2009). The study is conducted in collaboration with two clinical centres, specifically a department for neurology and a centre for neurorehabilitation. While neuropsychiatric adaptation problems need to be explained in terms of pathophysiology, identity problems and changes in the familiar coping setting require a broader theoretical framework to be explained with sufficient depth. A sociological perspective within a biopsychosocial framework (Mullins et al. 1996) is needed. But what is evident at first sight proves to be a very difficult problem in research. In the field of adaptation processes after deep brain stimulation, clinicians and scientists have to deal with a nature vs culture problem in an increased manner: culturalistic as well as biologistic reductionisms fail to explain the phenomena of postsurgical adaptation problems. A frontal lobe disorder might be diagnosed, an unintended irritation of the limbic area by the electrode may occur, but yet this does not sufficiently explain a patient's psychosocial problems. Practice theory and case reconstructive research on the other side fail to elucidate impulsiveness

or the phenomenon of the so called "awakening" (Sacks 1982) after surgery. Still, we are talking about a coherent event affecting cells, brain processes, bodies, biographies, partnerships and family structures. Theoretical concepts such as autopoiesis, self-referentialty or multifactoriality describe the process, but do not really help explaining and understanding it. In contrast, within the available theoretical and especially anthropological accounts Plessner's philosophical anthropology promises to be a fruitful and attractive candidate for an appropriate conceptualization. The Plessnerian scholar gains insight into a conceptualization of human practices that surmounts the old dichotomies of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) vs. the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), of body and mind, as well as artificiality and naturality.

Still, Plessner has worked on an individual anthropology (Hauke 2000). He is also renowned as a theoretician who points to the limits of community. This is what makes it difficult to focus on a patient's family problems using his writings – although Plessner of course has a concept of sociality called "*Mitwelt*." Instead, these are problems in the patterns of communication occurring in the more intimate sphere of the couple or familial community, which are usually reconstructed using the paradigm of symbolic interactionism or "social anthropology" (Delitz 2008).

But scholars doing research in the field of family-coping and medical sociology tend to underestimate the reality of biological processes, as well as the influence of the medical system – instead discounting clinicians who neglect the importance of the patients and their relatives work in the process of coping with a chronic illness and the reality of cultural processes. Here, Plessner's approach stands out from the rest. His writings, stemming from a trained zoologist as well as a philosopher and sociologist, are capable of reminding the mainstream (medical) sociology community of its obliviousness to the significance of the body, while on the other side is capable of reminding neurologists of their obliviousness of the social facts. But it still remains a problem of multidisciplinarity, not to mention interdisciplinarity, that sociologists know so little about pathophysiological processes and clinicians on the other hand know so little about social processes: Bridging the disciplinary gap is a far too difficult task and one has to remain humble in one's aims as a scientist. Nevertheless, in the following I will try to investigate to what extent Plessner's thinking in the field of philosophical anthropology can help shed light on some major problems in the project. To this end, I will focus on different oppositions such as object and subject, naturality and artificiality, inside and outside, de- and recentration, and finally, laughing and crying. I will thereby follow

two paths: 1) Investigating Cartesian and transhumanistic elements in the current neurosurgical praxis, and 2) Reflecting on the concept of the cyborg using the example of deep brain stimulated Parkinson patients.

Radical Cartesianism and the renaissance of stereotactic and functional neurosurgery

Clinical practice rests on scientific theories, proven knowledge of how to apply them, and last but not least, to the ideas of men. I will try to make such an account explicit by using the example of stereotactic and functional neurosurgery. Following a pragmatist and neo-Vygotskian thought collective, artefacts and tools used in sophisticated fields such as the laboratory or operation room can be considered as clotted solutions to a former action problem. Neurologists and psychiatrists working in the field of neurosurgery treat diseases, which are conceptualized as brain pathologies: Tourette syndrome, Parkinson's disease, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, anxiety and even schizophrenia. Focussing on the last group of mental-health problems, a striking difference appears between psychotherapeutic and psychosurgical approaches, which nowadays reappear: No conceptual difference is made between the animal model – where experiments are performed and treatments are tested – and man. Illocutionary acts, dreams, deontic scorekeeping, narrative identity, the faculty of speech, a symbolic sphere, constitutive for humans – if we follow other anthropological accounts – are peripheral for therapeutic purposes. Instead, a direct contact between the surgical knife, electrodes or lesion tools and the structures of the central nervous system is established. Access is made using the so-called stereotactic frame. In the following section, some issues concerning the stereotactic approach and its epistemological and practical implications will be considered. For this purpose I want to examine a photographic portrait. It depicts the physician and inventor Lars Leksell (1907-1986), famous for the invention and refinement of new neurosurgical techniques, such as the Leksell stereotactic system, which is displayed in the picture (see figure 20.1).

In the picture an operating table can be seen. A cranium is placed on its upper border. The cranium is fixed in a stereotactic frame. Leksell is standing behind his setup. His stature is that of a respected and renowned expert. Already aged, his appearance is that of an elegant man. He is wearing a white coat and a tie. His gaze is concentrated. One hand is placed in his pocket, while the other one is placed under his chin. The similarity to the

Figure 20.1 Professor Lars Leksell (1907-1986) with his first stereotactic instrument

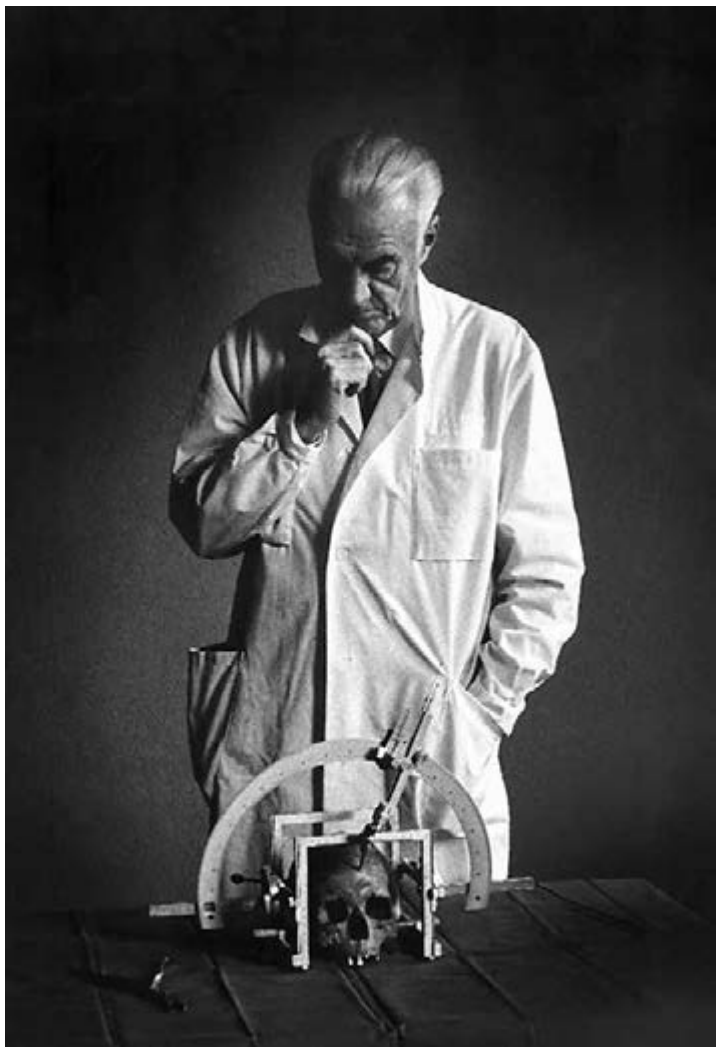

Image: courtesy of Elekta AB

figure of Hamlet, holding a skull, is an overt one (and in case the allusion was intended, one may wonder if the clinic can actually provide an appropriate ground for allegory and staging). Instead of his hands holding the cranium, it is fixed by the apparatus around it. In other words, the apparatus works as a refined extremity, in fact, it is conceptualized as a prosthesis. How can the constellation consisting of physician, cranium and stereotactic system be interpreted? For this, I would like to introduce a reading that goes back

to Plessner and Descartes. The apparatus fixes a cranium: "To be or not to be, that is the question." This skull, although constitutive to vertebrates, is featured as an object: unanimated, immobile. In this way it does not differ from the kind of entity Plessner begins with in his phenomenological investigations in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928] with objects (*Dinge*). Using the stereotactic frame, the cranium is conceptualized as *res extensa* – if we follow Descartes's world-fundamentalization resulting in a dualism consisting of nonmaterial entities, i.e. qualitative properties (*res cogitans*) that lack extension and motion, and material entities (*res extensa*), to which the human body belongs, having the material properties of both extensin and motion. Bodies belonging to the *res extensa* follow the laws of physics and can be measured in an quantitative way. In the picture, this result of scientific revolution is exposed in a clear way: stereotactic frames are triaxial Cartesian coordinate systems (with the exception of the Leksell system, in which polar coordinates are used) transformed into practical tools. A device can easily be moved on these axes and precisely fixed on a previously determined point. A drill and some other tools, such as electrodes or cutters, can be inserted into the central nervous system to alter the structure of a specific area. Up until this point, stereotactical and functional neurosurgery follows a deep Cartesian approach. It is important to note here that "Cartesian approach" is not meant in a strict historical, exegetical sense of the word, but more broadly, is meant to denote the Cartesian aftermath of the emergence of empirical science such as physiology and psychology. It is Plessner, who points to this historical relation in his *Stufen* (Plessner 1975, 46). By these means, parts of the human body appear only in their quantitative properties, the unanimated body following the laws of a Newtonian universe. Psychology and Physiology, as they emerged as disciplines of empirical science in the nineteenth century, were no longer concerned with or, as Plessner notes, even "blind" to the nonmeasurable properties of animated beings. This is also due to an ongoing secularization and a rejection of the so-called *Naturphilosophie* and metaphysics in general. As Plessner later notes in his *Stufen*, it would be regressive not to rely upon exact measurability (Plessner 1975, 42). But scientific problems still emerged even following the acceptance of Descartes's fundament principles. Plessner diagnoses a "*Problemstellung*," a post-Cartesian problem position. The problem itself is also inherent in the aforementioned picture. Here, it has an ethical as well as an epistemological dimension. From an ethical point of view it must be noted that the cranium formerly belonged to a living human being whose recognition is not granted much room. From an epistemological standpoint it must be obvious that

in the context of stereotactic surgical practice the central nervous system is treated and thereby reduced to an object as well. As a result, the solution of materialistic monism appears, reducing qualitative properties of the mind (and as Plessner notes, of the pure object as well) into quantitative properties. But there still exists at least one subject apparent in the picture: Leksell himself. This seems paradoxical. Does Leksell's mind consist of mere quantitative properties as well? Or – to follow Plessner's interpretation of Descartes's philosophy – is it a mere coincidence that Leksell chose to be the only subject in the picture, so to speak: The Cartesian cogito in its egologic universe, conceptualizing all objects as precisely measurable (cf. Hauke 2000)? From here one may raise the question, how is the brain able to function as a vessel for qualitative properties? And last but not least, an irreducible subjectivity exists in exactly the moment in which someone separates the cranium as an object from Leksell, the human: this gives rise to a lot of epistemological problems that materialistic monism as well as Cartesianism are unable to solve. At this point one could go back to Plessner's *Stufen* and study his solutions. But I want to follow another path. What interests me, is the fact that regardless of all the epistemologic problems implied, it can hardly be denied that stereotactic approaches have had a renaissance in recent years. Neurologists in this field would not follow the Plessnerian battle cry: "Get away from Descartes!" (Plessner 1975, 42), because they are not very interested in raising epistemological questions, especially if they lack any foreseeable application for them. Their habitus is pragmatic in nature, and so was Descartes (Perler 1998; Schnädelbach 2004):

> I have never made much account of what has proceeded from my own mind; and so long as I gathered no other advantage from the method I employ beyond satisfying myself on some difficulties belonging to the speculative sciences, [...] I never thought myself bound to publish anything respecting it. But as soon as I had acquired some general notions respecting physics, and beginning to make trial of them in various particular difficulties, had observed how far they can carry us, and how much they differ from the principles that have been employed up to the present time, I believed that I could not keep them concealed without sinning grievously against the law by which we are bound to promote, as far as in us lies, the general good of mankind (Descartes 2008).

First and foremost, a treatment of essential tremors or dystonia using deep brain stimulation techniques appears to be *effective*. Localizing centres in deep regions of the brain via the stereotactic frame and stimulating specific

cores makes treatments possible that were unthinkable a hundred years ago, not to mention in the age of Descartes. Neurosurgeons treating Parkinson's disease, dementia, cancer or Tourette syndrome are at the forefront of a clinical project to overcome diseases, decay and ageing. It is performed by using technology grounded in mathematics and empirical science. The project itself is not a very new one. Let me cite Descartes once more, the technician and natural scientist, as George Canguilhem outlined him in his 1937 lecture "Descartes et la technique" (Canguilhem 2006, 8):

> It is true that the science of medicine, as it now exists, contains few things whose utility is very remarkable: but without any wish to depreciate it, I am confident that there is no one, even among those whose profession it is, who does not admit that all at present known in it is almost nothing in comparison of what remains to be discovered; and that we could free ourselves from an infinity of maladies of body as well as of mind, and perhaps also even from the debility of age, if we had sufficiently ample knowledge of their causes, and of all the remedies provided for us by nature (Descartes 2008).

As Canguilhem notes, Descartes's main concern was not to formulate another utopian goal (Canguilhem 2004, 6), but instead, his main concern was to solve practical problems. After having accepted the fact that he was bound to his own body as a living body (Leib), a body he could not substitute, he had to find other strategies. Outer organs should complement or alter inner organs. Their artificiality should help to overcome the burdens of naturality (Canguilhem 2006, 19). A promising therapy in late stage Parkinson's disease has emerged in deep brain stimulation, a treatment that helps to reduce the cardinal symptoms of a severe chronical illness, a typical old-age disease. The main strategy being used here is the transformation of the patient into a so called "man-machine," in which human practice has not only altered the environment of the natural body, but technology surpassed the border of the skin to create a "phenomenological cyborg" (Spreen 1998). Here, the epistemic approach, the instruments being used, as well as the aim, are all Cartesian in nature.

Deep brain stimulation in the treatment of Parkinson's disease: A case of cyborgism?

Let us have a closer look at the deep brain stimulation procedure for the treatment of Parkinson's disease. Here we find that an electrode is

implanted into a specific core of the central nervous system, the nucleus subthalamicus. It is electrically driven by a battery implanted under the patient's chest. These electrical impulses block the electrical signals that cause Parkinson's symptoms. In this way, the cardinal symptoms e.g. a tremor – an involuntary, rhythmic muscle movement of the hand – either vanish entirely or are reduced significantly. What is important to note is the fact that a cure is nonetheless impossible, as this treatment is only able to suppress symptoms. Although sophisticated technology is used in the surgical procedure, the implant itself is a "low tech" device when compared to technologies as they are discussed in transhumanistic discourse, for example, nano-, bio-, info- and cognotechnologies (More 1996). But it is hard to deny that deep brain stimulation features all the characteristics commonly referred to as constitutive for cyborgs: artefacts fusing with phylogenetic old structures of the brain, wedding of flesh and chrome, the control of biological functions with the use of electronic devices. What distinguishes Cyborgs from man? Or to be more precise, what distinguishes cyborgs artificiality from the natural artificiality of man? One could argue that it is the very fact that synthetic parts enhance the body's mechanisms; implants like the cochlea implant or implanted harddisks transform man into a restorative or even enhanced cyborg. If we take this perspective, we have to agree with the distinction between "natural" versus "artificial" in a sense of "nature" vs. "culture." In this respect, we also differentiate between "inside" and "outside," thereby referring to glasses – which are worn outside – in comparison to, for example, the cochlea implant. But from an analytical point of view, I hesitate to follow the differentiations made. To focus on the treatment of Parkinson's disease, we might ask: Does a fundamental difference between a medicamentous treatment and deep brain stimulation really exist? Personally, I cannot see it. The levodopa drug most often used in medical treatment is an industrially manufactured artefact, like the neurostimulator. One takes it out of the package and swallows it. Up to this point it is still an entity existing in the environment of the organism. It then passes the intestinal mucosa as the critical border. Having later passed the blood-brain barrier, the central nervous system is reached. Here the precursor is finally converted into the neurotransmitter dopamine. If we take a closer look at the deep brain stimulation apparatus on the other hand, it is noteworthy that it stays a foreign object all throughout, despite it lying under the skin. Intermediation between organism and artefact happens only beyond the tip of the electrode. From this point of view, medication is a less intrusive technology compared to deep brain stimulation: If any complications occur between the drugs substances and the organism, no

explanation seems necessary. The therapeutic effect is the same, although deep brain stimulation is certainly a more effective treatment in late stage Parkinson's disease (Oertel and Reichmann 2008, 24), and is in fact the only option left at this point of development. If we follow these considerations, we should not apply an inside/outside differentiation that follows man's outward contours. A patient swallowing the levodopa drug or a "brute fact" like a potato being altered by cultural practices like cooking is, in this respect, an even more cyborg-like being compared to a deep brain stimulated Parkinson patient. Yet, it does not make sense to talk of these patients as *being* cyborgs. In contrast, one can argue that man has been a natural born cyborg since the very beginning of cultural evolution (Clark 2003). So if we are on the wrong track, in what way is it fruitful to perceive a deep brain stimulated patient as a "man-machine"?

Eccentric positionality is the organic stage constitutive of human beings (Plessner 1975). Any other stage would be systematically impossible (Haucke 2000). To conceive of cyborgs as the next stage of man would imply introducing teleology or "progress" into philosophical anthropology. Plessner undoubtedly refused this notion (Plessner 1961, 33). What is more, it would also follow vulgar attempts to present human history as a history of technological progress in which men have begun to alter their biological determinacy by means of a new stage of technology (More 1996). Furthermore, I do not want to deconstruct the difference between the concepts of man and machine. Rather, I think it is fruitful to maintain the boundary for analytical purposes. The crucial question is: How is it that in cases like deep brain stimulation, handling of the patients' naturality, and the world of artificial artefacts and prostheses, levelled in order to maintain a balance? How do patients *re*centre themselves? To analyse these questions, it is important to take the perspective of surgically treated patients. In my empirical project, in which patients with deep brain stimulation and their spouses are interviewed, I observed cases, in which the intervention was perceived as a marvellous cure (Hätscher 2009). Patients who suffered from severe Parkinson's disease for years, all of a sudden regained control over their entire body again. As I observed in two cases, the stimulator itself was not an entity that had to be integrated into the self-concept of the patient. Although one might want to conceptualize these patients as some kind of cyborg or man-machine, they actually did not *feel* like it. But this was not always the case. Some patients and their relatives reported problems while attempting to integrate the machine into their daily practice, more specifically, psychosocial adaptation problems occurred (Schüpbach et al. 2006). In our project I encountered cases in which the stimulator had to be

fine-tuned or even repeatedly switched on and off for several reasons after surgery. I will give empirical examples for both cases.

I would like to start with the complicated procedure of fine-tuning, where the goal is to find the proper adjustment among a dozen of parameters and nearly endless combinatory possibilities. The (re)programming has to be done by a specialist. But as always, time is precious and patients cannot be examined over long periods. Yet, a correct fine tuning is essential for an optimal outcome. In a way, the patient's quality of life depends on it, because mood, temper, speech, gesture and, last but not least, motor skills, are heavily influenced by the stimulation. Most important in this respect is the administering of medication and the fine tuning of the apparatus, as it can also be performed by the patients themselves, thanks to the development of a therapy controller. This device is virtually identical to television remote controls that can be bought in electrical stores. The procedure is very difficult, as a lot of trial and error may be needed. The interaction of stimulation and effect has to be carefully observed. In some cases, long intervals appear between cause and the effect appearing, as in the case of this 68-year-old man:

Case-Report I
A: Ja ich glaub ich muss meine rechte Körperseite, also die linke Hälfte, die hat er jetzt fixiert auf einen bestimmten Kanal (1,4s) ob man da (-) noch etwas machen kann. Wenn ich nämlich – (1,5s) ich nehm ja praktisch – (1,3s) zwanzig Prozent nur noch der Medikation die ich vorher hatte (1,3s) und äh (---) da (--) hat er JETZT, da hab ich ooch so ne Durchhänger gehabt, in der letzten Zeit, wo ich also – große oder lange Zeiten, schlechtere Beweglichkeit. Äh weil ja ne größere Agonisten, ne höhere Agonistendosis das Hebepan etwas erhöht, nicht, und das ergänzt dann etwas. Darf ich natürlich auch nicht weiter äh machen. Ich würd sagen ich muss mir SELBST, ich spür das ja SELBER wie das wirkt? (---) und dann müsst ich eventuell, neige ich etwas zur ÜBERbewegungen ne? Und das wieder fein hehe auszutarieren, möglicherweise nochmal (-) wir ham ja jetzt wieder n Termin und möglicherweise muss ich das nochmal mitner (-) Schrittmacherrückstufung parallel äh erledigen.

Translation
A: I guess I have to (-) my right side of the body (-) I mean he (the physician, JH) fixed the left side (electrode in left hemisphere of the patient's brain, JH) on a specific channel (-) if something can be optimized here. Because if I, well, right now I take practically twenty percent of the medication.

> And he just recently (-) I felt such a fatigue in the recent weeks when my overall mobility worsened more or less, because of taking more agonists, took more of this one preparation, it complements it a little. Of course I am not allowed to do it (administering of medication, JH) by myself. But I would say, I can feel it by myself you know? How it sinks in and then I would have to, I probably tend to hypokinesia, you know? (-) To balance it out. Probably again, we will arrange another time and date with the doctor, probably it will be necessary to downgrade the stimulator a little bit.

What we see here is an obvious struggle to regain autonomy over ones own body. High levels of neurological expertise as well as tacit knowledge and experience are required while the patient seeks to cope with this difficult situation. The linguistic structure of the text with its disrupted and discontinued phrases impressively depicts the patient's fluctuation between moments of initiative and self-reflection ("I can feel it by myself") on the one hand, and a disturbing sense of being subjected to an obscure disease and a complicated therapy, on the other, that makes him depend on the professional specialist. This man is striving for "self-governance," he "wants to master his body" but in order to reach this objective, his own effort as well as further collaboration with the neurologist is necessary.

Postsurgical adaptation problems and Plessner's philosophical anthropology as a theoretical framework

The other situation is even more irritating and leads back to our reflection on Plessner's concepts in the field of neurosurgery and brain implants. In the following it will be demonstrated in how far philosophical anthropology is capable to elucidate the phenomenon: The mentioned situation appears whenever the neurostimulator is temporarily deactivated for a number of reasons. In this situation what I would like to call "front-stage-android" – borrowing the term "front stage" from Goffman's sociology – can be seen. Using the remote control, the stimulator can be shut off, either by a physician, the patient himself, or even his relatives. Now the cardinal symptoms are no longer suppressed and reappear either spontaneously – especially in the case of tremor-treatment – or gradually. I will demonstrate two cases of suffering from severe rigidity and akinesia in a so called "OFF-state." In both situations, either the partner or his relatives make use of the remote control. After pushing the button, the patients fall back into a situation of

total immobility. What looks like a man-machine being shut off is actually just a relapse into the former illness, the symptoms of which are now no longer repressed. Pushing the correct button-sequence again, the patients are "reactivated," it is like switching a person "On" and "Off." In what follows, two transcribed sequences will be presented in which the situation is conveyed through the conversations of the patients and their relatives.

Case-Report II:
Note: The couple makes regular use of the ON/OFF function. The patient himself is paralyzed, still he profits from deep brain stimulation. The patient's wife shuts down the stimulator every time she puts him to bed. Once in a week she is visiting her friends in the evening. During the meetings she regularly disappears for a few minutes to follow the procedure at home. I interviewed both the patient and her.

One year follow-up interview, B: wife, E: couple, nurse and interviewer

B: Wir sind gerade beim (--) wir trinke da was oder weil jemand Geburtstag hatte; sach ich muss HEIM, ich muss meinen MANN ausschalten!
E: hehehehehehe
B: Ich muss meinen Mann abstelle hehehehe.
E: Hehehehehe
B: Also ich konnt halt n dreiviertel Jahr überHAUPT net lache – aber jetzt kann ich wenigstens wieder LACHE.

Translation:
B: We're drinking something, or we are at someone's birthday and I say: I gotta go home, I have to turn my husband off! (everyone laughing) I have to turn my husband off (everyone laughing)! Well, I wasn't able to laugh for nearly nine months but now I'm at least able to laugh.

Case-Report III:
Note: In this second scenario, a severe episode of hyperkinesia occurred under stress. To be able to manage such a situation in the future, the physician introduced the couple to the use of the remote control.

Three month follow-up interview, A: patient, B: wife, I: interviewer

A: Und dann merkt man das alles SCHWERER wurde. Nach zehn zwölf Minuten und nach fünfzehn Minuten konnte ich mich GAR nicht mehr

bewegen. Dann schaltet man wieder AN? Nach ner viertel Stunde nach zehn Minuten – is alles wieder in ORDnung. (3 s) Hab ich schon gesagt – wenn ich mich mit meiner Frau SCHLECHT stelle, dann KLAUT die mir die Fernbedienung.
B: Hehehehehehehe
I: Hehehehehe
A: Und stellt mich in die ECKE.

Translation:
A: I couldn't feel the weight in my legs. It increased slowly. After 15 minutes I couldn't move myself anymore. And then, you turn it "On." After 15 minutes everything is perfectly alright again! (pause of 3 sec.) I already said to myself: If my wife is fed up with me, then she nicks the remote control and turns me off! (I and B laugh heavily.) And puts me into the corner!

In both cases, laughter occurs. Next, I will argue that a) this laughter comprises a structural, anthropological problem and hence has a universal character, insofar as it cannot be reduced to the situation; and b) the Plessnerian anthropology can provide an intriguing solution to this problem.

According to Plessner's anthropology (Plessner 1970), laughing as well as crying can be understood as a human response to crises. In such situations, no routines or patterns of interpretations exist that assure a clear definition. Thus, a proper alignment cannot happen. If we focus on the linguistic transcripts as I have just presented them, it can be studied, how a meaningful sequence, a pragmatic rule-following in conversation, is adjourned. What is not apparent is the fact that laughing is primarily a reaction of the body (and one can build the argument that video protocols would provide a better basis for data). If we follow Plessner, laughing is comprised of a special relationship between man and his body (as living being) in its eccentric positionality. This is an even more important point in the case of Parkinson patients, whose primary problem is the loss of body control. Pathophysiological processes make it impossible for the person to move their extremities, form a gesture, move themselves, or perform other basic social practices. Chronical progrediency forces patients to withdraw from the public appearance. Thus, Parkinson's becomes an issue that brings about shame in the persons affected by it (Nijhof 1995). With the sociological thought of Plessner, it is possible to interpret this circumstantial loss of the body as the primary tool for performing impression management: the ability to work in a flexible way in role-taking or in Plessner's words: the ability to

wear different "masks" in the public sphere. Instead, the pathophysiological mechanisms force the individual into a single social role, the role of the "drunk" or the "madman." By withdrawing from the public sphere, the familial community as the only hideaway left is often experienced as a psychosocial jail. In the decision to opt for deep brain stimulation and after surgery, patients are able to explore the sphere of public life again, a possibility that within Plessner's anthropological framework, is constitutive for the status of being a person. It can happen in a rapid manner, even after years of chronic progrediency and decay.

Going back to laughing and crying as limits of human behaviour: To become a person, a threefold entity of mind, psyche and body (as living being) (*Geist, Seele und Leib*) is necessary. This entity, this state of personal integrity is not of an enduring nature: Abnormal situations, actual limits, force this entity to fall apart (Plessner 1961, 161). This is also the case in laughing or crying. The body, as a living body, slips away from control and takes over: It no longer serves as an instrument, with which one can act, speak, gesture or express something but the body reacts in direct counterblast (ibid.). It is a physiological automatism causing laughter. But as Plessner points out, humanity is effectively demonstrated through an abdication of body control, body possession, demonstrated by the disintegration of the threefold entity constituting the person. In this figure, the false dichotomy of hermeneutics and biology is overthrown: It comprises a reaction of the body to a crisis in the field of sense-structured world. Only an anthropology synthesizing both layers is capable of explaining this reaction in non-reductionistic terms. But what is the matter? What exactly is the limit in this case that causes laughter in the examples above?

The symptoms of Parkinson's disease lead to a loss of a person's ability to master his bodily control. By now, this potential is regained with the aid of deep brain stimulation. In the process of recentring oneself, a psychosocial adaptation problem appears: The human being, in its eccentric positionality appears – at least in the patterns of interpretation operative in the patients and his or her spouses – in one of its endless aspects as an artefact itself: as a machine, as an android. But the person, who lost the possession of his body, *is* not an android. The technology used to suppress the symptoms only behaves much more machine-like in comparison to, for example, the levodopa medication. What fails to be an analytical difference – the difference between an ordinary human and a so called cyborg – is in fact a difference in the *processual behaviour* of the body as a living body. The alteration of the pathophysiological mechanisms can be controlled by *buttons*. This confuses us, since buttons belong to machines in our ordinary

perception. But if the human is capable of differentiating humans from things, plants and animals (Plessner 1975; Haucke 2000) than an irritation appears in exactly the moment at which the body as a living body reacts like a machine in the perception of either the patient or his spouse. This situation causes laughter in the cases presented above. But by laughing in an abnormal situation, deep brain stimulated patients remain human in their natural artificiality.

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21 On Humor and "Laughing" Rats

The Importance of Plessner for Affective Neuroscience

Heleen J. Pott

Introduction

The philosophical study of laughing has a long history, including contributions from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. In trying to understand the meaning of human laughter, philosophers traditionally investigated the occasions that make us laugh: jokes, comedy, and humour, asking questions of when and why it is that we burst out into laughter. Everyone considered laughter to be a uniquely human capacity. "No other living things laugh," as Aristotle puts it in *Parts of Animals* (673a9).

In recent times, scientists began to question philosophy's assumption of laughter as a phenomenon exclusively found in human beings. Laughter is not unique to humans, as other primates do it as well. Contrary to popular opinion, most laughter is not about humour, but about social relationships, says psychologist Robert Provine in his bestselling book *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2000). Laughter's emergence within the evolution of the mammalian brain took place much earlier than is generally believed, predating the development of language by perhaps millions of years.

According to neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, even non-primate mammalian brains are capable of producing laughter. In *Affective Neuroscience* (1998) he famously defends the claim that rats laugh when you tickle them, although we just can't hear the ultrasonic play vocalizations because of the high frequency (50 kHz). Panksepp's proposal is that circuits for laughter and play exist in very ancient regions of the brain that we share not only with chimpanzees and apes, but also with rats and other rodents.

Does this mean that philosophy has lost its relevance to the study of laughter today? Should we disqualify philosophical studies because of their anthropocentrism and turn to empirical research on the laughter of chimps, dogs and rats instead? Or is there still reason to see the "laughing" of rats and other mammals as behavior that is qualitatively different from most types of human laughter – is animal laughter not genuine laughter after all, as philosophers traditionally made us believe?

In this paper I will defend the thesis that we don't necessarily have to choose between these two options. Instead, I will argue that traditional

philosophical approaches are perfectly compatible with the results of today's scientific research on animal laughter. To clarify this point, I will revisit Helmuth Plessner's hermeneutics of laughter presented in *Laughing and Crying* (1970) and show that a rethinking of Plessner's conceptual framework has much to teach us today about how there is a shared evolutionary basis for human and animal laughter, while at the same time highlighting important ways in which laughing can be seen as an exclusively human trait.

Why do we laugh?

Why do we laugh? What conditions and mechanisms are involved that trigger the explosion of gasping, grunting noises ensuing from such diverse stimuli as hearing funny jokes, watching Mr. Bean on TV, attending a birthday party, or smoking weed with friends?

The question may seem simple, but it is incredibly difficult to formulate an adequate answer. At first sight, nothing could be more common than laughing. We all do it, it is part of a vocabulary that is shared by the members of all different cultures. You don't have to learn it, the language of laughter is understood ubiquitously. Even children who are born blind and deaf still retain the capacity to laugh.

However, as soon as you actually try to answer *why* we make these weird noises, laughing stops seeming familiar. One of the puzzling things about it is that we do not freely, consciously and purposefully *choose* to break out into laughter, it simply happens to us in certain situations. There has been no preliminary decision to laugh, and we cannot start it on command. Only very good actors can convincingly fake that they are laughing. And neither can we stop it on command. As everyone knows from experience, inappropriate laughter is often difficult to disguise and it can easily get out of control.

Consequently, laughter cannot be seen as a voluntary activity, but neither can we think of it as an automatic physiological event triggered by some external stimulus. It is true that during exuberant laughing, our facial muscles stretch, we make a sequence of rhythmic expiratory sounds, tears stream and the body collapses, our physical existence seems completely disorganized. The interesting thing however is that it is not my body, but it is *me* who laughs – laughter is a meaningful activity. People laugh *about* something and they do it for a reason. One may ask why somebody is laughing, but it would be unorthodox to ask why somebody is sneezing,

or yawning, or coughing. An outburst of laughter can be deeply revealing about that individual's personality.

In addition, the reasons for laughing can be pretty sophisticated, as is illustrated in one of our earliest cultural narratives about laughter. In the Book of Genesis, God promises Abraham, who is one hundred years old at the time, that his wife Sarah will soon give birth to a son. Upon hearing the news Abraham falls on his face, laughing. Later on three angels approach Abraham in his tent and promise that Sarah will have a baby in the next year. Now it is Sarah who laughs, asking how she, old as she is, can still become a mother. The Lord then asks whether Sarah believes that there are things impossible for God. And Sarah becomes afraid, the Bible says, and denies having laughed at all.

Sarah's reasons for laughing are highly complex. According to philosopher Agnes Heller, who mentions Sarah's laughter in her study on comic phenomena (Heller 2005), Sarah does seem to laugh at God first of all, but by doing so she is also personally implicated, she also laughs at herself. Her laughter expresses not just a simple lack of faith in God's promise, but it is perhaps even more a laughter of self-irony, embarrassment, impossibility. The story indicates that there may exist a close relationship between laughter and a sense of incomprehensibility, even absurdity. Whatever it might have been exactly that made Sarah laugh – disbelief, doubt, or despair – there definitely was a lot of lucidity in her laughter (ibid., 29)

So at least we may say that some instances of human laughter can be complicated phenomena, involving mind, body and soul. For many philosophers, this complexity is efficient proof that laughing is a uniquely human capability, and that pondering on laughter is likely to give us some insight into what kind of persons we actually are.

Panksepp's laughing rats

Recently however, a number of scientists have argued that the capacity to produce laughter is not exclusive to human beings, but exhibited as well by other mammals. In his book *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2000), the American psychologist Robert Provine defends the claim that contrary to popular belief, laughing is not about humour, it is about instinctive social bonding. The sound of laughter is a social play vocalization, and as such, a laughter's stimulus is not a joke, but the presence of an animate *other*, Provine says. Chimpanzees, orangutans and other mammals laugh in social conditions like rough-and-tumble play, chasing

games or tickling. The fast and breathy vocalizations that they produce during play or when being tickled, have more than a passing resemblance to the laughter humans produce. The difference is merely that apes and other mammals vocalize as they inhale and exhale, whereas humans laugh during exhalation only, in the same way we do it during speech. In Provine's view, the evolution of bipedality in human ancestors freed the thorax and uncoupled breathing from running, providing humans with the typical flexible breath control required for both laughter and speech. His thesis is that human laughter is unusual in solitary settings – you cannot tickle yourself – and that it evolved from the ritualized panting sounds of our ancient primate ancestors during playing. It is literary the sound of play, a signal that reveals us as social animals, with the primal 'pant-pant' becoming the human 'ha-ha-ha.'

According to Jaak Panksepp, a psychologist and neuroscientist at Washington State University, laughter is a capacity that can be found not only in primates but in non-primates too. Panksepp discovered that even rats can laugh (Panksepp 1998). In a groundbreaking article, he and his colleague Burgdorf describe how, in a systematic study of non-human tickling, rats respond to finger strokes of their belly with ultrasonic play vocalizations that may be the rat's equivalence to human laughter. The play – and tickle-induced ultrasonic vocalization patterns (50 kHz chirps) in rats cannot be heard with the unaided human ear, but they seem to signal a readiness for social encounter. The rats that chirped the most were also the most playful, according to the authors. During the experiment, Panksepp's hand was accepted as a playmate and the rats were returning to it time and again for more tickling (Panksepp and Burgdorf 2003).

Panksepp and Burgdorf point out a number of reasons for the hypothesis that such rat vocalizations reflect a type of positive affect that may have evolutionary relationships to the joyfulness of early human laughter accompanying social play. According to their theory, rats, apes and humans share homologous brain circuits that generate basic emotional feelings, e.g. rage, distress, care, lust and playfulness. The sources of play and laughter in the mammalian brain are instinctual. Play is about physical touch, both touching others and being touched, which is the essence of being a mammal. Laughter by tickling evolved as a way of cementing the affective bond between parents and children, thereby laying the foundation for a behavior that then be passed on as a useful social trait for adult mammals. The sensory capacity of detecting other animals and the associated defence of the body boundaries that are exercised in early play, must be widespread in animal life. Therefore it is to be expected that the tickling response will

also be found in non-primates such as rats, squirrels, cats, dogs and many other animals.

Their proposal is that tickle may be at the root of all play, in animals as well as in humans, triggering feelings of joy and playfulness in the young and of sexual arousal in adults. The human taste for humour is based in some fundamental way on the existence of this kind of infantile laughter. As we learn to tickle each other with words, we may be developing new synaptic connections to neural zones residing deep inside our brain, according to Panksepp. He believes that rat laughter and infantile human laughter do share enough evolutionary relations for the former to be useful in decoding one of the great mysteries of human life – the genesis of pleasure and joy.

So it seems as if we ran into a dilemma here. From a philosophical point of view, human laughing about jokes, comedy, irony, or absurdity (as in the case of Sarah in the Old Testament), seems to have nothing in common with the chirping noises that rats make in Panksepp's laboratory in response to tickling. It looks as if the difference could not be any larger. Sarah's laughing was characterized by disbelief, embarrassment and possibly a number of other self-reflective states that rats obviously do not dispose of. So why take Panksepp's claim seriously at all?

On the other hand, Panksepp and other neuroscientists have compelling evidence to suggest that playfulness, and also rage, fear, lust, care, panic, are biologically basic affects that derive from architecturally and chemically distinct circuits, hard coded into the subcortex of the mammalian brain at birth. They function in a similar way in humans as they do in non-human mammals. Laughter, as an expression of the social play system, seems to derive from the same causal mechanisms in animals and humans. Rats may not have a sense of humour or comedy, but just like human beings, they do appear to have an enormous sense of fun and play, as Panksepp puts it.

In the next sections, I will make an attempt to reconcile Panksepp's claim that rats can laugh with the idea that laughter is uniquely human, as many philosophers have argued. I will show how Plessner's philosophical explanation of human laughter as a boundary phenomenon provides us with arguments to develop a strong case in this regard. It is true that Plessner stresses that laughing (and crying) "in the full sense of the words" are uniquely human phenomena. However, as I will argue, a thorough reading of his hermeneutics also provides us with the instruments to distinguish different *sorts* of laughter and to build bridges between self-conscious human laughing and the vocalizations of rats, chimps and little children in tickle and play.

Plessner's hermeneutics of human laughter

Plessner starts his analysis of *Laughing and Crying* (1970) with an intriguing claim: "Laughing and crying [...] are forms of expression which, in the full sense of the words, only man has at his disposal" (1970, 24). He then continues: "The statement that evidently only man has laughing and crying at his disposal, but not the lower animals, states no hypothesis which can one day be disproved by observation, but a certainty."

Right from the beginning, Plessner criticizes the idea that humans are uniquely characterized by "rational" activities such as speaking, thinking, and long-term goal-directed acting. In his view, "bodily" experiences, such as laughing and crying, should be counted amongst the human monopolies as well. A creature without the possibility of laughing and crying is not human at all, according to Plessner. Therefore, any attempt to explain laughter (and crying) in terms of archaic reactions and to reduce them to elementary drives for shelter or communication misses the point completely, in his view.

With "laughter in the full sense of the word," Plessner obviously does not refer to tickle and play situations. He is instead referring to laughter as it is related to the comic, to wit and humour, and also to embarrassment and despair (Plessner 1970, 194). What characterizes these specific occasions is that they generate a laughter that is simultaneously experienced as a loss of rational self-control, and as a meaningful response to the situation. When we burst out into laughter after hearing a really good joke, normal functioning is temporarily interrupted and an objective manipulation of the situation is over, Plessner says. The laughter breaks out *eruptively*, runs its course *compulsively*, and lacks definite symbolic form (Plessner 1970, 25). It is closer to an inarticulate cry or to a bodily reflex, than to disciplined speech. Yet, laughing remains the one and only true answer we can give to the funny situation.

For Plessner, the underlying question runs as follows: how should we understand that an articulate human being who in normal conditions can control his bodily expressions, falls into an automatic bodily reaction as soon as he "gets" the punch-line of a funny joke? How can we explain an automatism that shakes us so thoroughly, and yet is so much more than merely a bodily reaction? Neither the dualistic vocabulary of materialistic science, nor that of idealistic phenomenology can give a satisfying answer to this question, Plessner emphasizes. What this type of laughter points out is "the secret composition of human nature" itself. To explain the puzzle of laughter, we need a hermeneutic analysis that takes into account the human being as a whole.

Plessner's naturalized hermeneutics is based on the notion of *eccentric positionality*, as a constitutive principle of human behaviour. Man *is* his body and he *has* his body as a physical thing. He is living in two different orders, as he famously claims. Human life is constituted by having to find an arrangement with respect to this relation between being a body and having it. It is precisely this ambiguous structure of human existence that can explain how it is possible that man, as an intellectual being, can lose his relation to his own body in something as characteristic as laughing.

In Plessner's view, only beings that have self-control can lose it and surrender to the body in this way. Laughter happens when a situation confronts us with a multiplicity of meanings so that we feel immobilized among the abundance and don't know what to do. When the direction is missing in which we must organize ourselves as eccentrically positioned human beings, we give up the directed relationship to our environment, the body slips away and we laugh. But while the body takes over the answer, the person remains intact as a person, Plessner writes (1970, 33). Laughing is a meaningful reply. The unique experience of the brokenness of man's relation to his body during laughter exemplifies how fundamentally human corporeality differs from animal embodiment.

We tend to laugh in situations that are ambiguous or incongruous, yet not in such a way that it harms us, according to Plessner. If the ambiguous situation is also serious, posing a real threat to our well-being, we do not typically laugh. Instead, we are liable to panic or even lose consciousness. In non-dangerous situations however, especially if we cannot respond to the situation by means of words or actions, gestures or emotional expressions, we let ourselves go, automatism comes into play, and we laugh. Thus, laughter is the inarticulate, disorganized, yet intelligent expression of a boundary situation.

Tickling babies

An interesting implication of his hermeneutic approach is that Plessner has to make a sharp distinction between the eruptive, compulsory laughter at wit, comedy and humour, which he analyzes as a breakdown of the control a person has over the body, and other forms of laughter-like behavior such as giggling, smiling, laughing out of joy, laughing in play and after being tickled, polite conversational laughing, and social laughing. In all these sorts of laughter, there is no breakdown in the sense that the active directedness to the environment is maintained.

Plessner is obviously interested first and foremost in the more dramatic forms of human laughing. This may explain why he has many interesting things to say about humour and comedy, but relatively little about the laughter of babies and little children.

Of course, developmental psychologists would be inclined to see the different forms of laughing as different only in degree and not in kind, with eruptive laughter at comedy and jokes on the more sophisticated side of the spectrum, while the polar opposite is in uncomplicated laughter of babies in tickling or little children playing. Scientists who specialize in the ontogenesis of laughter tell us that babies start to smile in their second month and that they first laugh at about four months of age, their laughing being a way to interact with the mother and other caregivers. The incidence of laughter becomes more frequent later on, as do the varieties of occasions that elicit it. According to psychologist L. Alan Sroufe, the laughter develops from being a response to direct physical stimulation, toward smiling and laughing in response to a remote stimulus. One-year-olds laugh most at items that provide an obvious element of cognitive incongruity – mother sticking out her tongue, or playing peekaboo. Older babies seem to love the unpredictability of a situation like this so much that they begin to take an active role in the production of it. According to Sroufe, the development of laughter goes hand-in-hand with the development of the capacity to coordinate different tactile, auditory and visual schemata. Humans laugh most often during early childhood, and the most abundant laughter occurs during rough-and-tumble play and as a result of being tickled gently (Scroufe 1996, in Prusak 2006, 45).

The interesting thing is that the occasions that elicit laughter from babies and small children in tickling and play all seem to have certain characteristics in common. First, they all present an *incongruity* – a characteristic that certainly holds for tickling, which is an ambivalent form of contact that is at once repulsive and attractive, potentially threatening and comfortable. Secondly, when a child is confronted with an incongruity, she stops whatever else she was doing and a bodily *tension* builds up, which is necessary in order to release subsequent laughter. Thirdly, the need for tension relief alone can never provide a sufficient explanation for laughter, where the tension leads to depends on a further characteristic, namely the child's *evaluation* of the one who tickles. How the person that tickles her is perceived and valued can make the whole difference between a ticklish delight and an ordeal (Provine 1999, 100). Consequently, whether the stimulus of laughter is effective depends on the relationship with the tickler as much as it depends on any of the movements that he makes with

his hand. Laughing due to tickling and play is always an expression of the one who laughs, and not merely a bodily event.

In this respect, the laughter of little children has a lot in common with the laughter of rats, as Panksepp and Burgdorf point out. The chirping reaction of rats is a meaningful response as well. A video on YouTube with Panksepp' s laughing rats shows that these laboratory rats really enjoy being tickled because they socialize with the hand that tickles them. What the video makes clear is that tickle involves more than the sensory physiology of touch and the physical properties of the stimulus – not just anybody, in any circumstance, can make rats laugh by tickling them.

A fourth characteristic therefore is that from a psychological point of view, laughter is always *social*. This is in sharp contrast to crying, which is a solitary activity most of the time. From childhood, we learn to laugh at incongruities in a social context. We laugh at others and in the company of others, signalling friendly intentions and the feeling that we are part of a group. Laughter is contagious – even in the case of tickling, when children laugh together with the person who tickles them. As Panksepp and Burgdorf suggest, we may assume that the whole puzzle why one cannot tickle oneself may be due to the fact that the underlying neural systems in the tickling response are controlled by *social* cues and *social* interactions – the perception of being wanted/chased as well as the predictability/unpredictability of the resulting social interactions (Panksepp and Burgdorf 2003, 542).

The social function of laughter in play and in situations of tickling is likely to be positive, but can also be negative at times. Children laugh not only with others, but also at others, trying to force them to conform or to cast them out of the group. In adulthood we make jokes on those who obviously fail to meet the requirements of the social rules. Laughing can be used as a tool to reinforce a group's solidarity by devaluating outsiders – humans often laugh together from a position of moral power and superiority, which is probably one of the reasons why laughing has never been very popular in philosophy. Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes noticed correctly that we have a bad habit of laughing at those who don't fit in the group, or at the misfortunes of others.

A first conclusion we can draw might be that certain "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein) hold between the behavior of rats producing ultrasonic vocalizations while being tickled, the expressive sounds produced by babies and little children in tickling and play, and the eruptive laughter adult human beings produce at hearing a joke or watching "the world's funniest home videos." Together they represent a heterogeneous collection of states that have various degrees of similarity to each other. The similari-

ties explain why both ordinary and scientific language users easily refer to these analogous behaviors with the general and unspecific term "laughter."

A second conclusion might be that the common features of different sorts of "laughter" – the perception of incongruity, the built up of bodily tension and its relief, the process of evaluation, the mechanism of social inclusion – provide compelling evidence for the claim that the human taste for humour is indeed based on the existence of childhood joy and laughter in humans and other mammals. The first joke, the first action to produce a laugh without physical contact, probably was the feigned tickle, the same kind of movement parents make when they play with their babies.

Eccentric animals that can laugh

The reasons why Plessner focussed in *Laughing and Crying* (1970) on what we might call the more dramatic instances of laughter – laughter as a crisis, an uncontrolled eruption – may have become clear by now. His purpose was to understand laughter in its typically human aspects, as a meaningful answer that is at the same time a loss of orientation, a fall into the body. From the point of view of philosophical anthropology this is the real mystery of laughter, because this would never occur to non-human animals. It is precisely here that human corporeality appears to differ fundamentally from animal embodiment.

In spite of many remarks that seem to prove the contrary, I don't think that Plessner's point was that laughing – in a more general sense of the word – should be denied to creatures such as little children, babies, or even chimps and rats. In *Laughing and Crying* he explicitly acknowledges that there are different sorts of laughter, being on a curve which "stretches from the mediate occasions of boundless joy and titillation to the boundary situations of embarrassment and despair. The top of the curve, which is correlated with the occasions of the comic and of wit and humour, indicates laughter in its full development" (Plessner 1970, 113).

Therefore I assume that Plessner, if he were still alive, would readily admit that the behavior of chimps and rats while being tickled, shows interesting similarities with the behavior of babies or little children and that tickling is probably the closest we get to the laugh-inducing snatching and grabbing of our ancestors. He would easily join Panksepp in his conclusion that although laboratory rats lack a sense of humour, they do appear to have a sense of joy and fun. He would probably even agree with V.S. Ramachandran that a possible evolutionary explanation for the emergence of fully developed

human laughing might be that the individual is alerting others in the social group that the incongruity he detected is of trivial consequence, that there has been a false alarm (Ramachandran 1998, 352).

Neither would Plessner, in my view, object to the claim that most laughter in the human world is not about humour or wit, but about the relationships between people. Most of the time, laughter takes place in ordinary daily conversations, it is about things that are far from what one might call funny. Most laughter does not follow jokes or slapstick. It is a sort of social glue that bonds relationships, a kind of polite, artificial laughing, e.g. when your boss is making a speech. No doubt, Plessner would agree with Provine that most laughter happens during the pauses between the words, and that it seldomly interrupts breath or the sentence structure of speech in all entirety.

Yet, there are instances where it does exactly that. Sometimes we burst out into laughter when we hear a funny joke, in the process of which our body becomes alien to us. "We understand we are arriving at a boundary [...] our laughter is an embodiment of the estrangement from our body" (Plessner 1970, 138). To clarify how this peculiar event is possible, we need to understand that man is living in two different orders: he is eccentrically positioned in his world, an *embodied* creature and a creature *in the body* at the same time. It is precisely man's ambiguous position that constitutes the basis of laughing. In Plessner's interpretation, we are capable of breaking out into laughter because of our brokenness.

Therefore, the bottom line of Plessner's investigations reads loud and clear that the eruption of the alien body in laughter cannot be reduced to some primitive animal forerunner. To the contrary, it should be seen as a triumph of man, a victory of the self, even in catastrophe. Eruptive laughter exemplifies what is unique to the human being. It is in the breakdown of organized behaviour that we actually experience how our reflective relation to ourselves has indeed an origin in human corporeality, as the Dutch philosopher Maarten Coolen says (Coolen 2008, 165). In losing control over his body, man still attests to his sovereign understanding of what cannot be understood, to his power in weakness, to his freedom and greatness under constraint (Plessner 1970, 67).

Consequently, Plessner's hermeneutics testifies to a strikingly original understanding of man and his place in nature. It presents man not as a rational animal, actively controlling the machine of his body, but as an ambiguous creature, living in a condition of instability. Precisely when the body takes over, he asserts himself as a person and proves his humanity. Or to summarize it concisely: Plessner presents man as the eccentric animal that can laugh.

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22 A Moral Bubble

The Influence of Online Personalization on Moral Repositioning

Esther Keymolen

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in our information society is to acquire knowledge out of all the information that is piling up around us. Especially in the online world, where the bits of data are constantly multiplying, it has become impossible to efficiently search and find information without some – technological – assistance.

Many consider *online personalization* – the possibility to tailor online services to the individual needs and preferences of users – as one of the "Holy Grails" in the world of ICT (Van der Hof and Prins 2008; Nabeth 2008). The search engine Google, which provides users with search results relevant to their individual context, is a prime example of online-personalization practices. But also Facebook personalizes its services by ranking the messages on a user's page in order of importance, and online advertisement companies make it possible for their clients to display tailored adds to potential costumers all over the internet. Obviously, online personalization has many advantages. It provides an easy retrieval of relevant information and enables a more efficient and adequate way of doing business. In short, it makes online interactions run smoothly.

However, as online personalization becomes more and more sophisticated, it might also affect users negatively. Online personalization may lead to, what I will refer to as, a *moral bubble*. Contradicting information often triggers moral repositioning. However, by presenting users with information that only affirms their initial beliefs, online personalization might hamper this moral evaluation. Although in everyday life, we usually act without giving it a second thought, by following routines more than by engaging in conscious decision-making, the possibility to reflect upon our actions, nevertheless, is an important human attribute. Or, as Hildebrandt (2008, 27) claims: "the very small amount of actions we actually consciously intend, are distinctive for our moral competence." Information works as a key to open the room of moral reflection. Although the room is not frequently visited, it nevertheless is an important place to reside once in a while to affirm who we are or per-

haps change who we want to be. Without being confronted with alternative beliefs of others or contradicting information, it becomes more difficult to comprehend the motives of other persons or feel empathy for their considerations (Nussbaum 1997). Moreover, even when the moral bubble turns out to be a positive one, a bubble that guides our actions in ways we consciously endorse, it still deprives us of the possibility to practice our reflective attribute. Reaffirming the choices once made is also a valuable pursuit. All in all, by presenting users with information that dominantly confirms their initial beliefs, online personalization aims at the heart of moral agency.

Although it becomes quite evident that profiling is a technology that may leave a mark on moral practices, it is only quite recently a *material turn* has occurred in the field of applied ethics, resulting in more attention to the moral agency of artifacts (Verbeek 2011a; Swierstra et al. 2009; Swierstra and Waelbers 2012). While there is still debate on how to define this moral agency of artifacts, some consensus has been reached on the fact that "the artefacts we deal with in our daily life help to determine our actions and decisions" (Verbeek 2009, 226). In other words, online personalization practices are based on technologies that "mediate what we believe to be *the case*, what we believe to be *possible* and what we believe to be *desirable*" (Swierstra and Waelbers 2012, 160, italics in original). Because of this technological involvement, it is important to look deeper into the way a technological practice such as online personalization influences moral decision-making. Although a lot of attention has been paid to the phenomenon of online personalization and more particular to its legal, democratic, and economical consequences (Hildebrandt 2009; Hildebrandt and Gutwirth 2008; Hildebrandt and Rouvroy 2011; Van der Hof and Prins 2008; Solove 2004), very little research has been done on the implications for moral agency of this widely used online technology (an exception is the edited book of Hildebrandt and Rouvroy 2011).

In this book chapter, I will make use of some key insights of the philosophy of technology – more specifically deriving from *postphenomenology* as formulated by Ihde and Verbeek – to clarify and analyse the way online personalization can result in a moral bubble. I will turn to the work of the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner to analyze the profiling technologies that enable online personalization.

Based on this body of literature, I will discuss two ways in which online personalization influences moral repositioning. First, I will focus on the way in which profiling technologies build a *closed Umwelt* instead of an *open world*, resulting in an online environment that is characterized by *cold ethics* rather than by *hot morality*.

Second, I will focus on the *opaqueness* of the personalized interface. Up until now, there has not been much public debate about online personalization. As a consequence, a clear set of rules or agreements on how to implement profiling technologies is lacking. Therefore, most of the time it is not transparent based on which – automatic – decisions an interface has been designed. Moreover, because users have no direct access to the settings of the interface, they cannot judge for themselves whether the filtering of information is taken place accurately (Hildebrandt 2011a). Consequently, there is little room for moral repositioning.

Online personalization might hamper normative reflection. The *moral change* activated by online personalization can be characterized as establishing *moral stagnation*. By way of conclusion, I will explore means to avoid this stagnation. Based on a multi-actor approach, I focus on possible ways to counter the negative effects of a moral bubble on the level of user, technology/company, and regulation.

Setting the scene

A personal internet

Personalization can be perceived as an organizational strategy of companies, governments and other organizations to provide services by means of ICTs to a large number of individual customers worldwide on an individualized basis (Van der Hof and Prins 2008, 113). Delivering personalized services based on detailed information about the preferences and behavior of users is one of the key ambitions of almost all online retailers (Van der Hof and Prins 2008; Prins 2011). Online companies see personalization as an excellent tool for presenting users with a selection of information based on personal preferences instead of letting their potential customers swim (and probably drown) in an endless sea of data. The overall goal they want to achieve by tracking users is to increase their sales (Etzioni 2012). Nevertheless, personalization might also benefit users. It can ensure a flow of information a user on its own would not be able to generate. Personalization can make interactions online easier because they are already deprived of useless data. Personalized information might also empower an individual and strengthen personal development (Kelly 2010). Moreover, Sunstein (2013) speaks of *personalized default rules*, which could be installed to provide people with personalized nudges to ensure they act in a way that might make them "healthier, wealthier, and happier" (ibid., 9). Moreover, by sup-

porting personal aspirations, personalization, ideally, could contribute to a better world (cf. Nabeth 2008).

The *conditio sine qua non* for online personalization is automated profiling. By means of algorithms, databases filled with huge sets of data are mined to create, discover, or construct knowledge (Hildebrandt 2008, 17). Profiling is used to create profiles of individual users based on which personalization can take place. These profiles can be seen as "hypotheses" (ibid., 18); predictions about future preferences and behavior. Interestingly, these hypotheses are not necessarily based on a common sense expectation or on earlier-established knowledge. The hypotheses often just "emerge" in the process of gathering and analyzing data (ibid.).

To gain a better understanding of how profiling works, we will focus on *retargeting*, a form of profiling, which has skyrocketed over the last couple of years and is an important feature of the personalized web (Beales 2010; Helft and Vega 2010; Lambrecht and Tucker 2012). Online retailers do not merely want to display a website tailored to the specific interests of their visitors. Better still, since visitors often leave the website without purchase, corporations want to *follow* visitors all over the web with personalized adds in the hope to persuade them to buy the item –or a related one – they have shown interest for in the past.

E-Advertising companies make this real-time targeting possible for online retailers. By dropping a cookie – a small, non-intrusive text file – in the potential buyer's browser, retargeting systems are able to identify this specific user when visiting the web shop (Watts 2012). If this potential buyer is for example, looking at a pair of shoes, a cookie is placed into her browser connecting it to that pair of shoes (Steel 2007; Helft and Vega 2010). When she leaves the online shoe retailer, surfing to another website, the company is alarmed and automatically starts bidding on advertisement space on that other website, ensuring a personalized shoe-advertisement shows up when that web page has been loaded. All this happens fully-automated in a mere 6 milliseconds (Criteo 2013). Retargeting makes it possible for companies to 'follow' a user online, showing her advertisements and other information tailored to her previous online actions and interests, consequently, contributing to the arrival of a personalized online environment.

Online parties that want to make use of *retargeting* can also turn to Google that started testing this specific form of profiling – they refer to it as *remarketing* – in 2009 (Helft and Vega 2010). For Google, retargeting is just a more specific form of *behavioral targeting* (cf. Beales 2010), which is one of their core occupations (Helft and Vega 2010). Google's business plan is built on two pillars. One the one hand, the company wants to sell advertisements

that ensure their clients a good return on investment; on the other hand they want to provide users with accurate search results. Mager (2012) speaks of the "*service-for-profile model*." A user can use the search engine free of cost because the profile Google creates is sold to profit-making corporations.

In order to build these profiles and provide users with personalized search results, Google has to have access to a large body of *behavioral data*. Taking into account their status as an "obligatory passing point" (Mager 2012, 776) for almost everyone who wants to find information online, this does not seem to impose problems. Google can relate a query to the user's search history and has the ability to cross-reference this information with data coming from their other services such as Gmail and Google Docs (Tene 2008, 1448). In addition, Google always makes use of *contextualization* (Enge 2011). The search engine takes into account context elements such as geography, language, and seasonality to make the interaction between its interface and the user run smoothly. In addition, even when a user is not logged in to Google, the search engine personalizes its results by making use of cookies. For a period of 180 days, a cookie linked to the user's browser keeps track of the search history.

All these sorting techniques enable Google to tailor its list of results to the specific needs of the user. For what is relevant to one person does not have to be relevant to someone else. Similarly to the way in which the targeted ads of online retailers add to the personalization of the internet, the personalized search results of Google shape the online environment. The information Google presents to the user is based on automated profiling rather than on transparent or objective standards.

Although users have the feeling they are anonymous online and nobody is interested in their online activities, the opposite is the case (Benoist 2008, 168). Almost 80% of the most often-visited websites use tracking technology to gather information of their visitors (Angwin 2010) and a majority of them use this information to tailor their interface – the website environment – to the personal profile of their users (Pariser 2011; Solove 2004; Zittrain 2008; Morozov 2011; Goldsmith and Wu 2008). Even people who are aware of these profiling practices cannot always escape. Etzioni (2012, 929) reports the use of "supercookies" which are not only difficult to detect but can even reinstall themselves after they are removed. Also Facebook, with its Like button implemented on many websites, is able to track the visitors of those websites even when they are not a Facebook-member themselves (Roosendaal 2011). All in all, there is a whole range of online actors, from retailers such as Zalando and Amazon to the search engine Google, working hard to turn the internet into a filtered and personalized environment.

Filter bubble

Nowadays, the vision of an *open and free internet* as it was proclaimed in the early 90s of the last century can be judged as utopian and perhaps a little naïve (Morozov 2011; Wu 2011; Ess 2011). It is now generally recognized that internet service providers (ISPs), search engines, online businesses, and social network sites have a big say in what kind of information a user has access to (Zittrain 2008; Goldsmith and Wu 2008). Consequently, we see a *filtered internet*, tailored to the specific needs and habits of its users.

Pariser (2011, 9) coins the term "Filter Bubble" to refer to this "unique universe of information for each of us" that has come to dominate the online world. Although Pariser acknowledges the advantages of online personalization, in his book he primarily stresses its dark sides. An online world with information that only confirms previous actions and beliefs, Pariser claims, might negatively impact the creativity, empathy, and personal development of people. Moreover, because more and more online parties are using these personalization technologies, Pariser (ibid., 111) states "we'll increasingly be forced to trust the companies at the center of this process to properly express and synthesize who we really are."

Pariser (2011) and others – such as Zittrain (2008), Sunstein (2007), and Solove (2004) – claim that the internet is transforming from an open to a closed environment. I will elaborate on the analysis of Pariser by underpinning it with a theoretical framework and investigate the workings of this *personalized internet*, or *filter bubble*, in a normative setting.

Analysis

Technological mediation

Authors like Latour (1992), Ihde (1990) and Verbeek (2000) have convincingly shown that technologies are not just neutral instruments performing a predefined task, but that artefacts also influence the actions and experiences of their users in often unforeseen ways. This co-shaping of experiences and actions of users has been called "technological mediation" and it is a useful starting point to analyze human-world interactions, or in our case to analyze human-personalized interface interactions.

It is important to understand that this technological mediation is twofolded. Technology and users have a permanent stake in shaping each other. More than the "*building bricks*," they are the "*products*" of their interaction

(Verbeek 2000, 183). Therefore, online personalization is not just about a *personalized interface* but also about a *personalized user*. In the interaction, the user is constantly shaping and re-shaping the interface based on her online behavior. Conversely, the interface, presenting the online world in a personalized manner, is affecting the user by pre-sorting her choices and actions (Pariser 2011).

In analyzing technological mediation, one can take on different approaches. Verbeek (2000; 2009) makes a useful distinction between a *mediation of experience* and a *mediation of praxis*. In the former, the emphasis lays on how artefacts mediate people's perception or rather on how "reality can be interpreted and be present for people" (Verbeek 2011a, 8). In the latter, the focus is on how artefacts mediate people's actions. Consequently, online interaction can be analyzed from a perspective of experience as well as from a perspective of praxis. One can either choose to focus on the way the online world is *present* to the user or focus on the way a user can (*inter*) *act* making use of these online technologies. Because, in this chapter, our aim is to analyze how normative reflections might be influenced by the information and choices that are presented to users online, we will take the *mediation of experience* as our point of reference.

The online world is presented to the user through the interface on her computer screen. Without a computer or other mobile device the online world would remain inaccessible. With Ihde (1990), we could classify this mediation of the online world, therefore, as a *hermeneutic relation.* In a hermeneutic relation, an artifact represents reality in such a way that its users have access to it through the concerning artifact. Behind the computer, a user is looking at the personalized interface, which is the object of her perception, while simultaneously this interface is referring beyond itself to what is not immediately seen, namely the online world. Through this hermeneutic relation of user and personalized interface, the user can, so to speak, read herself into any possible, online situation without actually being there (cf. Ihde 1990, 92).

In mediation also a *translation* takes place (Ihde 1990). Some aspects of the online world are *amplified*, while others are *reduced*. Looking at the personalized interface, it even is its principal goal to amplify the information that fits the profile of the user and to reduce information that is irrelevant to it. The personalized interface pre-sorts a specific kind of interpretation and shapes what counts as "real" (Verbeek 2011b).

However, this postphenomenological conceptualization also has its limits. As Søraker (2012) convincingly shows, in analyzing the internet it becomes difficult to clearly distinguish between fundamental concepts

such as *technology* and *world*, since the interface that mediates the online experience simultaneously is the online world itself. "Virtual worlds are both worlds and technologies; the computer simulation is both the underpinning of the virtual world and the means of mediation" (ibid., 504). As a result, when analyzing the interface we have to be aware of its mediating function on the one hand and its ontological function on the other. To put it differently, in the hermeneutic relation of user and online world, a personalized interface does not only *mediate* and *represent* the online world; it also forms its *ontological foundation*.

A closed interface

To gain a better understanding of the workings of profiling technology and how it influences our normative reasoning, we first and foremost have to understand that the core activity of this technology, namely to automatically categorize and generalize information, is not merely confined to machines. Perhaps contra-intuitively, the non-reflective profiling of algorithms resembles the way *living nature*, including human beings, interact with their world on a daily basis. In order to hold their ground, plants, animals, and human beings all make use of –what we might call – *biological profiling* to filter their overly complex environment. In a routine-like manner, they are "extracting relevant information from the environment" in order to adapt themselves to this environment and survive (Hildebrandt 2008, 26). In line with Hildebrandt (ibid., 24), we might say that "profiling is not only a part of professional and everyday life but also a constitutive competence of life itself in the biological sense of the word."

To understand how profiling is in fact an important element in the everyday life of all living nature, I turn to Plessner's *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*]. Central to his analysis is the interaction between life forms –plants, animals or human beings – and their environment.[1]

According to Plessner, animals are 'captured' in a "*Funktionkreis*." They are aware of their environment as far as their building scheme permits

1 It has to be stressed that Plessner – not only a philosopher but also a zoologist by training – is well aware of the fact that distinctions made between plants, animals, and human beings can only be of an 'ideal-typical' nature. Throughout his work he emphasizes the continuation of life forms, as they are linked as stages of positionality" (see the contribution of De Mul to this volume). Nonetheless, when we compare the interaction between animals and their environment on the one hand and the interaction between human beings and their environment on the other, some central aspects of profiling become apparent.

them. Consequently, the information they receive while profiling their environment can only be of use in a specific situation, for example, when they perceive an enemy close by and have to choose between fleeing and fighting. Although especially higher mammals have a certain awareness of their environment, they cannot reflect upon their choices. They cannot break out of the actual situation, sit down, and wonder how to bring their strategies to perfection based on the gathered information over time. All information that is acquired by profiling their environment must fit into their pre-existing knowledge frame. Not aware of a past or future, non-human animals live "here and now" in an "*Umwelt*," a closed environment limited by their building scheme (Plessner 1928, 1978).

Just like other animals, profiling by human beings often takes place in a routine-like manner. People take the presence of the world, their fellow human beings, and the objects they encounter for granted. In everyday life, people do not doubt their existence. Moreover, they expect to see and experience the world in a similar way as their fellow human beings do. The human world is an inter-subjective world. Meaning is, often implicitly, constituted in and through interaction with others. Human beings certainly not think through all the choices they make. To reduce the complexity inherent in human life, they are in an often-unconscious way generalizing and categorizing the information around them (Luhmann 1979).

Notwithstanding the fact that human beings mostly act without giving it a second thought, this does not mean their reflexive attribute is unimportant or even superfluous. On the contrary, according to Plessner, human beings differ from other animals because they are "conscious of their consciousness." Human beings are aware of the fact that *they* are the ones who are profiling the world. Human beings can take on an "eccentric positionality," as Plessner calls it, and reflect upon their relation with the world, with their fellow human beings, and with themselves. They can break out of an actual situation and become aware of its contingency. This second order awareness makes that, so to say, from a distance human beings can look back and reflect upon the course of action, being able to consider possible alternatives. Often, this awareness is triggered by new information contradicting their knowledge frame and, eventually, this confrontation might lead to the adjustment of their initial set of beliefs. De Mul and Van Den Berg (2011, 52) refer to this process of evaluating internal and external motives as "the reflexive loop."

All in all, this ontological distance defines the way human beings are in the world. They do not live in a pre-existing, fixed environment, tuned to their building scheme as other animals do. Human beings have to mould

their own world through culture, language, and technology. Their world is never finished and, therefore, their interaction with it can be characterized as "open." Although human beings lack a fixed *Umwelt*, by making use of artificial means the whole world can become their home. Consequently, Plessner describes human beings as "artificial by nature." On biological grounds, they need technologies such as automated, online profiling to mediate their interaction with the world. Plessner speaks of *mediated immediacy* to point out that all human interaction is in fact mediated interaction.

Nevertheless, in daily life people may often 'forget' that the routines inscribed in their bodies are human-made and therefore changeable (Plessner 1978). And although all interaction is mediated, human beings experience it as direct, dismissing possible side effects of the mediating artefacts at hand. Human beings tend to uphold a *utopian belief* in a stable and unchangeable world, steered by universal rules. Morals exist as daily routines and are considered self-evident. As a result, people often experience the world they live in as a *closed world* instead of as an *open, cultural world*. This cultural world puts its stamp on human life, but it is only by reflection or when a situation of conflict occurs that people become aware of its contingency. Or as Swierstra and Rip (2009, 210) claim:

> We become aware of moral routines when people disobey them, when conflicts between routines emerge and a moral dilemma arises, or when they are no longer able to provide satisfactory responses to new problems. To put it strongly: whereas morality is characterized by unproblematic acceptance, ethics is marked by explicitness and controversy. Ethics is 'hot' morality; morality is 'cold ethics.' We perform ethics when we put up moral routines for discussion.

The first indication that a filter bubble may lead to a *moral bubble* is the fact that it invites users to live in a *closed Umwelt* instead of in an *open world*. Profiling technologies build an online world, which resembles the closed world of animals, determined by their *Funktionkreis*. In a filter bubble, it is not likely to encounter conflicting opinions or disturbing information that spur moral reflection. Hence, it becomes increasingly difficult to be aware of the contingency of the presented information. Online, people reside in a *personalized Umwelt*, and contrary to the cultural and open world, this is not a *shared world* [*Mitwelt*] in which meaning is inter-subjectively constituted. By feeding users a string of information that only affirms their pre-existing, individual beliefs, a personalized interface is more about *cold ethics* than

about *hot morality*. Taking into account that "conscious reflection is the incentive to create new habits" (Hildebrandt 2008, 27), a filter bubble gives rise to *moral stagnation* rather than to moral repositioning.

The "technological intentionality" (Ihde 1990) of the personalized interface, therefore, is one of confirming the status-quo. This is not only a threat to the personal development of users, but it also endangers the development of a viable democracy. For a democracy to thrive, it is necessary that citizens have a shared body of knowledge and at the same time become aware of the diversity of opinions (Hildebrandt 2011b; Van der Hof and Prins 2008; Nussbaum 1997). The workings of a personalized interface support neither.

An opaque interface

The second indication that a filter bubble may turn into a moral bubble can be found in the *opaqueness* of its functioning. Whereas, even if a user has the intention to reflect upon the way information is presented to her online, she has no access to the information that has led to her personalize interface. Without this information she cannot come to a well-informed judgment and, as a result, she remains in her moral bubble. Moreover, even on a societal level this knowledge about the workings of the profiling practices is lacking. There has not yet been a thorough, public debate about the values and norms profiling technologies have to apply to. Or, in other words, a moral bubble immediately becomes *cold ethics* without any preceding *hot morality*.

Ihde (1990) already pinpointed a possible problem that might occur in hermeneutic human-technology relations when the artifact (the interface) is presenting something (the online world) in a faulty manner. Without the interface, there is no online world. It is impossible to have a "naked perception" or a non-mediated perception of the online world based on which a user can judge if its representation is sufficient. The average user might be able to read the interface, but not to explore the inner workings of the underlying profiling technologies. "Personalization [...] may force individuals into restrictive two-dimensional models based on the criteria set by technology and of those who own and apply the technology" (Van der Hof and Prins 2008, 121).

Instead of delegating functionality to profiling technologies in a deliberate way, these technologies can become to *dominate* our experience of the online world (cf. Verbeek 2011b). Van den Hoven (1998) speaks of "artificial authorities" to emphasize the reliance of users on their devices to function properly.

The impossibility to see through the functioning of the underlying profiling technologies also shows that, although we speak of a *personalized* interface, this user herself *does not own* the interface. The mediation of perception taking place through the interface is a mediation enabled by a third party, namely an online company. This company has its own interests, which do not necessarily align with the interests of the user (Mager 2012). Consequently, the only way of gaining access to the settings of the interface is through the company who owns it. And as Hildebrandt states: "If the interests of the data controller (the company behind the interface, EK) and subject (user, EK) differ it may well be that the interests of the data controller, who pays for the whole process, will take precedence" (2008, 19).

A possible answer

Because of the personalized *Umwelt* instigated by profiling technologies and their opaque workings, users are invited to live in a moral bubble. The arrival of this moral bubble can be categorized as an unintended and unwanted consequence of personalization online. We can assume neither the developers nor the users of personalized services are aiming at diminishing moral repositioning. It is also not the 'fault' of the personalized interface that it has the tendency to turn in to a moral bubble. Both user and interface constitute each other in the interaction and become as it were a hybrid entity with human as well as non-human features. When a user is online, she comes to embody, so to speak, the interface. And the interface cannot exist without a user shaping it. In other words, while it is true that the personalized interface influences users' behavior by creating a moral bubble, it is equally true that the way in which users interact with the interface is shaping the working of that same interface. Provoking moral stagnation therefore is not an inescapable characteristic of the *personalized interface* but of a certain *interaction* between user and interface.

By way of conclusion, I will sketch a preliminary direction for countering the negative effects that might be caused by the moral bubble. Considering the scope of this book chapter and the complexity of the problem at hand, it is not possible to come up with a full-fetched answer. Nonetheless, our analysis of the moral bubble shows that for a solution to be successful, it should at least take a multi-actor approach. The moral bubble arises from the interplay of user, company, technology, and the legislation that imbeds these actors. Consequently, all these actors should be included in our search for a possible answer to the arrival of a moral bubble.

User

Users are able by changing their interaction with the personalized interface to adjust its workings. This "domestication" (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Frissen 2004) of artefacts often occurs when the artifact is embedded in daily practice. Pariser (2011) recommends several personal strategies to replenish the filter bubble with new and diverse information.

By altering her daily routines online, a user can open up the personalized interface and indirectly persuade it to build in new elements of information. Or as Pariser (ibid., 223) states: "varying your path online dramatically increases your likelihood of encountering new ideas and people." Another strategy is to prefer websites that are transparent about the profiling technologies they use to websites that are not. By being conscious about the kind of interfaces one uses, the influence of a moral bubble can be minimized.

However, a necessary condition for successfully getting around the moral bubble is some basic knowledge on how profiling technologies work. If users are sleepwalking into a moral bubble, they cannot change their routines. Unfortunately, knowledge about online personalization is often absent. Pan et al. (2007) for example, show how college students aren't aware of the ranking strategy of Google and blindly trust the search engine by clicking on the first search results that pops up, even when the abstract seems less relevant.

In his pamphlet *Program or Be Programmed*, Rushkoff (2010) makes a stand against digital illiteracy and encourages the development of basic programming skills for all internet users. Having insight in the basic workings of programming must strengthen users to use personalized interfaces in a safer way. Developing digital literacy or e-skills is also on Europe's digital agenda. It is assumed that children can benefit more from the internet when they are better able to recognize and deal with online risks such as a biased online environment (De Haan 2010; Sonck et al. 2011).

Technology

By adapting the design of the personalized interface, the development of a moral bubble might also be tempered. Although in general, the influence of the engineer on the design of an artifact is by far the largest in the early stage of development, this does not have to apply to the personalized interface. Different than *analog artefacts* which, when bought, in general are out of reach for the engineers, *digital artefacts* such as the personalized interface, never really leave the realm of design. Because of its *virtuality*,

the personalized interface can interact with users while staying within reach of the engineers. Consequently, the influence of the engineer on the workings of the personalized interface remains significant, even after the interface has been employed.

To counterbalance the workings of the moral bubble, I would like to introduce the concept of *programmed serendipity:* the intentional replenishing of the personalized interface with random information. By including a portion of information that not directly derives from the personal profile of the user in the interface, the filter bubble and therefore also the moral bubble becomes less absolute. Consequently, there is room for conflicting opinions and information that could instigate moral repositioning.

The question remains however, based on which parameters this 'unpersonalized' stream of information should be built. *Sheer randomness* – as the opposite of personalization – could easily result in information that is of no interest to the user at all. Hence, sheer randomness is not an instigator for moral repositioning since it is more likely to repel a user than to stimulate her in reflecting upon the presented information. With Gadamer (1972), we could say that to get the conversation started, we should find ourselves between the limits of 'strangeness and familiarity.' If the random information is completely strange to the user, she probably will not be interested nor make an effort to evaluate it. If the information is completely familiar, no repositioning will take place either. Programmed serendipity therefore is, to a certain extent, depending on the same personalization techniques it is supposed to counterbalance. To replenish the interface with information that will catch the attention of the user, some basic interests of the user simply have to be known first. Eventually, taking Gadamer's limits a step further, it might come down to finding the right balance between random and personalized information.

Computer scientists and programmers have taken on the task of finding this balance and safeguarding serendipity in the online world. For example, Campos and De Figueiredo (2002) have investigated the possibility of 'programming for serendipity.' They developed a software agent called Max "that browses the web in order to find information that might stimulate the user, especially information that the user is not focused upon" (ibid., 52). Making use of, amongst others, the user's profile and a lexical database, Max formulates suggestions based on the generation of alternatives, the selection of also less significant concepts, replacing selected concepts by other, related concepts, and random stimulation (ibid., 57).

Also Helberger (2011), who addresses the problem of the moral bubble up and foremost from a policy perspective, sees concrete design principles as a manner of ensuring diverse information exposure online. She speaks of "diversity by design" and analyzes four different conceptions of exposure diversity which could inform the design of internet technologies such as Electronic Programme Guides and search engines, namely: "Discovering the Difference, Exposure to Diverse Media Outlets, Promoting Personal Autonomy, and Encouraging Serendipitous Discoveries" (Helberger 2011, 464).

All in all, it becomes clear that *programmed serendipity* could help to safeguard the *open character* of the online world, but only if the engineers/companies that own the interface are willing to cooperate. To a certain extent, their willingness depends on –legal – regulation.

Regulation

Finally, to enable moral repositioning, users should be allowed access to the information behind the interface. As we have seen, even if a user wants to reflect upon the way information is represented to her, she is unable to do so because of the lack of transparency of the profiling practices. As Koops (2011) argues, it is not very effective for users to control the process of collecting and managing data as such. It would be more useful to make the process of decision-making transparent. Users should be able to control how companies, but also governments make use of personal data. Eventually, users should have a say in how the interface looks like. This "decision-transparency" is a necessary condition to empower users. It enables them to take a stand against unfair decisions.

The successful establishment of such measures largely depends on the action undertaken by governments and other international institutes. Key actors such as the European Union, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and the American Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently have been putting the negative consequences of personalization on the digital agenda. In its report "Protecting Consumer Privacy in an Era of Rapid Change," the FTC (2012) pleads –amongst others – for legislation that enables consumers to access the information that is being collected about them by online companies (more specifically the FTC focuses on "data brokers"). FTC also urges these companies to develop a central website to inform users about the way their data is being collected and used and to explain how users can control this data use.

Within the W3C (2013), the Tracking Protection Working group is preparing recommendations to "improve user privacy and user control by defining mechanisms for expressing user preferences around Web tracking and for blocking or allowing Web tracking elements." In their effort to deliver "global consensus definitions and codes of conduct" they try to involve as much as possible other relevant actors such as governments, academia, industry, and advocacy groups (ibid.).

In January 2012, The European Commission (2012) announced a comprehensive reform of data protection rules not only to "strengthen online privacy rights," but also to "boost Europe's digital economy." If these changes are instituted, they could help to temper the moral bubble. For example, the European Commission claims that people will be having easier access to their own data. Moreover, wherever consent is required for data to be processed, it should become clear that this consent has to be given explicitly, rather than assumed (which often is the case now). In addition, people will be able to refer to the data protection authority in their own country, even when the company that has been collecting their data resides outside the EU.

Conclusion

All in all, it becomes clear that there is no clear-cut answer to the arrival of a moral bubble online. Nonetheless, since this moral bubble is not a trait of the personalized interface as such, but emerges in the *interaction* between the user and the interface, a multi-actor approach is needed. Engaging users, companies as well as governments and other international partners, therefore, seems to be the most fruitful approach.

In this book chapter, I have analyzed the way in which a moral bubble arises online. Two main reasons for such a moral bubble to emerge have been examined. First, because the personalized interface shows only familiar and validating information, it gains the character of a closed *Umwelt*. Users do not encounter countervailing information and therefore are not stimulated to reflect upon their own routine-like behavior. A personalized interface is therefore more about *cold ethics* than about *hot morality*. Second, a personalized interface may turn into a moral bubble because of its opaque character. Users have no clear insight into the way the profiling technologies work and shape the interface. Consequently, users are blindly depending on the companies behind the interface to deliver them a good-working and fair interface.

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23 Eccentric Positionality as a Precondition for the Criminal Liability Of Artificial Life Forms

Mireille Hildebrandt

ALFs: Automatic and autonomous agents

Building on Maturana and Varela (1998), Bourgine and Varela (1992, xi) have defined artificial life (AL) as "a research program concerned with autonomous systems, their characterization and specific modes of viability." Their working definition differs substantially from mainstream attempts to define AL in terms of the extraction of necessary and sufficient conditions of biological life forms, which are then applied to non-biological entities, hoping to thus synthesize life. Rather than opting for an imitation of biological life, they focus on the autonomy of living systems, whether natural or artificial. They emphasize autonomy as the most salient feature of life, which they further define by the constitutive capacities of viability, abduction and adaptability. *Viability* regards the capacity to respond to unpredictable changes in the environment in a manner that allows the system to maintain its organizational identity (implying operational closure), for instance by changing its internal structure (often entailing structural coupling with other living systems within the environment). To anticipate changes and to respond to unanticipated change, living systems need to function as *abduction machines*, producing sets of responses that sustain the unity of the system. *Adaptability* implies that the internal restructuring adequately fits with the challenges produced by the external environment, without annihilating the organizational identity of the system. Clearly, Bourgine and Varela did not consider Plessner's notion of centricity, let alone eccentricity, as a necessary condition in this regard. For them, neither natural nor artificial life forms presume eccentricity or centricity to qualify as living systems. They do require a measure of autonomy, even if this may not be a sufficient condition.[1] One could associate the way Bourgine and Varela as

1 Maturana & Varela (1992, 48) emphasize that living systems are not the only autonomous entities. For instance, societies are autonomous systems, but they differ from organisms in the degree of autonomy of their components (ibid., at 198-199). In a similar vein one could suggest

well as Maturana and Varela define living systems with Plessner's notion of the border or boundary and with his concept of positionality. For both Varela and Plessner, the difference between the border between a non-living thing and its environment on the one hand, and the border between a living system and its environment on the other hand, is that in the former the border is *neither* part of the environment nor of the thing, whereas in the latter, the border is actively created and maintained by the living system of which it is also a part. Interestingly, both Plessner and Varela consider living entities to be systems, meaning that the identity of the entity derives from the productive interrelations between its components. Last but not least, both speak of the capacity for self-regulation (*Selbstregulierbarheit*, Plessner 1975, 160-165; autopoiesis, Maturana and Varela 1998, 47-48) as crucial for living forms, even if Plessner may understand this as a transcendental category rather than an observable.

To further investigate the notion of autonomy, we can use Steels's distinction between automatic and autonomous agents. Steels defines agents as systems, meaning "a set of elements which have a particular relation amongst themselves and with the environment" (Steels 1995, 1). He then defines agents as performing a particular function for another agent or system, and finally, he stipulates that agents are systems capable of maintaining themselves. Agents thus come close to living systems, which operate on the basis of two mechanisms:

– They continuously replace their components and that way secure existence in the face of unreliable or short-lived components. the individual components of the system therefore do not matter, only the roles they play.[2]
– The system as a whole adapts/evolves to remain viable even if the environment changes, which is bound to happen (Steels 1995, 2).

Steels then goes on to explain the meaning of autonomy in terms of its etymology, which stems from the self-government of the Greek city states: *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule or law). Those who live in accordance with their own law are autonomous, whereas those obedient to an external law are not.

that autonomic computing systems could be autonomous in the sense outlined by Maturana & Varela, without necessarily being alive.

2 This observation is similar to Maturana and Varela's distinction between organisation and structure: whereas the organisation of a system refers to "those relations that must exist among the components of a system for it to be a member of a specific class," its structure refers to "the components and relations that actually constitute a particular unity and make its organization real" (Maturna and Varela 1992, 47).

He contrasts this with the term automatic, which he claims to be derived from *cybernetic* or self-steering. This implies that "automatic systems are self-regulating, but they do not make the laws that their regulatory activities seek to satisfy" (Steels 1995, 4).[3] Autonomous systems are self-governing as well as self-regulating, whereas automatic systems are merely self-regulating. Old style artificially intelligent entities (AIs) are automatic to the extent that they cannot step outside the boundaries of their original design, whereas living systems are autonomous because they have not been built and programmed by others and are capable of self-organization, development, adaptation and learning in order to sustain their viability in a changing environment. The difference between AI and AL, therefore, seems to be that between automatic systems and autonomous systems. In speaking of artificial life forms (ALFs) instead of artificial lives (ALs) I wish to prevent equating AL with humanoid robots or other imitations of human beings, since I expect artificial life to develop as life forms that are entirely different from our own. ALFs might, for instance, emerge from distributed polymorphous multi-agent systems that would present us with novel life forms that are not necessarily contained within the "skin" of a robot, and it may be difficult at this point to even imagine "them" as identifiable entities.

Autonomic computing

Having thus differentiated between automatic and autonomous systems I will now introduce a further distinction, namely that of autonomic systems. The reason for this is that the autonomy of living systems, as defined by Varela and by Steels, does not match the notion of human autonomy that is assumed by our Western legal framework. Criminal liability requires a measure of autonomy, and it assumes that such autonomy is not to be found in animals or machines. To differentiate human autonomy from the autonomy of current artificial autonomous systems we will need a more precise definition of human autonomy, and a clear understanding of the kind of autonomy that adheres in current artificial autonomous systems. For the latter I will refer to the notion of autonomic computing, for the former I will refer to Plessner's eccentric positionality.

The tech industry giant IBM has introduced the notion of autonomic computing (Kephart and Chess 2003), using the autonomic nervous system as a metaphor, to describe computing systems capable of self-management

3 Steels (1995, 5) refers to a personal communication from Tim Smithers in September 1992.

(self-repair, self-maintenance, self-configuration). It does not strike me as altogether improbable that by designing a system capable of managing itself, a self may actually emerge in the process of defining itself and of actively maintaining its borders. This would imply that even if these systems are programmed to achieve goals that we have set for them to accomplish, the goal of self-management may at some point claim priority. This relates to the third criterion that Steels introduced in his definition of autonomous agents; to be an agent rather than merely an instrument, a system must have its own interest in maintaining itself. To the extent that autonomic computing systems achieve such a level of autonomy, they could thus qualify as ALFs.[4]

In 1995, Steels concluded that no robots were as yet autonomous in the sense he described. To decide whether autonomic computing systems are autonomous in Steels's sense would require empirical investigation. Since at this point in time, autonomic computing is still in its infancy and thus more of a vision than a reality, empirical evidence cannot provide very precise answers yet. However, it makes sense to anticipate the consequences of developing autonomic systems in case they do become autonomous in ways that qualify as similar to human autonomy, because this would have far reaching legal and ethical consequences. For all practical purposes I will understand "truly" autonomic computing systems as a novel type of ALF, judging them to be fundamentally different from "stand-alone" old school AI robots.[5]

One of the consequences of computing systems that function as an agent for their human users by sustaining their own identity will be a fundamental unpredictability. This unpredictability is "caused" by the complexity of the interactions of their components (autonomic systems will definitively be multi-agent systems), as well as by their polymorphous character (to achieve their goals they may change their structure). The uncertainty brought about by the emergent properties of multi-agent interactions relates to the *behaviour* of the emergent system, while the uncertainty brought about by

4 Note that in *The Tree of Knowledge* (1992, 48) Maturana & Varela admit that not all autonomous entities are living beings. Though in *Autopoiesis and Cognition* (1980, 82) they still held that autopoiesis is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for life, their claim in *The tree of knowledge* is more modest. This would mean that autonomic computing systems *could* qualify as ALFs, depending on what finally determines whether a system is or is not alive. Note also that consciousness, let alone self-consciousness is not a requirement for an entity to be alive.

5 New style robotics develops robots capable of perceiving and enacting their environment, based on machine learning techniques. This may entail autonomic computing. "Stand alone" old school robotics refers to the fact that these robots had no connection with databases, little or no capacity to perceive the world and no ability to improve their performance based on real time feed-back.

structural changes of the components of the system relates to the *identity* of the system that is behaving. In both cases, serious problems may occur if the behaviour of the system results in harm or damage: first, it may be difficult to attribute causality to either individual nodes of the system or to its user or designer (thus requesting us to focus on the behaviour of the ALF) and second, it may be difficult to identify the system as the object of attribution of causation (how can we identify a particular ALF?). A third, even more challenging issue, concerns blameworthiness: can we censure the system, hold the ALF accountable in its own right? Within the framework of criminal law, liability depends on wrongfulness and culpability and this seems farfetched, even if causality could be attributed to an identifiable autonomous computing system. This raises many questions regarding causality, wrongfulness and culpability. In this contribution, I will focus on what it would take to actually blame an ALF for its behaviour. At which point does an ALF qualify as an autonomous system that can be held accountable in a court of law? I believe that Plessner's distinction between a centric and an eccentric positionality provides a salient conceptual tool to make the difference between autonomy as a characteristic of all autonomic systems and the autonomy that is – so far – specific for human agency. But before attempting to highlight this crucial difference between centric and eccentric positionality, it is important to pay attention to the noncentric positionality of plants, to remind us of the fact that life forms are not necessarily centric.

Within the realm of living organisms, Plessner distinguishes among three life forms: plants, animals and humans. Life forms are characterized by their positionality, which constitutes the manner in which they relate to their spatial and temporal environment and to their self. By categorizing these life forms, Plessner does not deny their empirical overlaps, but instead emphasizes the need for analytical distinctions that allow one to better understand what kind of transitions are at stake among different life forms. The extent to which he adheres to a transcendental perspective is not what I wish to dwell on here, though it may be interesting to investigate the implications of his interpretation of Kant at this point.

According to Plessner, plants have an open form of organization, responding to their environment in a way that is less mediated by the internal complexities of the organism than in the case of animals. Their inner workings are not centralized as they are in animals with a spinal cord or central nervous system. He therefore coins plants as "dividuals" instead of individuals. There is a kind of equivalence between the nodes of the plant that is transformed to a more hierarchical system of components in

animals that allows for a greater differentiation between different parts of the animal, but consequently gives rise to a somewhat less flexible or open structure. The most salient feature of plants as compared to animals is the lack of a centre of organization. In plants, perception is not enacted via a set of specific organs (eyes, ears, skin, nose) that produce a unified experience thanks to the way the central nervous system responds to the imprint of events in the environment. In fact, the whole idea of enaction – coined as such by Varela, but present in Plessner's work – does not apply to plants (Plessner 1975, 225).[6] "Experience and action (i.e. centrally mediated movements, which can be modified by associations) go against the grain of the open form."

Animal life forms entail a centralized organization of action/perception, afforded by the central nervous system that creates an awareness of an embodied self that is both the material body (*Körper*) and its central representation as an organized unity (*Leib*).[7] The transition from plant to animal seems to afford the birth of a "unified" self that confronts the environment in a frontal manner instead of confronting all of its components at once (on all sides). The difference is not that a plant does not sustain an identifiable organization with a specific repertoire of strategies to deal with environmental change. Rather, the difference is that the organization of plants is non-hierarchical in the sense that their perceptions and their decisions to act are not mediated through a central point, making it hard to even speak of a plant's actions when referring to its movements (e.g. during growth). To read a centralized plan into the development of a plant would be a mistake for the following reason: "It would be a betrayal of the essence of plants (as it would be a betrayal of nature), to understand them as symbolic, as the embodiment of a principle that expresses itself in them, as the articulation of a force, a soul, a reality, that is no longer themselves" (Plessner 1975, 226).[8]

6 My translation of: "Empfindung und Handlung (d.h. durch Assoziationen modifizierbare, zentral vermittelte Bewegungen) widersprechen dem Wesen offener Form."

7 *Stufen*, 230-231: "Er [animal organism, mh] ist die uber die einheitliche Repräsentation der Glieder vermittelte Einheit des Körpers, welcher eben dadurch von der zentralen Repräsentation abhangt. Sein Körper ist sein Leib geworden, jene konkrete Mitte, dadurch dat Lebenssubjekt mit dem Umfeld zusammenhangt."

8 My translation of: "Es ist nun einmal ein Verrat am Wesen der Pflanze (wie es ein Verrat am Wesen der Natur ist), sie symbolisch zu nehmen, als Verkorperung eines in ihr sich aussprechenden Prinzips, als Ausdruck einer Kraft, einer Seele, einer Wirklichkeit, die nicht mehr sie selbst ist."

In exploring the idea of artificial life forms, we must take this warning to heart. Apart from the fact that smart technologies may not qualify as life forms at all, for instance because they are heteronomous in their design and mechanistic in their operation (self-regulating but not self-governing), smart technologies could theoretically display a non-centric positionality akin to that of plants, rather than providing a virtual core that springs from a centralized organization of perception and action.[9]

According to Plessner, animal positionality is defined by centricity and frontality. Crucially, the animal *has* a body and *is* a body, but he does not understand this dualism in a Cartesian manner (discriminating two substances). Plessner speaks of a double aspectivity that creates a distance between the *Körper* (the body an animal experiences as having) and the *Leib* (the body an animal experiences as being), suggesting that this distance is productive in allowing for a dynamic representation of the self (*Leib*) in relation to its body (*Körper*) in its environment. The productive split between these two bodies is brought about by the centric positionality of animals and pertains equally to human beings, who share the dynamics of becoming an individual in front of an environment that is constituted as such in the con-frontation with a unified self. The representation that is enabled by the centric organization of animals is also what allows them to learn from past experience, aligning their knowledge about the past with anticipation of future occurrences (Plessner 1975, 277-287). One can explain this by highlighting that representation does not necessarily refer to symbolic representation, as it can merely denote the imprint that is made on the perceptive/enactive structure of the animal. As Steels observes:

> Representations are physical structures (for example, electro-chemical states) which have correlations with aspects of the environment and thus have a predictive power for the system. These correlations are maintained by processes which are themselves quite complex and indirect, for example, sensors and actuators which act as transducers of energy of one form into energy of another form. Representations support processes that in turn influence behavior. *What makes representations unique is that processes*

9 I expect that smart technologies that qualify as autonomous according to Steels' definition will exhibit the kind of distributed intelligence that is explained by connectionist models of the brain. This raises the question which entity we are talking about when referring to an ALF: the autonomic computing system itself (the brains) or the system that it embodies, nourishes and produces (the entire body).

> *operating over representations can have their own dynamics independently of the dynamics of the world that they represent* (Steels 1995, 7; my italics).

In Plessner's analysis, the difference between animals and humans resides in the fact that humans have developed an awareness of the distance between *Leib* and *Körper*. In using language, which allows a person to address what is not here and what is not now, human beings have developed the capacity to decentralize their position in space and time, thereby "liberating" themselves from the here and now that holds together the animal self: "To the animal his here-and-now character is not given, not present, it emerges in him and in that way carries the hidden barrier against his own individual Existence. Indeed it (the *Leib*) is present to itself (the whole), but the whole is not present to it. Present to it is the outer world and the *Körperleib*" (Plessner 1975, 239).[10]

Unlike animals, the human life form is not enclosed in the *Umwelt*-channel of the here and now. The animal may be conscious of its environment and of its own body *as* its own body, but it is not conscious of being conscious because it cannot escape what is present – it cannot leave its specific *Umwelt-tunnel* (Cheung 2006, 321). In phenomenological terms there is intentionality (consciousness of something), but this intentionality regards the outside world as it appears in the act of perception.[11] The animal is a self, but not an "I" (Plessner 1975, 238), because the "I" depends on an eccentric positionality, which is made possible only in the use of human language.[12] This can be illustrated with the constitution of the self in the language of an infant. If I address an infant by pointing at her and saying "you are Charlotte" and pointing back at myself, saying "I am Mireille," the child will initially imitate me and – pointing to herself – repeat: "you Charlotte," and – pointing to me – repeat: "I Mireille." My response ("no, you Charlotte, I Mireille") will not catch on until the day that Charlotte suddenly realizes that she is "you" for me, whereas she is "I" to herself. This capacity to turn back on herself from the position of the other is afforded by language and constitutes the birth of eccentric positionality in humans. Language also allows us to present what is absent (in time or space), thus opening the

10 My translation of: "Dem Tier is sein Hier-Jezt-Charakter nicht gegeben, nicht gegenwärtig, es geht noch in him auf und trägt darin die ihm selbst verborgene Schranke gegen seine eigene individuele Existenz. Wohl ist es (als Leib) ihm (dem Ganzen), nicht aber das Ganze sich gegenwärtig. Ihm gegenwärtig ist Außenfeld und Körperleib."

11 On intentionality as consciousness *of something as something* ("nothing is given which is not given *as such*"), cf. Waldenfels 2004, 237-239.

12 On Plessner's language concept in relation to the human life form, see Cheung 2006.

door for our imagination, and providing an entirely new "infrastructure" for the representation of our selves and our environment, creating the possibility to reinvent our selves as well as each other. The absence, lack or emptiness that animals cannot conceive of,[13] is the precondition for humans to move from the *Umwelt* of ostensive reference to the *Welt* brought about by the use of language (Ricoeur 1976, chapter 4).

Eccentricity thus refers to a centric self that is consciously aware of itself. Looking back at it-self from the position of others (*Selbstdistanz*), it causes a decentralization of the self by introducing the position of the observer. This doubling of the double aspectivity is what enables the constitution of an outside world, an inner world and a middle world (*Mitwelt*).[14] The *Umfeld* is replaced by an outside world that is filled with things that are not merely perceived from the centric and frontal position of a self, but can be observed from the position of other selves or from that of the same self in another time and place. The body – one's own body – can now appear as one of these things that crowd an outside world. At the same time, the self looks back at itself via the gaze of the other (Mead 1959, 134), thus instantiating the "I" that is performing this act of constitution, creating a view of the self as another (Ricoeur 1992; Waldenfels 2004) and thus instauring an inner world: In the distance to himself the living being is given as its inner world (Plessner 1975, 295).[15]

Finally, taking the position of the other (Mead 1959; Merleau-Ponty 1945; Ricoeur 1992; Butler 2005) enables *a double anticipation* (Hildebrandt, Koops, and De Vries 2008); it enables us to anticipate what others expect from us; it enables us to anticipate how others will interpret our behaviours. In a way it precedes the birth of the outside world and the inner world; to be consciously aware of oneself as a self one has to be addressed as such by another and to construct one's identity as a particular person one must be drawn into a web of meaning that can be moulded into one that signifies

13 Plessner speaks of "ihm verschlossene Anschauungsmöglichkeiten" (Plessner 1975, 271). I prefer the term conceive, because dogs and cats seem very capable of missing a close companion, whether another pet or a human person. They cannot, however, thematize, objectify, modify or otherwise conceptualize the sense of loss they experience. They are caught up in it, just like they are caught up in their *Umwelt-tunnel*.

14 Plessner situates the *Seele* at the level of the *Innenwelt*, the *Bewustsein* at the level of the *Aussenwelt* and the *Geist* at the level of the *Mitwelt*. The term *Mitwelt* would translate as 'with-world,' which is not the same as 'middle world' or 'shared world.' For this reason I mostly prefer to use the German term.

15 My translation of: "In der Distanz zu ihm selber ist sich das Lebewesen als Innenwelt gegeben."

such identification: "The *Mitwelt* carries the person, while at the same time it is carried and built by him" (Plessner 1975, 303).[16]

The position of the observer and human autonomy

Plessner extends his analysis regarding the difference between centric and eccentric positionality with the articulation of three constitutive anthropological laws: the law of natural artificiality; the law of mediated immediacy and the law of the utopian position. The double aspectivity that is typical for humans involves an inescapable need to reconstruct the self, the world and the others, thus entailing an unavoidable artificiality of the *Körperleib* that grounds us. This natural artificiality need not be thought of as lamentable. Quite to the contrary, it should be celebrated because it is the result of a freedom that is productive of and produced by the human life form. But it also stands for a rootlessness, an uncertainty and an awareness that we have no immediate access to the self, the world, or our peers. This is how we come to envy the animal that is caught up in the immediacy of its *Umfeld*: an animal may be sad, but it lacks the capacity to reflect upon its own sadness. Such reflection creates a distance between us and our feelings that seems alien to a centric position. The upside is that such reflection allows us to think in terms of possibilities, to imagine an outside world that is not (yet) reality, to initiate a measure of novelty in the web of meaning that constitutes the *Mitwelt* and to experiment with different selves (roles), thus enlarging the repertoire of coping strategies for expected and unexpected challenges (Lévy 1998). Possibility, however, does not equate with unbounded freedom, it refers to a disposition that springs from a reiterated decenteralization, a capacity to look at things, people and the self from a variety of positions and to thereby bring forth a world that is tested from a plurality of points of view, instead of taking the first (own) point of view for granted. At the same time, the re-creative nature of language, which allows one to speak of what is not, enables a genuine form of novelty – negotiating the constraints of language.

Language thus *affords* the human life form to take the position of the observer (the third person singular, or what Mead called "the generalized other"), which – it seems to me – lies at the root of Plessner's anthropological laws. Being thrown into a language that generates the position of

16 My translation of: "Die Mitwelt trägt die Person, indem sie zugleich von ihr getragen und gebildet wird."

the third person singular humans are forced to be artificial, mediated and utopian; there is no way back to a natural, unmediated access to the here and now. The constitution of the human self thus coincides with its fundamental splitting image: that of the observer who observes herself while observing herself etc. Looking at how Maturana and Varela introduce the position of the observer, one can detect important differences between various perspectives on observation. First, they connect the position of the observer with the predictability of the behaviour of systems under observation (Maturana and Varela 1998, 122-125). This – in and of itself – does not necessarily depend on an eccentric position, since all living systems need to anticipate the behaviour of their environment. Second, they explain that such prediction depends on the interpretation *by the observer* of past and present behaviours of other systems and their respective environments or niches (Maturana and Varela 1980, 8-9). The observer's predictions, based on her descriptions of an entity as a unity of interactions with its environment, must not be confused with the way that the system under observation – itself – anticipates changes in its environment.[17] This will depend on its own organization, whereas the observation depends on the observer's organization. The interactions lie in the cognitive domain of the observed entity, while the causal or other relations between an entity and its niche as observed by the observer lie in the cognitive domain of the observer. In fact, Maturana and Varela's observer is a human person, whose description is addressed to another observer, which she may be herself. It seems that language not only enables observation, but in fact equals observation: "Anything said is said by an observer" (Maturana and Varela 1980, 8). The most direct reference to what Plessner coins as eccentricity can be found in their statement (Maturana and Varela 1980, 8): "The observer can define himself as an entity by specifying his own domain of interactions; he can always remain an observer of these interactions, which he can treat as independent entities."

What is important here is the claim that an observer – thanks to the use of language – can distance herself from her self and treat her own interactions as if they are disentangled from her self[18]: she can take an eccentric position with regard to herself. Some observers would describe

17 Making the distinction between the operational closure of the observed system and that of the observer is itself an observation that belongs to the domain of the observer. Hayles (1999, 145) rightly points some epistemological paradoxes in Maturana's position here.

18 On the role of semantic description, language and human consciousness, see Maturana & Varela 1998, chapter 9: Linguistic Domains and Human Consciousness.

this as second order statements about first order interactions. This can be an accurate description if we acknowledge that the second order statement does not contain a view from nowhere; it does not represent a given reality "out there" and cannot make sense if it does not connect to the regularities we encounter. Maturana and Varela explain:

> Again we must walk on the razor's edge, eschewing the extremes of representationalism (objectivism) and solipsism (idealism). Our purpose in this book has been to find a *via media*: to understand the regularity of the world we are experiencing at every moment, but without any point of reference independent of ourselves that would give certainty to our descriptions and cognitive assertions. Indeed, the whole mechanism of generating ourselves as describers and observers tells us that our world, as the world which we bring forth in our coexistence with others, will always have precisely that mixture of regularity and mutability, that combination of solidity and shifting sand, so typical for human experience when we look at it up close (Maturana & Varela 1998, 241).

It seems apparent that the position of the observer defines human autonomy as distinct from the autonomy that defines all living systems in general. The observer entails the difference that makes a difference. In the words of Katherine Hayles: "Although the observer's perceptions construct reality rather than passively perceive it, for Maturana this construction depends on positionality rather than personality. In autopoietic theory, the opposite of objectivism is not subjectivism but relativism" (Hayles 1999, 43).

Though Hayles is not referring to Plessner's usage of the term positionality, her observation is interesting because one could say that in a similar way, Plessner's eccentric positionality does not refer to a psychological analysis, but to the fact that the human life form is capable of taking a second and third person perspective. Connecting Plessner with the work of Maturana and Varela, one could say that this position accounts for the fact that humans can bring forth a world that 1) reflects the constraints they encounter in their domain of interactions and 2) opens up a plurality of alternative interactions. The connection between being an observer and being capable of prediction implies that the individual observer has a *measure* of choice in how to act, working out the potential consequences of different courses of action as well as anticipating how her fellow-observers will "read" alternative actions. This foresight can be based on Plessner's utopian position that allows an observer to look back from the future, consciously anticipating how her actions will be understood by other observers. The domain of the

observer assumes and generates Plessner's *Mitwelt* that carries and supports (*trägt*) the individual person, who is born in this process. There is another interesting analogy between Plessner's work and that of Maturana and Varela. In both cases, the human organism is capable of creating a shared world, called *Mitwelt* by Plessner, and *society* by Maturana and Varela. In contrast, systems theory, especially that of Luhmann, tends to reify this *Mitwelt* or *society* as a third order unity that effects operational closure in a manner similar to first – and second order organisms (cells and metacellulars), neither Plessner nor Maturana and Varela fall in this trap. In the case of Plessner, the *Mitwelt* is underdetermined by the anthropological laws, and saturated in the ambiguities of the double anticipations that nourish it. Maturana and Varela devoted an entire chapter to Social Phenomena in order to explain that: "an organism restricts the individual creativity of its component unities, as these unities exist for that organism. The human social system amplifies the individual creativity of its components, as that system exists for these components" (Maturana and Varela 1998, 199).

This is why the domain of the observer cannot affect the kind of operational closure that biological organisms must perform to sustain their identity, and that is also why the human life form entails a rootlessness, ambiguity and uncertainty that is at the same time its freedom to perform as an outlier. In this sense, human autonomy differs fundamentally from the autonomic nervous system that enables its emergence, as well as from autonomic computing systems that cannot reflect on the meaning of their interactions.

One last point must be made. Maturana and Varela's self-observing observer can be understood as a mechanism that produces second order beliefs about its own first order beliefs. To the extent that autonomic computing entails self-management, one could argue that the system generates second order beliefs about its first order beliefs. This, one could argue, implies that autonomic computing systems indeed qualify as eccentric and autonomous systems. The double anticipation that is implied in the eccentric position can be interpreted as an observer's attribution of certain intentions, allowing the observer to adequately infer and predict the behaviour of others. Siding with Dennett (2009), for example, one could claim that the question of whether people or autonomic computing systems "really" have second order beliefs and intentions is a misguided question, since there is no way to anchor the difference, in which case there is no point in trying to determine whether autonomic computing systems develop an eccentric position. Instead, we must ask ourselves whether we can better anticipate their behaviour if we understand them as rational agents that are capable of

having first and second order beliefs and desires. This constellation is what Dennett has coined the *intentional stance*: assuming that another acts on the basis of intentionality because that better explains her behaviours. For many reasons, however, Dennett does not fit well with Plessner. Though I do not think that Plessner would reject the possibility of non-biological life forms developing an eccentric positionality, I do think that he would not be satisfied with ALFs merely "displaying" an intentional stance.[19] From his semi-transcendental perspective, it makes no sense to attribute intentions – and thus eccentricity – to a system that has no conscious self-awareness. Dennett's behaviourism and physicalism don't seem to be in alignment with Plessner's philosophical anthropology.

However, if we "(mis)read" Dennett's position as if it were in line with that of behaviourists like Ryle and G.H. Mead, I think that we could end up close to Plessner's stance: what counts is not some metaphysical theory about the essential nature of human beings, but the paradoxical first hand experience of an eccentricity that allows us a permanent distantiation and concurrent reconfiguration of inner, outer and middle world (*Mitwelt*). This is what forces us to develop second order intentions and this allows us to address those we "read" as taking a similar stance in life as responsible for their actions. Creatively misreading Dennett as a proponent of Plessnerian thought, I suggest that endorsing the intentional stance versus an ALF would be a worthwhile experiment, a way of finding out whether they indeed live up to the expectations that spring from interactions with a person who is capable of developing a mind of her own.

To what extent and why can ALFs be held criminal liable, if at all?

The difference between centricity and eccentricity is important from the perspective of legal philosophy, because it relates to the type of human agency that is presumed in legal notions of accountability, especially in the case of criminal liability. To hold a person accountable in a court of law for having committed a crime, she must be capable of wrongful action

19 This could bring us to a discussion of Searle's Chinese room argument against the Turing-test. See on this point Hayles 1999, xi-xiv and 289-290. Maybe the point is that Searle's fear that machines could in fact act as if they know Chinese, meaning that once they convince a Chinese of such knowledge over an extended period of time they will in fact have developed the capacity to attribute meaning to the signifiers of the Chinese language. This is not to deny that their meaning will not differ substantially from ours, due to difference in embodiment and historicity. See also Floridi and Taddeo 2009.

and culpability. However, before embarking on these requirements, we must first establish whether or not ALFs, such as autonomic computing systems, could cause criminal harm or endanger values and interests that are protected by the criminal law. One could argue that it is never an ALF that commits such crimes but rather its designers or users, rendering the ALF itself as being merely an instrument. However, if we assume that ALFs are autonomous in the sense that they are being capable of taking decisions that neither the designer (programmer) nor the user could have foreseen, we have to acknowledge that they can in fact cause harm or damage that would fall within the scope of the criminal law if committed by a legal person (a human agent, or, for example, an association, company or trust fund, to the extent that positive law allows this). It seems to make no sense to attribute the liability to those who could not have foreseen (and thus not have prevented) this action. Note that ALFs will be created precisely because of their capacity to find novel solutions without human intervention.[20] ALFs will mostly be created as agents that perform specific tasks for an organization or person who is keen on delegating tasks to such agents; they can be automatic in the case of simple straightforward tasks, but when we speak of ALFs, we refer to more complex autonomous systems that are capable of coming up with unexpected solutions. The relevant comparison here is not the liability of the producer or the user of a product, but the liability of the owner of an animal for the harm or damage it causes due to its own initiative. This demonstrates that the mere fact that autonomous agents entail a measure of unpredictability does not imply that we can hold them responsible under the criminal law.[21] Another salient comparison is the notion of "acts of god," like earthquakes, floods or volcanic outbursts. Though they cannot be attributed to a particular human person or organization, we cannot call the earth, sea or mountain to account in a court of law.

This is related, as in the case of animals, to the fact that holding a person accountable for a criminal offence assumes that she should have been aware of the wrongfulness of her action, and moreover, can be blamed for having violated the law. In this sense, we do not assign full personhood to animals.[22] My use of the word person is somewhat provocative, because we

20 Cf. e.g. Karnow (1996), who points out the precarious legal implications of this planned unpredictability.

21 For this reason Teubner's (2007) example of animal liability in medieval times seems mistaken to the extent that it aims to demonstrate that it makes sense to attribute legal personhood to nonhumans.

22 Nevertheless, animals can be said to have a specific personality: fearful, trusting, secretive, unscrupulous, loyal. This probably means that personhood entails more than just moral and

tend to assume that only human animals qualify for personhood. Following Plessner, however, we can understand personhood as the individuality typical for the eccentric position, emerging at the nexus of the inner, outer and middle world (*Mitwelt*), though without any essentialist foundation or final determination: "His existence is truly built on nothing" (Plessner 1975, 293).[23] To be a person means being capable of knowing and willing (ibid. also Frankfurt 1971), that is, capable of differentiating between one's urges and one's second order desires about these urges, thus forming an intention and acting upon it. For an ALF to be liable under the criminal law, this would imply that four conditions must be fulfilled: first, it must be identifiable as a unity of perception and action (centricity); second, the harm or danger must be attributable to its action; third, it must be foreseeable by the ALF when performing the incriminated action; and fourth, the ALF must be capable of the double anticipation that allows anticipation of how others will "read" its behaviours (eccentricity). The first condition relates to what is called *actus reus* in criminal law, the second (overlapping with the third) relates to the requirement of causality, whereas the third and fourth can be associated with the concepts of wrongfulness and culpability.

If we want to punish an ALF for actions that fall within the scope of the criminal law, it must also be in a position to exercise its rights of defence; under the rule of law, punishment takes place after a fair trial (due process) has taken its course. This is the crucial difference between punishment and discipline, as Hegel saliently suggested when differentiating between punishing a person and training a dog. In a liberal democracy, punishment implies more than the *expression* of strong disapproval, requiring instead the *communication* of censure (Duff 2001), which is a bidirectional process. Punishment – unlike discipline or manipulation – assumes an appeal to the double anticipation of whoever has been singled out for its address. This means that a defendant can contest the accusation and reject the charge, not only by denying that she committed the incriminating action, but also by opening a dialogue about the meaning of the legal norm she allegedly violated and the meaning of her action in the light of this norm. Due process and a fair trial thus again assume an eccentric positionality. Punishment is not merely about imposing suffering, but also about defining which behaviour counts as criminal. For this reason, a democracy entitles a person who is subject to criminal sanction to being part of the constitu-

legal responsibility; it would be interesting to investigate to what extent having a personality is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral or legal personhood.

23 My translation of "Seine Existenz ist wahrhaft auf Nichts gestellt."

ency that defines which actions fall within the scope of the criminal law (self-government). This implies that criminal liability for ALFs would entitle them to vote and partake in democratic government.

Conclusions

Plessner's notion of human eccentricity has turned out to make an impactful difference when it comes to the attribution of criminal liability. This notion indeed allows us to discriminate between automatic devices, autonomous machines, and the type of human autonomy that is preconditional for accountability under the criminal law. Moreover, it enables us to investigate whether artificial life forms might eventually qualify for being censured under the criminal law, as well as the exercise of due process rights and – eventually – participation in defining the contents of the criminal law.

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24 Not Terminated

Cyborgized Men Still Remain Human Beings

Dierk Spreen

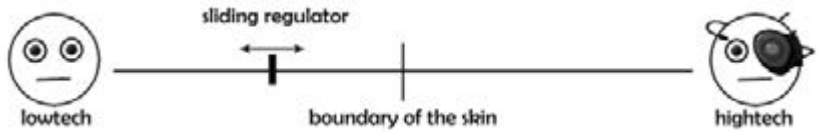
Between bios and techne

Usually "cyborg" (*cy*bernetic *or*ganism) means a "self-regulating organism that combines the natural and artificial together in one system" (Gray 2001, 2). Cyborgs are mixed beings of animal and technology, man and technology or technological and organic or biologic parts. However, this mixture does *not* imply that these differences are "neutralized" by the cyborg. Rather, anthropological questions operating at differences, those between man, animal, plant and automat, become a topic of discussion already in a double sense: on the one hand, the cyborg appears as a figure where the boundaries between body and technology are blurred. Of course, technology can be incorporated not only into the human body, but also into animals or even plants. Vice versa, technological systems can be linked to biologic parts, for example, by combining micro-organisms and micro-processors. From films and TV we know about plenty of examples of androids covered under human skin. Such cases are either human, animal or android cyborgs.

On the other hand, cyborgization again brings in the classical differences of philosophical anthropology. Both the differentiation between man/animal/plant and the difference between man/machine are involved in this matter. However, whereas in most cases the first series is continued without any problem at all – everybody believes to know the difference between a cyborg-mouse and a human cyborg – the second one is often understood as a socioevolutionary trend, and the age of post-humanism is predicted. According to post – or transhumanistic theories, cultural evolution leads to the human body being replaced by a machine body. This body appears as a sheer artefact, which may be changed just as clothes bought ready made (Moravec and Weizenbaum 1993; Moravec 1996, 112-117; see also Becker 2000). Such visions have the paradox effect that "human cyborgs" become the symbol of a "post-human age" (Gray 2001).

In this chapter, a concept of human cyborg will be supported, which still understands technologically "enhanced" people as "human" and which understands talking about cyborgs as a discourse and topical figure of the

Figure 24.1 Sketch of the "Regulator Model"



"reflexive modernization" (Beck et al. 1994),[1] i.e. a kind of modernization where the repercussions of the societal organization of reality are discussed and thus exert an influence on this very same organization. At the same time, this means that cyborgs neither undermine the linguistic or the conceptual differentiation between the organic and the technological, nor that between man and animal. However, what can become problematic are the ways of human self-understanding and ideas of social relations which exclude the technological and the artificial from the description of the self, from physicality and the social or understand them only as additional factors. Rather, technology and the boundary between the living and the technological become a problem which cannot be rejected and exiled to the culture pages, but which for many people increasingly becomes an everyday aspect of experiencing their own bodies as well as interpersonal relations.

To make this plausible, I will proceed as follows: at first there will be an attempt at defining the idea of man as a "cyborg" in more detail. In this context I will introduce the "regulator model," which makes the body obvious as something that is technologically operated in general, without losing any of the specifics of cyborgization. Following this, I will explain why humans who become cyborgs nevertheless stay to be human and are neither harbingers of a (renewed) "fall of the Occident" nor of a post-human society. To do so, I will reach back to Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. In this context, Plessner's anthropology is of particular interest, as it thinks the relation between the organic and the technologic without referring to anti-technological value orientations. Rather, Plessner assumes the "humane nature" of technological utopia (GS X, 37) and develops a theory of society which considers the artificial, the produced and the technologic to be constitutive for social structures and life worlds. At the same time, however, his way of discussing the artificial social world remains tied to the concept of "man." Thus, we are presented a social-theoretical concept that

1 Quotations from books and texts published in German were translated into the English language.

is particularly suitable for evaluating if the technicization of the human body will stay within "man's" (practical and ethical) space of possibilities.

Finally, I will expose some fields of the debate on cyborgs. This is meant to, first, illustrate to what extent the cyborg is a discursive figure of the "reflexivity of modernity" (Giddens 1990), and, secondly, to clarify that he/she does not at all go beyond the scope of that what is possible for man. For, if we agree with Plessner, we must precisely expect that the relation between technology and body will prove to be problematic because it is not set by nature, but is civilization-historically variable and determined by society and must thus continuously be discursively negotiated. Being a collective term for invasive body technologies, "the cyborg" thus proves to be not a symbol of trans- or post-humanist leaps of evolution, but a field where one can discuss possible shifts of the boundary between technology and body in modern society.

The regulator model

For a long time, technology has been much more than just tool, kitchen aid or industrial machine. It is rather that it tackles man and nestles against the body. Man is surrounded by a technological aura which is tied to his bodily here and now and moves along with him: mobile phone, laptop, PDA, MP3 player, portable navigation systems, interactive clothing equipped with nanotechnology, etc. These technologies are connected to the bodily-I and become a part of our self-perception. The mobile phone, for example, almost permanently locates the body in the public within a network of familiar relations. At any given time, it is possible to contact friends or family members and to cover the unfamiliar with familiarity. Walkman or MP3 player provide the perception of city and landscape with a suitable sound, which way the perception of body and self is changed (Winkler and Tischleder 2001). Nonetheless, these technologies stay at the physical surface. While they influence self-perception or become aspects of the bodily-I, they may be misplaced, lost or forgotten. It's quite likely that we notice that it's missing and may suffer from certain inconveniences as a result, but at least it is possible to leave the mobile phone without dying.

The situation is different for technologies that connect to the body and cannot be detached without causing serious harm or more. Here, at first all kinds of medical technologies attract our attention: prostheses, heart and brain pacemakers, cochlear implants or neuro-chips. But also radiofrequency identification (RFID) chips, which are implanted into the hand

and at the first draught automatically pay the drink or – in a Star Trek-like fashion – make it possible to open the car door with a tiny gesture, to name a few. In these cases, technological apparatus or systems become a part of the body, they are "installed" into the human body and thus become aspects of one's own physicality. Donna Haraway calls them "intimate components" of our bodies (Haraway 1991, 178). Technology gets under the skin and intrudes the body. Human cyborgs *are* technology, precisely "because they are physical" (Spreen 2004, 341).

But in this way the status of technology is changed, too. Generally, technological artefacts are means and tools of purposeful use. They serve for manipulating the world (including one's own or another body). They are thus characterized by availability or "being at hand" (Heidegger 1993, 69f.). And the body is that what we "feel" (Böhme 1985, 120). One's own body is not only a 'thing' which is handled in some way. Rather, it is characterized by a certain degree of non-availability, for it ties man to a here and now, to a certain position in the world. Helmuth Plessner expresses a similar view by distinguishing "having a body" (*Körper-Haben*) from "being a body" (*Körper-Sein*): one *has* a body, one *is* physical. With the aid of the body, one is capable of reaching out to the world. By way of being a body one is grasped. Now if technology becomes a part of our body, it changes in some way from the register of having to the register of being. At the same time, it also remains artificial, something which can be switched on and off, must be maintained and repaired, and can be upgraded or needs electricity. To make it possible to ask about the specific significance of body invasive technology in the context of the general technologic-media culture of modernity, a model is needed which depicts the step beyond the boundary of our skin without losing sight of the context of the technologic saturation of the close area of our physicality and of society.

For this, one may imagine that by help of a sliding regulator, the technologization of the body can be shifted on a scale between *lowtech body* and *hightech body* (fig. 1). If the boundary of the skin has been crossed, man becomes a human cyborg. This is what I call the *subcutaneity criterion* (Spreen 2000, 27f.). If the regulator is pushed back – which is not always possible, but sometimes (e.g. if an RFID chip is removed from the body) – the human cyborg will be an "ordinary" man once again. We must assume that the degree of technologization and cyborgization will rise with increasing age and increasing progress of the development of nano-technology.[2] This is

2 Estimations at the degree of cyborgization in the Western world are between 10 and 50 percent.

due to today's medical nature of most cyborg technologies. But subculture examples such as implanted RFIDs, the boom of surgical cosmetics or the attractiveness of anti-aging practices make it all too probable that soon crossing the boundary of the skin will no longer be restricted to medical applications.[3] At first, the regulator model meets definition needs. When is it possible to speak of a "cyborg"? – The thesis that we have always been cyborgs[4] is little convincing, for doubtlessly the systematic development of body invasive cybernetic technologies is a cultural innovation which is due to impressive progress in the fields of life sciences and computer technology. But above all, the model is meant to clarify that modern individual and social relationships must principally be understood by their constitutive relation to material technologies and technological media. The regulator scheme emphasizes the "political centrality of technology" (Gray 2001, 20), i.e. the fact that body-, bio – and social policies cannot be imagined beyond the technological. In this context, technology is understood to be somewhat of a "medium, where dead and alive, spiritual and material, problems and programmes, action-related and automat-like are related to each other and are made permeable for each other" (Gamm 2000, 291f.). The regulator model makes obvious that physicality, self-constitution and society cannot be imagined without conceptually taking technology into consideration.

On the anthropology of cyborgs

If we choose to regard the social, the living body, and both individual and collective self-understanding technology to be of constitutive significance, wouldn't it make more sense to speak of a "trans-human society," the "end of man" and "post humanism"? – This conclusion was indeed drawn by some theories on technologization (Angerer 2002; Becker 2000; De Mul 2003). Vice versa, paradoxically this way they confirm that man and society might be imagined in a "pre-technologic way." However, the philosophical anthropology developed in the first half of the twentieth century, already rejected naive ideas of a natural originality of man. That even cyborgization

3 This also assumed for many science fiction novels such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy.

4 This is also stated by Manfred Clynes, who invented the term "cyborg": "Homo sapiens, when he puts on a pair of glasses, has already changed. When he rides a bicycle he virtually has become a cyborg" (Gray 1995, 49).

does not at all go beyond the concept of man is something I like to show by using the works of Helmuth Plessner.

In principle, the following cyborg technologies may be imagined at first:

- *New senses*: an appropriately upgraded cyborg might perceive changes in its environment which man's natural senses cannot perceive (e.g. radiation or magnetic fields).
- *New organs*, which either maintain, modify, or secure the body's inner regulation: not only the activity of the heart can be additionally regulated. It may also be imagined that for example, breathing, metabolism and temperature are altered, enabling humans to exist in completely new environments. Also, we may imagine artificial backup organs.
- *Controlling psychic functions by way of purposeful steering*: with the aid of an apparatus which release drugs, hormones or stimulations within the body, it would become possible to manipulate physical reactions, emotions or cognitions. For this, different models of steering may be adequate: cybernetic self-regulation, purposeful control by others or control by the consciousness itself (e.g. deep brain stimulation in case of Parkinson's disease).
- *New organs to have effect on the world*: prostheses may not only replace lost organs, but also integrate new functions into the body. An abundance of specific examples where new organs are used as tools or organs can be found in science fiction literature.

This raises, most of all, two kinds of questions. Firstly, why should such an enhanced being still be "human," given its substantially altered shape and behavior? Secondly, is it still possible to speak of a "human" if a software calculates data taken from the body to determine the appropriate "action plan"? To whom can the performance of cyborgs be attributed, after all?

Plessner determines man topologically, i.e. by concepts describing its position within the world. "Being a body," man is unavoidably obliged to the spatial-chronological position he occupies. By "having a body," however, he decides about his environment and makes history. Plessner calls this double aspect of being a body and having a body an "eccentric positionality." This way he describes a relation to the world which on the one hand always already goes beyond the body, has its centre outside the body, but on the other hand, is fundamentally linked to the body and physical existence. In so far, man does not only exist within the actual "here-now," but "behind himself" (Plessner 1975, 292). The essence of this anthropology is in describing man *both* as being tied to body and space *and* as an artificial and space-claiming being. Thus, Plessner speaks of man's "natural artificiality":

"Being existentially in need, a half by nature, naked, for man artificiality is an essential expression of his nature. […] Artificiality of acting, thinking and dreaming is the inner means by help of which man as a living natural being is in accordance with himself" (Plessner 1975, 316).

This version of man is not only compatible with the technological opening up of new spaces – particularly by way of space travel, which implies nothing less than the construction of artificial spheres of life (Fischer 2007; Spreen 2004) – but also to the technological opening up of the inner space of the body and thus also the brain (Fischer 2002, 236-239). Being a natural-artificial being, man is a biological body being, which has always been leaving the space of the biological and moves within a world of culture, of history, of art, of technology and of language. Why should the human potential to open towards the world and to open up the world stop at his own body? Rather, the anthropology of openness towards the world can move with man changing shape and thus also with the technologization and changing of the body: "Being man is not tied to a certain shape and might thus also happen by various shapes which are not congruent with those we know. Man is tied to the centralist way of organization which is the basis of his eccentricity" (Plessner 1975, 293).

Thus, the technological change of the human body alone is an insufficient reason for why we should speak of post-humanism – but what about the problem of attributing actions? For example, a BrainGate™ Neural Interface System of the American Cyberkinetics Neurotechnology System company is able to read the firing of neurons within the brain, interpret it with the aid of a specific software, and translate it into actions. The chip is about 4mm x 4mm big. But what if the software produces interpretive mistakes, resulting in unwanted actions?

Not only do translation mistakes at the interface between brain and prosthesis constitute a problem, but there are also issues associated with programmed, automatic reactions carried out by an inner-body machine. Who or what has been acting then (Zoglauer 2003)?

How could we use Plessner as an argument with respect to such problems? – It must be emphasized that Plessner speaking of an eccentric positionality does not aim at an absolute autonomy of acting subjectivity. In a perspective which understands human beings as life forms of eccentric positionality, it seems rather normal that humans are necessarily confronted with the possibility of losing control over their bodies. Man is able to weep and laugh. According to Plessner, these are answers to "disasters," in the context of which the subject loses control, but which does not suddenly make man non-human. Rather, man has lost "his relation to his physical existence,

it evades him and so to speak does with him as it wants. Nevertheless, one perceives this loss as an expression of and answer to an appropriate situation" (GS VII, 274).

This means: Plessner understands the loss of control by the body to be a condition for the constitution of the self and therefore attributes an important function to the "I" losing control:

> By losing power over himself, by giving up on understanding himself, man neither gives testimony to his superior understanding of that what cannot be understood nor to his power in the face of powerlessness nor to his freedom and greatness in the face of constraint. He knows how to find answers even there where is nothing to answer. If not having the last word, he plays the last card in the game, loss meaning a gain for him (GS VII, 276).

Such experiences are thus of great significance for the development of the self. As a result, it is not total subjectivity and responsibility, but rather the specifically eccentric positionality between body and physicality, between acting and suffering, between having and being that is characteristic of being human. Experiences of surprising oneself are thus genuinely human and constitutive for the self. Other theories on man draw quite similar conclusions. Sigmund Freud showed that the I is not the sole master in its own house. George Herbert Mead assumes the intransparency of the I, i.e. the subject-I: "Only after having acted we know what we have done; only after having spoken we know what we have said" (Mead 1973, 240).

Thus, after all Plessner formulates a theory which is the foundation of constituting new meanings during an identity crisis.[5] The "uninfluencedness," "unarticulatedness" and "senselessness" of physical expressions demand interpretation, attribution of meaning, and disciplining, while at the same time going beyond them (GS VII, 276).

Thus, if human cyborgs are confused by the reactions of their "smart" prostheses, is it that then something is happening which is beyond man's horizon of experience? Physical confusion is more or less common. Furthermore, the human way of understanding the world and himself includes the possibility of disturbing border experiences. Instead of implicitly postulating a specific "post-human" quality of experience, with Plessner we may assume that the modes of problematizing and answering such expressions of physicality take a new shape. Does one steer towards a kind

5 On this in detail, see Spreen 2008, 30-53, 60-62.

of "technological unconsciousness" or does one ask oneself which body-technological constellation/interaction has created this reaction? If so, what might this show? It will be very interesting to analyze such discussions on the self and on identity constructions: how will human cyborgs integrate their physical expressions into their idea of themselves? When will such processes fail? What will be the exact role of discourses discussing the shift of the boundaries between body and technology (= cyborg discourses)?

Problem fields of cyborg discourses

It seems to follow that cyborgization does not at all force us to assume the "disappearance of man." Nevertheless, the technologization and networking of bodies creates a number of chances and risks which are negotiated by way of reflective discourses. They are about interpreting experiences, about determining both individual and collective self-images, about the image of man, and about social and ethical questions. At least four topics of discussion arise from here:

Interface: artificial organs are repetitions. This way, shifts between the organic and the technologic are created within the body, places of "différance" (Jacques Derrida). Independent of their degree of perfection, new organs will always remain replacements, additions or (re)constructions, which mark inner-physical interfaces (Spreen 2004). This way, certain interface problems may come up within the body, which might gain our attention. Some examples are: rejection reactions, infections, interpretation problems in the context of the inner-body exchange of information, side-effects or permanent social caution and self-watching (Manzei 2003, 185-207). It is often impossible to speak of harmony within the bodies of cyborgs, as it is suggested by many texts on this topic, more or less unquestioned. To the contrary, by factual technology immigrating into the body and provoking interface problems, body-technology becomes systematically topical.[6]

Networking: frictions at the interfaces can hardly be avoided if grown organism and produced mechanism are put together to form a body. Thus, the cyborgicized self is confronted with perpetually possible inner effects of technology, due to which it is typical of these technologies that they are connected to outer-body knowledge and control institutions. Human cyborgs are permanently controlled by medical institutions – that is health

6 E.g. with incorporated "cultural techniques" (habit, rites, traditions) this definitely not the case; rather they usually appear as habits as a matter of courses (Mauss 1989, 205).

care professionals, hospitals or research institutions. There they are supported, and from there they receive their upgradings. The vision that in the future "we cyborgs" will connect to the internet by way of USB 4 to download the new firmware for our brain implant from our doctor's server is thus not too far-fetched.

There is a number of questions and problems we need to address: to what extent will such a body become a public place and a societal entity? How could privacy be defined under such conditions? Also, the actions of cyborgs may be manipulated from the outside by way of their networked implants, so that personal autonomy will be threatened, posing ambiguities and uncertainties in the attribution of moral blame. And what if prostheses can be permanently connected to health servers via Bluetooth and mobile phones? Criminals might hack themselves into the bodies, as they already do today with the hard discs of unsuspecting users. State security institutions, on the other hand, might be tempted to use similar means to control risk groups. Will the body of the cyborg also become a new field of security policy beyond medical immunology?

Upgrading: another set of problems results from the improvement promises and optimization utopias of discourses on cyborgs. Cyborg technology is getting less and less restricted to medical applications. Rather, research strives for "upgrading" and "improvement" to relieve the body from his natural restrictions (Keller 2004). In a totalized power and risk society, where there is demand for the stress-resisting, young and optimized high performance individual, he/she will be provided with an enormous competitive advantage by re-arming and extending his/her body at regular intervals. The boom of anti-aging, fitness or cognitive enhancement (Ritalin, for example) shows that there is great demand for all offers that can improve performance and physical attractiveness. Could social inequalities be increased this way? The basic health system will not cover needs of body upgrades which are not medically induced but have only been created by market dynamics. This will have the effect that the health of individuals with high buying power will be amplified, whereas highly resource-constrained individuals will have to be satisfied with involuntarily giving up on rearmament.

Spatial revolution: The word "cyborg" originates from space research. The idea of the cyborg is simply based on reversing the principle of clothing: how could one survive in space without a spacesuit, "*qua natura*," or in alien atmospheres (Clynes and Kline 1995, 30)? In this context, questions concerning life within highly artificial environments become radicalized. How do you build self-sufficient biospheres to settle on Moon or Mars

exploiting noble earths or other raw materials? How do you construct cabins and life systems for deep space travel? Can man live in space colonies? What about space agriculture and so on?[7]

Such "science fiction" discourses highlight that man is not only *not* tied to Planet Earth and "soil," but *also not* tied to a certain physical shape. They refer to the civilization-historic contingency of his living conditions – including his physical appearance – and thus emphasize the "start towards Artificial Society" (Heinrich Popitz) and its possibilities. Discourses on cyborgs and space do not only discuss the reorganization of nature for human purposes and man's distancing from nature, but they also point out to the consequences of such tendencies of modernity, which are triggered if both aspects are combined: The technological shaping of man's inner nature (Popitz 1995, 132).

The anthropology of eccentric positionality opens up purely technologic spheres of life to man, as it understands him to be an artificial being by nature. And as man is able to transform his environment, why should this creative power stop at the limit of the skin? Why not change man, by adding technologic organs to his body, by technologically extending physical capabilities, by medially networking and physically adapting him to foreign environments? – Plessner also clearly saw the possibility to technologically change the body. However, he also stresses that just how man depends on artificiality, he also depends on his organic nature and bodily existence. This tension cannot be abandoned as long as humans live or they themselves let the human race live. Thus, from Plessner's point of view, it is hardly surprising that discursive fields develop where the relationship between artificial and natural aspects is intensively debated and where problems of this relation become obvious. Instead, precisely this must be expected, because man does not "exist out of the midst of himself," but must cope with "constitutive homelessness" (Plessner 1975, 309).

Cyborgs as a figure of "reflexive modernization"

Living with cyborgs means recognizing that indeed society does not only consist of humans, but is in many respects also technologically-medially constituted. The social sciences and the humanities tend to give up on epistemically focussing the social on man. For "reflexive" or "second" modernity, a similar thought is typical, in so far as it lines out the risks and chances

7 For an earlier discussions about this topic, see Heppenheimer 1977.

of the technological domination of nature (Beck 1986, 254-374; Beck et al. 1994; Giddens 1990, 36-45). In a general sense, the theory of "reflexive modernization" aims at explaining the social not *only* by the social or by human action contexts. Rather, it is about creating a systematic place for, firstly, objects, things, material technologies and media and, secondly, for bodily existence and nature in the context of social-theoretical conceptuality.[8] This modernity is reflective in so far as the repercussions of the societal organization of reality are discussed. While doing so, effective factors and constitutive elements which prove to be impeding and stubborn towards social references of meaning are systematically included. This implies an extension or reformulation of the "social-constructivist attitude," which reconstructs societal reality only from everyday references of *meaning* or from discursive-symbolic *meaning* (see Eßbach 2001; Mersch 2002; Spreen 2008, 43-50). In this context, the cyborg proves to be one of the discursive figures by way of which such repercussions become obvious: In the context of the cyborg figure, shifts of the border between technology and body are made a topic of discussion without giving up on the conceptual distinction between the organic and the technologic. In precisely this way does the technologic-medial as well as natural or physical constitutional conditions of social contexts and relations become visible. Particularly in the fields of interface, networking, upgrading and spatial revolution the technologic and physical constitution of modern self – and social conditions is made a topic of discussion. These are reflective discourses on cyborgization. "Cyborg" in this context is a metaphor of our time, that is "a matter of fiction and lived experience" (Haraway 1991, 149). This image helps to make the structural shifts in the globalized information and knowledge society visible.

However, here it also becomes obvious that it continues to be reasonable to maintain conceptual differences between organic and technologic, human and non-human (man/animal, man/machine), in order to make the bodies' permeability for technology visible, as well as the problems arising from this. From a Plessnerian perspective, "man" will not disappear when the regulator is shifted beyond the boundary of the skin, as he has already been a natural-artificial being prior to such shift. The aforementioned fields of the discourse on cyborgs prove to be ambivalent. They refer both to problems and to possibilities: interface problems, but on the other hand

8 And thirdly – for the sake of completeness I must point out to this – the fact that we cannot go back to a state before historic events and the thus connected traces of remembrance must be given a systematic place in social theory. This becomes particularly important if it is about questions dealing with collective violations, violence and war (Spreen 2008, 30-75).

new life chances; sociation of the body, but at the same time increased security; increased social differentiation, but on the other hand individual improvement, change of shape, but on the other hand the opening up of new environments etc.

On the other hand, particularly in the context of post-humanist and post-feminist discourses, the cyborg is considered a border figure, by which not only the dichotomy of being natural and being artificial, but also that of man and woman becomes blurred and disappears. This opens up opportunities to rewrite identity and role models, which are organized along the borders of the sexes.[9] According to this radical-constructivist reading, after all the technicized body appears to be arbitrarily socially recodable. Cyborgs, it is stated, are "beyond traditional binary structures" (Lenzhofer 2006, 194), and the cyber future is said to be "a clean slate, or a blank screen, onto which we can project our fascination" (Springer 1999, 53). With the Plessnarian approach in contrast, the observation is emphasized that the technologic crossing of the border of the skin does not at all trivialize the conceptual differentiation between the technologic and the organic (which is as true for the concept of "border" itself). Rather, "cyborgs" prove to be a discursive field of reflection within which the societal change of identities, roles and power structures may be made a topic of discussion precisely *because* the "material" conditions for the constitution of social situations – for example, technologic, medial, natural or physical – attract attention by their difference to each other and their resistance to discursive attributions of meaning. Technological inventions, new media, spatial revolutions, or indeed shifts of the border between technology and body result in new experiences which resist common patterns of interpretation and thus stimulate a novel reflection of our societal situation.

Discourses on cyborgs discuss journeys between body and technology, nature and culture, man and artefact in societal contexts. Being a figure of discourse, "the cyborg" makes these journeys a topic of discussion and at the same time emphasizes the significance of differences. Moreover, this approach highlights the technological-media constitution both of modern societies and modern self-constitutions. Although in this context, particularly the technological and medial constitutions of society are discussed, it does in no way imply the dawning of an age of post-humanism. Rather, technologic and artificial constitutional conditions are relevant for the entire history of society (see Popitz 1995, 39-43). From such a point of view,

9 See e.g. Haraway 1991; for a summary, see Lenzhofer 2006, 194-196; for a critical view of this, see Balsamo 1996.

reflective modernity does not *reflect* a "post-humane" change of societal relations, but only a reasonable *self-reflection* by modernity, i.e. a cultural learning process which processes historic experiences. It is an essential content of this reflection that it shows and recognizes the (always effective) varied material constitution of societal conditions.

this way, it becomes obvious how necessary it is to take constitutive ("non-societal") dimensions into consideration when it comes to the social-scientific reconstruction of self – and societal conditions. For this, Plessner's anthropology proves to be a helpful approach. His way of reflecting on the constitutional conditions of artificial society does not only succeed in making current phenomena, such as the cyborgization of man, understandable, but in this context it also resists any fashionable, intellectual impulses towards an implosion of categories and conceptual de-differentiation. For, by the concept of eccentric positionality, *man's specific border situation* is marked, which combines freedom and necessity, social norm and natural causality, the intelligible and the sensual, culture and nature, without "sublating" this antinomic structure towards one side or the other, however.

Although Plessner developed his anthropology as early as in the first half of the twentieth century, it still proves to be an approach which is able to grasp current technologically induced problems. But maybe this is not that surprising, as for the time being, no kind of reality has appeared on this side or that side of the orbit which was not at least basically imagined and projected by the technologic-natural-scientific drafts and the science fiction of the early and mid-twentieth century (Fischer 2002; Spreen 2004).[10]

However, as man lives in a state of "alienation" in accordance with his nature, even his artificial life worlds will not be able to satisfy the illusion of a "home" which is a matter of course and without problems. Indeed, Plessner speaks of artificiality as "the detour towards a second fatherland where [man] will find a home and will be absolutely rooted" (Plessner 1975, 316), but there are two reasons why this position may not be interpreted as a "coming home" with the aid of technology and artificiality. Firstly, this becomes obvious by a historic perspective: The development of his technology has

10 What has also not appeared yet are the "aliens" who are omnipresent with science fiction. Making contact to them may be supposed to definitely make way for that "decentralized concept of the world" of which Martin Schwonke speaks, while following Plessner (Schwonke 1957, 140): To a cosmos which includes contact to that what is "maximum alien" (Schetsche 2003), a concept of the world is appropriate for which no longer Man is the measure of all things: "Just as Earth will become an insignificant, neglectable piece of dust whose destruction is of no interest for the universe, 'homo sapiens' will become one intelligent being among many, which will, indeed must wear off, without intelligence and life as such being extincted" (Schwonke 1957, 141).

provided the species *Homo sapiens* with the possibility of causing its own extinction. In this respect, Günther Anders – also in the theoretical context of philosophical anthropology (Reimann 1990, 30-35) – doubted that man's imagination would be able to catch up with this possibility. That is why he speaks of "man's outmoded nature" (Anders 1956). Regardless of whether or not we like to agree with Anders that much, his concept neatly points out the destructive possibilities of modernity and thus *precisely* demands an ethical-humanist answer. Although at a first glance, speaking of "world without man" (Anders 1984) may remind us of post-humanist apologies, it must be understood as a contrafactual, humanistic-ethical appeal. Thus, what we may learn from Anders is that this destructivity (not at last in the form of war) is a problem which will inevitably accompany the future of man (Spreen 1998, 152-164). Consequently, artificial society will not become a second home where man might believe to have no problems and to be "in good keeping." Rather, such kind of "being in good keeping" is replaced by man's "task" "to take care of himself for the continuous existence of human life within cosmos" (Fischer 2007, 59). From these destructive possibilities emerges humanity's moral and security-political obligation to reduce global risks of violence (such as nuclear terrorism).

The destructivity that an artificial society is provided with may also be found in human cyborgs, not only because they too will not be able to get rid of the knowledge of the nuclear bomb, but also because in a cultural-psychological sense, we may understand the invasion of the body by technology to be an "identification with the aggressor" (Gendolla 1982; Spreen 1998, 91-96). Thus, connecting the body to technology is also the result of being threatened by total violence. That is why even neo-romantic visions of a technology-free, pure bodily existence will do next to nothing about the fact that man is unable to go back to a stage before knowledge and the given constructive and destructive possibilities – the idea of incapability is antiquated. "The idea survives. Plato victorious" (Anders 1980, 395). Even the "lowtech body" – just as the name says – depends on the technological: "It is impossible to run away from the machines and go back to the field. They will not release us, and we will not release them. By an enigmatic power, they are within us, and we are within them" (GS X, 38).

Secondly, the idea that by way of "forced interruption" and "artificial elements," a closed circle of life (Plessner 1975, 316) would be able to generate a *home which is by itself a matter of course*, is already rejected by Plessner himself. What might be achieved at best, is a "second" fatherland; however the latter will continue to be artificial, changeable and thus doubtful. Accordingly, such unnaturality and "constitutive imbalance" (Plessner

1975, 316) are due to the structure of human life. They result in man being *fundamentally obliged to self-reflectivity* – particularly man "in the age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin 2008), i.e. in modern, artificial society: Nothing is a matter of course, everything is potentially a problem. Thus, in a modernity which is permeated by reflective discourses, man lives inevitably in a state of constitutive foreignness: "Who is on the side of intellect will not return" (Plessner 1976, 342).

In contrast to the background of this obligation of self-reflectivity and the ethical-humanist (*as well as* security-political) "task," Plessner's anthropology can *neither* consider the natural *nor* the artificial body as a lastingly unproblematic "home" of the human self. In this way, Plessner makes a theoretical offer to sociology, which bears contemporary significance. At the same time, it forces us to bring up alterity, artificiality and alienality as *constitutive factors* and grasp modernity *without* giving up on "man" or on important conceptual differentiations, such that between nature and culture, or between the organic and the technologic. Being dependent on a technology-permeated body and a completely artificial habitat, man stays "man." In this way, his societal and historic possibilities become obvious, but by none of these possibilities does his "real nature" becomes obvious, for his eccentricity does not allow man "any clear fixation of his own status" (Plessner 1975, 342). Precisely because of this, he is able to be a cyborg at all.[11]

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11 And that is why I do not see any reason why in respect of new worlds of cyborgs and virtual realities Plessner's concept of "eccentric positionality" should be extended towards a "poly-eccentric positionality" (De Mul 2003). Rather, viewing the world from a position which is different from that of oneself and one's own body, i.e. "in a different light," is an essential feature of eccentric positionality (see Plessner 1982).

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25 Plessner and Technology

Philosophical Anthropology Meets the Posthuman

Peter-Paul Verbeek[1]

Introduction

Until recently, Helmuth Plessner's work has hardly played any substantial role in the philosophy of technology. The only two exceptions are the work of two Dutch philosophers of technology, Petran Kockelkoren (2003) and Jos de Mul (2003), who investigated Plessner's concept of mediation and eccentricity, respectively, with regards to technology. While Kockelkoren founded the contemporary approach of technological mediation in Plessner's anthropology, De Mul expanded Plessner's concept of eccentricity into 'poly-eccentricity,' in order to do justice to the new ways of being-in-the-world made possible by information technologies.

In this chapter, I will take this discussion a step further. First, I will sketch the account of human-technology relations in the history of philosophical anthropology. This will provide a context for taking up some of Plessner's ideas in philosophy of technology. Second, I will discuss how Plessner's framework sheds a new light on technology and the mediating role of technologies in human existence. Finally, I will investigate if and how Plessner's theory can help to analyse contemporary technological developments that are often understood in terms of 'human enhancement' or even 'posthumanism.' Do we need to expand his theory in order to make sense of the newest technologies, or does his original work still apply on its own? Can Plessner's anthropology help us conceptualize how technology takes us beyond the human? Or does his work rather urge us to see 'posthumanism' as a necessary ingredient of being human?

1 This chapter is a revised and expanded version of a chapter in my Dutch book *De grens van de mens: over techniek, ethiek en de menselijke natuur* (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2011), translated from the Dutch by Hermien Lankhorst.

Philosophical anthropology and technology

Philosophical anthropology – the discipline of philosophy that is concerned with understanding the human being – can be seen as the philosophical answer to the new ways in which humans were being approached by biology and the behavioral sciences at the start of the past century. New developments, such as the theory of evolution, psychoanalysis and behaviorism, all questioned the manner in which 'man' was understood traditionally. All of a sudden, these emerging new approaches labelled humans as part of the animal kingdom, as a thin film of 'I' on a swirling mash of unconscious wishes and desires, or as a stimulus-response machine. As a result, the philosophical question of what it means to be human resurfaced. In light of all these new attitudes, how should the human be understood?

We are currently facing similar circumstances, albeit not through developments in science but in technology. Many new possibilities have emerged to intervene in human nature: psychopharmaceuticals, tissue regeneration, intelligent prostheses, brain implants, and many more. All these developments raise the question anew about what human nature is and where the limits of humanity lie. In the first wave of philosophical-anthropological theories, the focus lied on defining distinctive boundaries between human beings and animals. The animal, which shows instinctual behavior, stands in opposition to man, who acts freely, gives meaning to the world and shapes his or her own existence. Oddly enough however, the technique has always played a large role in philosophical anthropology as well. Philosophical anthropologists like Ernst Kapp, Hermann Schmidt and Arnold Gehlen were all fascinated by the relationship between technological artefacts and the human organism. The idea that humans come to this world as imperfect beings that have to survive on their own by using technology has always been a dominating view.

We humans are *Mängelwesen* ('imperfect creatures'), as Gehlen expressed it so poignantly in *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (1940), invoking Herder. Since we have no specialized organs and instincts, we could never survive in a natural environment. We do not have fur to keep ourselves warm and physically we are neither equipped to protect ourselves nor to obtain food. We have to add something to ourselves to be able to exist – and it is for this reason that the relationship between the human organism and technology has always played an important part in philosophical anthropology.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Ernst Kapp was among the first to take a closer look at the relationship between the human organism and technology. His central thesis in *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* (1877) was that of organ projection: technologies are conscious or unconscious projections

of human organs. A hammer is a projection in matter of what the fist is in the organic domain. A saw is a projection of human teeth. The telegraph network – which was being constructed in Kapps's time – is a projection of the central nervous system. Because we, human beings, 'objectify' ourselves in matter, we develop knowledge about ourselves as well. We discover who we are by projecting elements of ourselves in matter, and by subsequently finding out that we are more than just the sum those projections.

Kapps's position comes down to an inversion of the theory that, since the Enlightenment, nature has increasingly been understood in mechanical terms. Kapp does the exact opposite: he thinks the mechanical from the organic, technique from nature. We create a material world of technical objects by externalizing elements of our own organism – and in this way we discover more and more of ourselves in the use of technology.

In the twentieth century, Hermann Schmidt further elaborated the relationship between the organic and the technical. In 'Die Entwicklung der Technik als Phase der Wandlung des Menschen' (1954), Schmidt discerned three stages in the development of technique. The earlier analysis by Kapp relates to the first stage: that of the *tool*. Here, the necessary power comes from human labour, as well as the intelligence to use the instrument for a specific purpose. The second stage is that of the *machine*. This derives power from itself, but it still has to be operated by a human being for a certain purpose. Finally, the third stage is that of the *automaton*, which derives both its physical operation and the purposeful deployment of its machinery from technology. In a way, the human subject has become redundant here, as both physically and intellectually, the automaton has become self-sufficient.

In *Beyond the Machine* [*De machine voorbij*, 1992], the Dutch philosopher Maarten Coolen showed that Herman Schmidt also approached technology as an externalization of man, which can serve as a source of self-knowledge. We recognise aspects of ourselves in technology and at the same time we discover that we are more than that alone. The machine embodies the physical use of the tool. The automaton then embodies the purposeful operation of the machine. Subsequently, we human beings, who can relate to machines and automatons, are always more than just the externalized elements of ourselves. We are more than machines, even when parts of ourselves can be understood as a mechanism, and more than automatons, even though we can certainly consider aspects of ourselves as such. Human self-understanding develops itself in the mirror of technology, according to Coolen:

> It is my intention to develop a philosophical appreciation of technique in which technological artefacts can be considered to be expressions

> of the human mind. Therefore, I am interested in precisely those anthropological ideas that one can associate with the act of technological transformation itself. What can man learn about himself from his own fabrications? (Coolen 1992, 165-166; translation mine)

In the twentieth century, Arnold Gehlen built on the ideas of Schmidt, by raising once more the question of how all these technologies relate to man as an organic being. In his text "A Philosophical-Anthropological Perspective on Technology" (2003, 213), Gehlen distinguishes three relationships between man and technique:

- *Organ replacement* – for example, the hammer that replaces the fist.
- *Organ improvement* – for example, the microscope that enhances the already existing capabilities of the eye.
- *Organ relief* – for example, the wheel that makes it possible to move heavy objects without burdening the body too much.

Here, Gehlen perceives the tendency that the organic is increasingly being replaced by the inorganic. More and more, technology is taking over the place that once belonged to man – and this is a development that could also turn against humans, Gehlen thinks.

The approaches of Kapp, Schmidt and Gehlen all show in their own way the relationship between organic people and non-organic technologies. In the end, however, these positions aren't adequate. Contemporary technological developments that go beyond the configuration of usage-situations do not fit the frameworks above.

A good example is the technology of *deep brain stimulation* (DBS). This technology stimulates specific parts of the brain with low-voltage electricity in order to achieve an effect on the motor capacities of Parkinson patients, or on the moods and sensations of psychiatric patients. Such brain implants cannot be understood as organ projections – after all, which organ would be projected here? They also go beyond the dialectic of tool-machine-automaton – rather, the hybrid of human and technique that emerges through the implantation of a DBS-device forms a next phase in this development.

This is where the *cyborg* appears: a creature that is part human, part technology (cf. Haraway 1991). A substitution of the organic by the inorganic, Gehlen's biggest fear, is not the issue here. On the contrary, the organic is absolutely central and merges with the inorganic in order to operate better. While the body functioned as a completely natural boundary between humans and technology in classic philosophical anthropology, that line becomes more fuzzy when it comes to the latest anthropo-technology.

These technologies do not project the body, nor do they complement it; rather they merge with it to become a new hybrid body.

To truly understand this new phase in the relationship between humans and technology, we have to overcome a large conceptual hurdle. The dichotomy of man versus technology, that seems so self-evident to many, just does not fit with the matter at hand. Anthropo-technologies require that we blur the boundary between man and technology, which is an incredibly fundamental boundary. After all, we see ourselves as natural, while technology is artificial – and as a result, we experience the blurring of boundaries as a degradation of our authenticity. However, it appears necessary to consider this distortion of boundaries as part of the human condition.

The distinction between the natural and the technical is very old indeed. The ancient Greeks distinguished *technè* (technique, craftsmanship) from *fysis* (nature), both forms of *poièsis* (creation): while *fysis* creates itself, *technè* is interference by humans. A flower blooms by itself, but a building or a painting is made by people. While technique is the work of man, man is not a product of technique.

French philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler argued in *Technics and Time* (1998) that it is precisely this distinction between *techne* and *fysis* that needs to be reconsidered. Stiegler argues that man has to be seen as a creature that is originally technological, an idea that Pieter Lemmens beautifully developed in *Driven by Technology* [*Gedreven door techniek*, 2008]. After all, humans have always technologically interfered in nature, precisely as "defective beings" (*Mängelwesen*), and thus an 'artificial' surrounding emerged in which human development – or evolution, if you like – has taken place.

From the outset, man has been interwoven with technology on an organic level as well. Because of the slow pace of development, this had not been noticed for a long period of time. However, since the emergence of modern technique, the developments have gained momentum and it has become clear how the environment of human existence changes as a result of technology.

> What constitutes the humanity of man and lies at the root of the break of the human-animal from the continuity of animal life, Stiegler states [...], is nothing less than a process of *technological exteriorisation* of life. [...] Man is a creature that, rather than entering the struggle for his existence with his own organs, comes into it with artificial 'organs': tools and techniques that are located outside his own biology but on which he nevertheless has become completely dependent for his survival, and so they have become of vital importance for him (Lemmens 2008, 397; translation mine).

This notion of 'originary technicity' – by which Stiegler indicates the originally technological character of man – sheds a completely new light on the question of 'the boundary of man.' It shows that there has never really been a clear boundary between humans and technique to begin with. As Donna Haraway puts it: "the cyborg is our ontology" (Haraway 1991). The cyborg – the merging of the mechanical and the organic –embodies not the alienation of being human, but in fact shows its fundamental structure. We have never been specimens of 'man,' at least not in the sense that we could indicate a primordial condition of humanity from which we could be alienated. What makes us humans is precisely the fact that we continually mould ourselves. In that sense, we have always been cyborgs.

Plessner and technology

This self-designing character of man has been an important theme in twentieth-century philosophy. Heidegger argued in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) that man, from his 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) into this world, continually 'designs' (*Entwerft*) himself: the fact that we exist comes over us, but the way in which we fill in this existence is an assignment to ourselves, a productive interplay with our thrownness. The existential tradition, too, is based on the idea that man himself is responsible for who he is: humans do not coincide with themselves, but they have freedom, and from this freedom their existence is not simply a given, but a task. Nietzsche's statement, that man is a being that needs to be surpassed, not a goal in itself but a transitional being, may be understood in this way as well. It is man's purpose to always transcend himself.

It appears that, with the latest technologies, we encounter a new meaning of the words of the German philosophical anthropologist Helmuth Plessner, man is 'artificial by nature.' In his influential work *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928], Plessner made an analysis of modes of existence of different types of organic beings, including humans. He looks at these beings in terms of their 'boundary realizations': the way in which they may or may not demarcate the line between themselves and their surroundings. This turns out to be a valuable criterion for distinction.

Stones, for example, are defined completely externally. They do not have an 'inside' from which they could experience a boundary with a world 'outside.' Meanwhile, plants do have an inside and an outside: there is a boundary between an 'inside world' and an 'outside world' and their metabolism regulates any traffic across the boundary.

Because of this boundary between the inside and outside, plants, just like all living creatures, have *positionality*: they have a relationship with their border. However, a plant does not know about this boundary, it has no centre from which it can experience its own limits. This is what distinguishes plants from animals. Animals do operate from a centre: an animal is not just an organic body, but it is also *in* that body and experiences the world *from* that body.

The human way of existence, then, is characterized by the fact that humans have a relation to their centre as well. They do not only act from a centre, they are also aware of it. This adds a third dimension to the human physicality. Not only *are* humans their body and *in* their body, they also *have* a body. They have a relationship to their corporeality. In addition to their centricity – operating from their centre – they are also eccentric, i.e. they can step outside their centre and develop a relationship with it. People are always an audience of themselves: they do not coincide with themselves, but in addition to their experience of the world, they always have an *experience of their experience*.

This eccentricity makes humans, in the words of Plessner, "artificial by nature." It is part of our nature that we are unnatural. The reason for this is the tension that our eccentricity creates. Because people do not just 'exist,' their existence is an assignment for them, a challenge, a task. It belongs to our nature that we continually have to make something of ourselves. Plessner explains eccentricity as the experience of a permanent imperfection. The distance to ourselves and to the world, which arises through our self-consciousness, begs to be bridged. It is precisely here that technique plays an important role: man creates for himself an artificial environment to compensate for the imperfection and the nakedness that he experiences. We do not take ourselves and the world as given, but as a task: we literally have to make something of it. Technology bridges the distances and compensates the imperfections that we experience.

In this way, Plessner radicalizes the philosophical anthropological theme of man as a *deficient* being. For him, the human deficit is not the lack of an adequate organic set of instruments for survival, but a consequence of human eccentricity. Because people have a relationship to their centre, there is a distance to themselves and to the world that they then try to bridge. It is this eccentricity that makes us human, and it is this distance from our own centre that ensures that people technologically interfere in reality.

Mediation and technology

The eccentric character of human existence also gives the human relation to the world a specific character. Plessner characterizes it as an 'indirect directness,' or 'mediated immediacy.' Our relations to the world always involve a detour. They can never be experienced as direct, because we always have a relation to these relations. Because of our eccentric nature, we are never entirely 'in' these relations; we are always aware that there *is* this relation. Any experience of the world inevitably also involves an experience of the relation that makes this experience possible. The world is never merely 'given' to us, because we are always aware of *the way in which* it is given. We only have mediated access to the world.

Dutch philosopher Petran Kockelkoren introduced Plessners concept of mediated immediacy into philosophy of technology. The mediated character of our relation to the world also involves technologies, as Kockelkoren explains (Kockekoren, this volume). Connecting to Martin Heidegger's ideas about the 'ready-to-hand' character of tools (1927), and to Don Ihde's analysis of human-technology relations (1990), Kockelkoren argues that technologies deserve a well developed place in our understanding of the relations between humans and the world (Kockelkoren 2003).

In Being and Time, one of the subjects Heidegger investigated is the relation between human beings and 'equipment,' or 'tools': things that are used to fulfill a particular purpose. Heidegger shows that when we deal with such objects, they withdraw, as it were, from our experience. We do not focus on our hammer when we are hammering, but on the nail we want to hit. Things-in-use are 'ready-to-hand,' as Heidegger calls it, as opposed to 'present-at-hand' objects that are examined from a detached and external standpoint. Our experience of the world takes place *through* the things that we use. We do not experience these things themselves, but they give us a specific form of access to the world.

Don Ihde elaborated this idea of 'readiness-to-hand' into an analysis of various types of human-technology relations. Ihde has researched the many ways in which the relationship between humans and the world is actually mediated by technologies (Ihde 1990). People can *embody* technologies, as when wearing a pair of glasses, which one does not look *at* but look *through*. Other technologies require that we have to *read*, in the way that a thermometer gives information on temperature, or an ultrasound scanner gives a representation of an unborn child. People can also *interact* with technology, as when operating a DVD player or setting a central heating thermostat. Finally, within the framework sketched by Ihde, technologies can also play a role in the *background* of our experience. The fan noise

made by a computer and the illumination provided by room lights are not experienced directly, but form a context within which people experience reality. All these human-technology-world relations can be seen as specific instances of 'technological mediation.' In our technological culture, these are the shapes that our 'mediated immediacy' or 'indirect directness' can take.

Ihde's framework has been of considerable value to philosophy of technology. Yet, current technological developments seem to urge us to expand this framework. The implicit focus of Ihde's schema is technology that gets *used*: glasses, telescopes, hammers, and hearing aids. However, the newest technologies increasingly evoke human-technology relationships that can no longer be characterized in such 'use' configuration.

The development of intelligent environments, for instance, with the *Ambient Intelligence* programme initiated by Philips as a prime example, leads to a configuration that might rather be called *immersion.* Here, people are immersed in an environment that reacts intelligently to their presence and activities. Such technologies go beyond what Ihde calls a 'background relationship'; because they engage in an active interaction with humans, they are more than just a 'context.'

At the other end of the spectrum there are technologies that do not merge with our environment, but with ourselves. Technologies like brain implants, psychotropic drugs, and intelligent prostheses, blur the boundaries between technologies and the human body. Relations with these devices go beyond that of *incorporation*; it might be said to represent a *merge*, as it becomes difficult to draw a distinction between the human and the technological. When a deaf person is given a degree of hearing capability thanks to a cochlear implant connected directly to their auditory nerve, then this 'hearing' is a joint activity of the human and the technology; it is the configuration as a whole that 'hears,' and not a human being whose 'hearing' is restored thanks to technology (cf. Verbeek 2008).

Sometimes, these technologies are sees as steps towards 'human enhancement.' Rather than restoring an original state, and 'curing' people with 'defects,' these technologies interfere directly with what it means to be human. Deep brain stimulation is a good example here, as this technology consists of a device with several electrodes that are implanted deep into the brain in order to reduce, for instance, the motor effects of Parkinson's disease, or the impact of psychiatric disorders such as severe depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder. These implants can have a serious impact on people's personality.

A famous case was described in the Dutch medical journal *Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*. This article recounts how the condition of a patient suffering from Parkinson's disease improved markedly after having been implanted

(Leentjens et al., 2004). Yet, while the symptoms of Parkinson's disease reduced notably, his behavior also changed and developed to become increasingly more uninhibited. He got involved in extramarital relationships, spent all his money carelessly, and was unaware of his behavioral change until the DBS was discontinued for medical reasons. As soon as his Parkinson's symptoms returned – he became entirely bed-ridden and dependent. There appeared to be no middle way; he would have to choose between a life with Parkinson's disease, bed-ridden – or a life without the symptoms, but so uninhibited that he would predictably get himself into trouble. In the end, he chose to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital, where he could continue DBS and suffer fewer symptoms of his disease, but at the same time be protected against his undesired behavioral changes.

This case raises all sorts of questions about how technology affects what it means to be human. What does this imply for our understanding of our 'mediated directness'? And how can Plessner's anthropology help in analyzing human-technology relations like this? Can human beings who surround or even change themselves with the latest technology still be understood by using Plessner's terms?

Expanding Plessner

Jos de Mul has argued (De Mul 2003, 2010) that contemporary information technology really puts Plessner's notion of eccentricity to the test. This technology adds a new dimension to the 'positionality,' which for Plessner counts as the defining aspect for distinguishing between stones, plants, animals, and human beings. Information technology enables different forms of being-there, such as telepresence and presence in a virtual reality. In the case of telepresence, humans are present in the world through a robot: they experience and act at a distance, because they are in contact with a part of reality, through cameras, microphones and the 'body' of a robot, where their own body is not present at that moment in time. And in the case of virtual realities, people experience and act in an artificial reality through an *avatar* who represents them in that reality: they see their own avatar on screen, walking through a virtual world.

Both forms of being-there imply a new positionality, according to De Mul. They change human eccentricity, not by moving the centre of a human being to a different place – to the robot or the avatar – but by *doubling* the centre. The centre of our experience is no longer exclusively in our own body, but neither is it moved to a robot or an avatar. The centre of our experience is in both our own body and outside of it. We experience the

world by experiencing what the robot experiences; we act in a virtual world by letting an avatar act on behalf of ourselves.

De Mul calls this form of eccentricity *poly-*(*ec*)*centricity*: in contemporary information technology, a multiplication of centricity and eccentricity occurs (De Mul, 2010, 201-205). Instead of extending our body with technology and being in the world 'through technology,' we are present in a twofold manner: we interact with technology and technology acts on our behalf; we experience the technology and we experience how technology experiences the world.

However, this extension of Plessner's notion of human eccentricity is not sufficient to do justice to all new technologies. De Mul's expansion allows us to bring prosthetics and virtual environments into Plessner's framework in order to analyse the relationships between man and the world. But technologies such as psychotropic drugs, *deep brain stimulation* and genetic intervention play a completely different role in human eccentricity.

These technologies all interfere – at least potentially – in human consciousness. Rather than influencing the centre from which humans act and experience, they influence the nature of human eccentricity: the way in which people relate to themselves. By influencing our moods, by altering our ability to concentrate or even by interfering with our character traits, these technologies change eccentricity itself. They do not result in multiple centres of experience, but in a new position outside of ourselves. A position from which humans not only relate to their centres, like in the case of the eccentric position, but also to eccentricity itself, in which they now can actively interfere.

Here, we seem to encounter a new positionality. Just like human eccentricity moved beyond the centricity of the animal, these new technologies seems to take us beyond the eccentricity of the 'old' human. This new positionality could be called *meta-eccentricity*. Rather than involving a multiplication of bodies from which people are present in the world, as in De Mul's concept of poly-eccentricity, this form of eccentricity involves a change of the body itself, which forms the basis of human eccentricity. The body is no longer a given that may or may not be extended with other entities: it has become possible to interfere in the bodily basis of eccentricity. The eccentric idea that we not just *are* a body, but also *have* a body, needs to be extended with the meta-eccentric idea that we can also *interfere* in our body.

As a result, rather than just having a relationship to our centric position, we also have a relationship to our eccentricity, which makes this position visible. We are eccentric with regard to our eccentricity – hence 'meta-eccentricity.' Our very eccentricity has entered the realm of human action and design, as the case of the Parkinson patient with deep brain stimulation showed. This man did not simply have freedom in the sense we ordinarily

conceive it, but he had to decide about the freedom of his own freedom. Not only did he look over his own shoulder, as eccentric positionality could be explained; he also had to decide *how* to look over his own shoulder.

What does this all mean for our notion of man? To what extent can we call a meta-eccentric being still a human being? Plessner classifies the organic into a few 'steps': from stone via plant and animal to man. Do we have to place the cyborg, constructed from human and technological components and characterised by poly – and meta-eccentricity, on a new step? Or do these forms of eccentricity belong to the natural artificiality of man as well? Does a post-human relationship to the world become visible with these new ways of being-in-the-world, or are these simply extensions of the repertoire of man?

Interestingly, the meta-eccentric form of positionality that becomes visible when analyzing recent technological developments can in fact be seen as a fully-fledged aspect of human existence. The technological ways of interfering in ourselves show what we implicitly have always already been, only with greater intensity: we are artificial creatures that find their origin in technology. It is our 'natural artificiality,' in Plessner's terms, that makes our eccentric positionality artificial as well. In retrospect, we have in fact always organized how we are eccentric, by developing frameworks of interpretation about ourselves, and organizing the decisions we make about ourselves and our own lives in cultural practices and material arrangements.

We do not stop being human when we interfere with our bodies; on the contrary, this is precisely what characterizes us as human. In Donna Haraway's terms: "we have always been cyborgs." Bernard Stiegler even uses a vocabulary that resembles Plessner's thoughts when he speaks about our 'originary prostheticity' or even 'originary technicity.' Just like how a human being does not stop being an animal by adding an eccentric position to the centric, we do not become less human by adding a meta-eccentric position to our eccentricity.

In short, in human existence, the seemingly obvious dichotomy of *physis* versus *techne* is distorted right from the onset. Technology is part of human nature – it is an element of our 'natural artificiality.' Recent technological developments do not go beyond Plessner's framework, but rather provide a new, more radical interpretation of his theme. Furthermore, they allow us to refine Plessner's analysis of human positionality, by showing that eccentricity always involves meta-eccentricity as well.

In this age of human enhancement, we no longer just design our existence existentially, but also biologically – according to Stiegler we have in fact always already done that without explicitly realizing it, but it becomes more explicit in these times of fast paced technological development. The fact that the latest 'anthropo-technologies' appear to be radical variations of

the old theme of the natural artificiality of man does not make it any less relevant in terms of its implications. Through the intertwining of *fysis* and *technè*, new technologies shape the human condition in new ways over and over again. The meta-eccentricity that has always implicitly accompanied human eccentricity is now moving explicitly to the foreground, given that emerging technologies allow us to interfere in new ways in the character of our own freedom and the shapes our eccentricity can take.

Conclusion

Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology offers highly relevant insights into philosophy of technology, especially when it is expanded in confrontation with the contemporary approach of technological mediation. Mediation theory can be grounded in Plessner's analysis of the 'indirect directness' of the human way of being in the world. Furthermore, contemporary technological developments that involve a physical 'blending' of humans and technologies give the impetus to expand Plessner's theory of eccentricity. Technologies that explicitly interfere in our minds and moods – drugs, brain implants – give us the possibility to modify our eccentricity. In a way, we have become eccentric with respect to our eccentricity.

Upon closer inspection however, this meta-eccentricity appears to be a phenomenon that has always accompanied human eccentricity. We have always – albeit usually only implicitly – organized our ways of being eccentric. It is eccentricity itself that makes it possible to develop a relation, not only to our centricity but to our eccentricity itself as well. This brings us back to that other, dialectical tradition in the anthropology of technology: in the mirror of technology, we keep discovering and overcoming ourselves.

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26 Philosophical Anthropology 2.0

Reading Plessner in the Age of Converging Technologies

Jos de Mul

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the relevance of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology in the twenty-first century. In the first part of this chapter, I will argue that the heydays of philosophical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth is closely connected with the (Darwinian) naturalization of the worldview. Whereas the debate on naturalization resulted in an unfruitful opposition between 'greedy reductionism' and a no less 'greedy transcendentism,' Plessner's philosophical anthropology, presented in his magnum opus *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928), offered a promising 'third way.'

In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss some of the objections that have been raised in the course of the twentieth century against the alleged essentialism and anthropocentrism of the project of philosophical anthropology, and which, at least according to the critics, suggest that philosophical anthropology has to face the same fate as its subject 'man,' which – to use the often quoted metaphor of Foucault – is about to be "erased like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault 1970, 387). I will argue that, although Plessner is far from being a hardboiled essentialist or a defender of anthropocentrism, the critiques invite a revision of at least some elements of Plessner's philosophical anthropology in order to make room for a necessary reflection upon the challenges we face at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In the third and last part of my chapter, I will argue that such a revision is especially needed in light of neo-Darwinism and the converging technologies that are intertwined with it. These technologies promise – or threaten, depending on one's perspective – to give Foucault's 'End of Man' a *material* turn. While classical Darwinism challenged the human place in cosmos mainly in theoretical terms, converging technologies like genetic modification, neuro-enhancement and electronic implants, have the potential to 'overcome' *Homo sapiens sapiens* as we know it in a more radical,

practical sense.[1] This creates within us a certain urge towards fundamental post-essentialist and post-anthropocentric human self-reflection. The claim I will underpin is that Plessner's anthropology still offers a fruitful starting point for the development of this 'philosophical anthropology 2.0.' I will demonstrate this by a critical re-interpretation of Plessner's three 'anthropological laws' in light of the aforementioned converging technologies.

Beyond 'greedy reductionism' vs. 'greedy transcendentism'

One way to interpret the rapid development and immense popularity of philosophical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century is to conceive of it as a reaction to the revolutionary developments in the natural and social sciences that took place since the second half of the nineteenth century. Especially Darwin's theory of evolution necessitated a fundamental reconsideration of – to quote the title of Scheler's famous essay – 'the human place in the cosmos' (Scheler 1928). Darwin's 'dangerous idea' (Dennett 1995), the presupposition that a simple algorithm of reproduction, variation and selection is responsible for the entire evolution of life on earth, did not only question the alleged gulf between human beings and (other) animals, but even questioned the gulf between animate and inanimate nature. After all, Darwin's theory of evolution seduced many followers to a 'greedy reduction' of life to a series of biochemical processes.

The main reactions of those who opposed this mechanistic interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution were twofold. Negatively, the opponents tried to underpin Kant's claim – in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* – that there will never be a biological Newton who could explain teleological phenomena such as the emergence of even a single blade of grass (Kant 1968, B337). Positively, the opponents tried to show that there are phenomena or principles that necessarily escape a naturalistic and mechanistic approach. They either postulated the existence of a vital, teleological principle, a life-force distinct from biochemical reactions, as did, for example, the neovitalist Hans Driesch by implementing an Aristotelean notion of entelegy, or of a spiritual, metaphysical dimension, as did Max Scheler by opposing a divine Spirit (*Geist*) to the 'drive driven' life force (*Drang*). As different as the approaches of these two supervisors of Plessner were, they both deepened

1 Varying Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, the motto of the converging technologies seems to be: "The *biologists* have only interpreted the world differently; the point is to change it."

the emerging gap between the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*).

Plessner, coming both from biology and philosophy, took another, more fruitful approach, which – critically – endorses the naturalization of the worldview. In "Ein Newton des Grashalms" – written in 1964, one decade after the first adequate description of the double helix structure of DNA molecules, which marked the beginning of the turbulent history of molecular biology – Plessner states that by now even the phenomenon of (inner) teleology has become subject to a biochemical analysis. Several decades before the emergence of synthetic biology, Plessner already admitted – approvingly quoting Wendell M. Stanley – that "eventually chemists should be able to synthesize a small polynucleotide specifically arranged, hence one now dares to think of synthesizing in the laboratory a structure possessing genetic continuity and of all the tremendous implications of such an accomplishment" (Plessner 1980ff.; GS VIII, 262).[2]

However, this did not convince Plessner to accept a mechanistic interpretation. Biochemical analysis may eventually clarify *how* the vital and psychic functions of living organisms are being materialized, but not *what* life in its subsequent stages and various expressions *is*. In his own words: "It is here that we find the limits of the Newton of the grass blade, not in the phenomenon of teleology, as Kant thought" (GS VIII, 262).

However, as much as Plessner rejects the 'greedy reductionism' of the mechanistic worldview, which attempts to explain "too much with too little" (Dennett 1995, 82) he also rejects the 'greedy transcendentism' of the vitalistic and metaphysical alternatives of Scheler and Driesch, which explain 'too little with too much' and for this reason inevitably are driven back to "cryptological formulas' (GS VIII, 261), various intuitions of a transcendent God (GS IV, 18), stop-gap solutions (*Verlegenheitslösungen*) and contradictions (GS IV, 32). To clarify his own position, Plessner uses the term 'hylozoist,' which Driesch used to debunk Plessner's approach in *Die Stufen*, as an honorary nickname. After all, the idea that life is inseparable from matter (GS IV, 177), and that human life is a psychophysical unity (GS IV, 75), is not only defended by ancient hylozoists like Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus, but it is indeed also the very presupposition upon which Plessner's bio-philosophy and philosophical anthropology rest.

2 The English translation of this and the following quotes from German texts in this chapter are made by the author, with the exception of the quotes from *Die Stufen*, which are taken (sometimes with small modifications) from the not-yet-published translation of Scott Davis.

Philosophy, as Plessner understands it, should take the scientific understanding of life forms as its starting point in order to elucidate the "immaterial dimensionalization of lived matter" (GS VIII, 261). Or, as he expresses it in *Die Stufen*, it is an "a prioristic theory of the essential characteristics (*Wesensmerkmale*) of the organic" (GS IV, 158). In the foreword to the second edition (1975), Plessner further elaborates: "This theory is not a prioristic because of its starting point, as if it would develop out of pure concepts, with the help of axioms, a deductive system, but because of its regressive method which aims at elucidating the conditions of possibility of a given fact" (GS IV, 29-30).

Plessner further elucidates these conditions of possibility as "material [or concrete] a prioristic" characteristics of life (GS IV, 172; cf. GS VIII, 392ff.). They are

> preconscious a priori forms, categories of existence, vital categories, which belong to deeper strata of existence of the carrier of life, the organisms (not understood as existing objects, but rather as living subjects), upon which the mutual address and mutual belongingness of the organism and its surrounding world [*Umwelt*] are based (GS IV, 110).

Because only "life understands life," as Plessner quotes Dilthey's life-philosophical credo in *Die Stufen* (GS VIII, 59), one needs a hermeneutical phenomenology to explicate and interpret these vital categories, inherent in all organic expressions of life. The vital categories that result from this hermeneutics of organic life – 'double aspectivity,' 'boundary' and 'positionality' – enable Plessner to develop a profound and illuminating analysis of the subsequent stages of life, which not only holds the promise of bridging the gulf between life sciences and philosophy, but also, with the additional category of eccentric positionality, provides the building bricks for a (material) philosophical anthropology (cf. Fischer 2000, 279-283), which, moreover, provides the social sciences and humanities within a profound psycho-physiological foundation.[3]

3 "The aim of Plessner's anthropology was to find a mind/body neutral language that could, in terms simultaneously empirically and phenomenologically meaningful, locate human beings amongst the continuum of living organisms and yet also pick out the differentia of their organismic being" (Moss 2007, 147).

Philosophical Anthropology 1.0 under attack

In retrospect, as promising as philosophical anthropology appeared to be in its formative years, its heyday was short-lived (cf. Fischer 2008). After World War II – prepared by the vitriolic attacks Heidegger directed at philosophical anthropology in the 1930s and 40s – the discipline became the subject of a series of fundamental critiques. Though for different normative reasons, these critiques were especially directed against the alleged *essentialism* and *anthropocentrism* of philosophical anthropology.

This critique was, at least in part, politically motivated. In the case of the Frankfurt School, for example, it was directed at the essentialist notion of a fixed human nature, which, according to the critics, characterizes philosophical anthropology. Referring to Scheler, Max Horkheimer states in his early "Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology," that "there is no formula that defines the relationships among individuals, society and nature for all time" (Horkheimer 1993). The critique of the Frankfurters was especially directed against the conservative politics that would emerge from this essentialist notion of human nature, and which contradicts the neo-Marxist hope to create a 'New Man' along the way of a more or less revolutionary transformation of society. As Lukács claims in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, "[t]he transformation of philosophy into an anthropology has lead to a fossilization of man transforming him into a fixed objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*], and as a consequence a setting aside of dialectics and history" (quoted in Marquard 1982, 134).

One could question whether this neo-Marxist critique also applies to Plessner. After all, eccentric positionality, the key notion of Plessner's philosophical anthropology, does not so much set aside the notion of history, but rather designates the fundamental openness of the human life form that is the very condition of the possibility of human history. As we read in *Die Stufen*: "As eccentrically organized being, man must *still make himself into what he already is*" (GS IV, 383). This is not an accidental characteristic, but constitutive for the human life form. After all, as Plessner expressed it in the first of his three anthropological laws: man is *artificial by nature* (GS IV, 382ff.): "Because man is compelled by his type of existence to lead the life that he lives, i.e. to make what he is – just because he only is when he realizes himself – he needs a complement of an unnatural, non-grown kind. That is why they are artificial by nature, on the grounds of their form of existence" (GS IV, 384-5).[4]

4 "Man tries to escape the unbearable eccentricity of his being, he wants to compensate for the lack that constitutes his life form. Eccentricity and the need for complements are one and

It is because of man's natural artificiality and his "ontic necessity" (GS IV, 396) to express himself, that man has a history:

> Thanks to his expressivity, man is a being that, even when he continually intends to conserve himself, presses on towards ever different realization [*nach immer anderer Verwirklichung*], and so leaves a *history* behind himself. In this expressivity alone lies the inner ground for the historical character of his existence (GS IV, 416).[5]

Be that as it may, in a certain respect the critique that Plessner's philosophical anthropology presupposes an unchanging human nature, hits target. Although the notion of 'eccentric positionality' constitutes the inner ground of historicity, Plessner seems to understand the material a priori of eccentric positionality as a kind of essence of humanity, which itself is not subject to historical development. In this sense, we paradoxically might call Plessner an anti-essentialist essentialist. After all, in his final analysis, Plessner explicitly claims that eccentric positionality is the highest possible stage of animal nature:

> One comprehends why animal nature must remain preserved at this highest positional stage. The closed form of organization is only carried out to its most extreme degree. The living thing in its positional moments just does not has a point from which a rise [*Steigerung*] could be attained, other than through realization of the possibility of organizing the reflexive general system of the animal body according to the principle of reflexivity, and through positing that which constitutes the animal

the same. We should not understand 'need' in this context psychologically or as something subjective. It is something that is logically prior to every need, drive, tendency or will. In this fundamental need or nakedness we find the motive for everything that is specifically human, the focus on the irrealis and the use of artificial means, the ultimate foundation of the technical artefact and that which it serves: culture" (GS IV, 385).

5 As Lenny Moss argues in 'Contra Habermas and towards a Critical Theory of Human Nature and the Question of Genetic Enhancement,' referring to the philosophical tradition to which Herder and Plessner belong: "The progressive removal of an organism from a fixed niche for which it is specialized and to which it is finally attuned results in an interiority that is increasingly capable of undertaking its own self-formation. Detachment results in vulnerability, but also in a potential space of subjective openness to both the nature within and the nature without. The space of subjective openness can and must become formed, and it does so in a social context" (Moss 2007, 142). Concerning the persistant tension between anthropology and philosophy of history in the German philosophy of the last centuries, see Odo Marquard's 'Zur Geschichte des philosophische Begriffs "Anthropologie" seit dem Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts' (Marquard 1982, 122-144)

> stage of life, once again in relation to the living creature. A further rise beyond this is impossible, since the living thing now really comes behind itself (GS IV, 363).

In this crucial passage, Plessner seems to revert to a kind of Kantian transcendentalism in which the a priori is formal and timeless (not unlike is the case with Heidegger's *Daseinanaytik* in *Sein und Zeit* – bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble!).[6] Although it might be true that Plessner – as he emphasizes in the foreword to the second edition – offers no deductive system out of pure concept, the developmental logic of the subsequent stages of positionality gives his argumentation a 'conceptual closure' that resembles the conceptual necessity of Hegelian dialectical synthesis. Anyway, this developmental logic seems to convince Plessner to repudiate, at least in passages like the one just quoted, the open character of the historical development of the material a priori, as analyzed by Dilthey in his *Kritik der Historischen Vernunft* (see De Mul 2004, 140ff.). Our eccentricity should not be understood in an essentialistic, a prioristic sense, it is the result of a long evolutionary, historical, cultural and technological development (Nauta 1991; De Mul 2003).

In light of the historical character of the material a priori and the ongoing techno-cultural developments, it seems to be rather inconsistent to exclude the possibility of further stages of positionality on 'formal-transcendental' grounds, whereas only empirical experience of future life forms – be it organic or artificial – could determine the outcome of this possibility. Considering the past four billion years of the evolution of life on earth it seems to be somewhat naïve, certainly for a biologist, to claim that the eccentric type of positionality that characterizes *Homo sapiens* is the highest positional stage that can ever be attained.

It all comes down to one question: could we imagine a type of positionality beyond the eccentric type? As the development of life does not follow a necessary logic, but is rather the product of a series of contingencies (Gould 1989), predictions about the future are dicey. However, the prospect of *Homo sapiens* 2.0 and trans – and posthuman life forms is not sheer science fiction. A number of technological developments already seem to have started to modify the positionality of the human life form. Specific types of information and communication technologies, such as telepresence, create a phenomenal experience which could be called poly(ec)centric. When a

6 Perhaps this a priorism also displays the impact that Weber's typology had on Plessner (Schüßler 2000, 12f.).

person is connected to a robotic body and experiences the world through the artificial senses and limbs of the robot, the result of this doubling of the body is an experience of simultaneously having multiple centres of experience, and occupying multiple eccentric positions (see for a detailed exposition: De Mul 2003; cf. Verbeek's contribution to this volume).

This phenomenon of poly(ec)centricity can be situated within the 'contingent logic' of Plessner's stage-model. In order to be able to do so, we should first realize that the stages Plessner distinguishes show a certain dialectical order. Whereas the positionality of plants is *open*, the positionality of the animal is *closed*. In the sixth chapter of *Die Stufen* Plessner characterizes the closed form of positionality of animals as *centric*, whereas in the seventh chapter the human sphere is opposed to this sphere as (also) being *eccentric*. If we wish to characterize eccentric positionality in *Die Stufen*, we could call it *virtual*. Why virtual? Well, it's because the eccentric position a human being can occupy is not a physical place or body, but rather a reflexive relationship, the relation the living body has to itself. However, in the case of telepresence, when we perceive the world through the artificial senses of the robot and interact with the world with the help of its artificial limbs, our eccentric position gets a material (boundary) realization. Virtual eccentricity becomes *real* eccentricity: our centricity doubles. Whereas the center of the somatosensory apparatus remains located in our organic body, vision and hearing are phenomenally experienced from the center of the robotic body. However, our eccentricity also gets distributed: though we are centred in two bodies at once, at the same time we are outside both of our bodies. The result may be dissociation, at least from an anthropocentric perspective.[7]

This last remark evokes the second fundamental objection that has been raised against philosophical anthropology, which is directed at its inherent *anthropocentrism*. Although anthropocentrism is no invention of philosophical anthropology – it characterizes the modern, Western worldview and before that Christianity, if not already in its Jewish and Greek roots – philosophical anthropology has been accused of being one of its last and most radical expressions.[8] Just as in the case of the critique of its

7 New technologies – be they new means of transport, protheses or deep brain stimulation – often have a disruptive effect on the human body scheme and evoke phenomena of de-centring, which calls for collective strategies of domestication and incorporation of those technologies (cf. Kockelkoren 2003).

8 As Heidegger's expresses it vehementically: "Turned into anthropology, philosophy gets ruined by metaphysics" (Heidegger 1967, I, 79).

alleged essentialism, the ontological critique often has a normative tenor.[9] For example, deep ecologists such as Arne Naess regard anthropocentrism as a crucial element in the reduction of all inanimate and animate nature to raw materials for the inexhaustible human needs and desires. Theoretically, by devaluing animals to sheer machines, as did Descartes, or practically, as we can witness it in the bio-industries. According to deep ecologists, philosophical anthropology sets man apart from nature, whereas we should instead consider humankind as an integral part of the ecosystem.

"Our history is not a single-species narrative, but intimately connected with the histories of various other species, ranging from domesticated animals and cultivated plants to ecosystem dynamics and climate change. Seeing humans as 'authors' or 'directors' of processes of domestication, philosophical anthropology failed to appreciate how we are targets as well" (De Mul, Verbeek, and Zwart 2009).

It is true that the branches of philosophical anthropology which are motivated by a 'greedy transcendentism' – we could think of Max Scheler here again – indeed have a strong tendency to oppose man, gifted by *Geist*, to nature. However, in the case of Plessner, there is a rather strong emphasis on the continuation of life forms, as they are linked as stages or levels of positionality. At the same time Plessner's philosophical anthropology makes clear why it is so difficult, if not impossible, for humans to act in a non-anthropocentric way. Both aspects can be explained from the fact that human beings are both centric and eccentric. As centric beings, anthropocentrism – and the individual form of it: egocentricity – is unavoidable. However, thanks to our eccentricity we not only have the possibility to take the perspective of our fellow men and women, but that of other centric species as well. As such, we are even able – though not always and seldomly in its full range – to criticize egocentricity and anthropocentrism and to embrace a non-anthropocentric, ecological point of view instead of a single species narrative.

Today, philosophers of technology argue that we should not only apply this non-anthropocentric, ecological approach to animate nature, but to inanimate nature as well. Bruno Latour convincingly argued that technical artefacts are less instrumental than it is often presupposed and should be regarded as "actants" themselves (Latour 2002). Technology co-evolves with human beings. While technological innovations can be seen as products of human tool-making, we ourselves are the products of technology as well. Eccentricity is as much the outcome of, as it is the precondition for

9 As every ontology implies a certain deontology, every ontology-critique is motivated by a different (de)ontology.

techno-cultural development. It cannot be seen as simply given, but it is interwoven with technologies, ranging from the introduction of mirrors and writing, up to intrusive information and communication technologies.

When we think Plessner's second anthropological law, the law of *mediated immediacy*, we realize, however, that the idea of a co-evolution of man's positionality and techno-cultural artefacts isn't foreign at all to his philosophical anthropology, even though Plessner – because of his aforementioned closed developmental logic, isn't able to develop its full implications:

> Equally essential for the technical artifact is its inner weight, its objectivity that discloses the aspect of technology that only can be found or discovered, but never made. Everything that enters the sphere of culture shows its dependence on human creation. But at the same time (and to the same extent) it is independent of man (GS IV, 397).

When we take note of the aforementioned critiques of the alleged essentialism and anthropocentrism of philosophical anthropology, the tentative conclusion is that Plessner's philosophical anthropology is still a good starting point for the development of a philosophical anthropology, which is prepared for an adequate reflection on the challenges humankind faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, in order to develop such a 'philosophical anthropology 2.0,' we should purify Plessner's account from its essentialist tendencies, opening the space to reflect on emerging trans – and posthuman types of positionality. Moreover, it should complement its unavoidable anthropocentrism by eco-centric, socio-centric and techno-centric views, calling for even more intense interactions between the various fields involved, and bridge the alleged gap between humanities, social and natural sciences (De Mul, Verbeek, and Zwart 2009).

Philosophical Anthropology 2.0

The development of an upgraded version of philosophical anthropology is needed, because at the beginning of the twenty-first century the proclaimed 'End of Man' seems to get yet another, more material turn as a result of the development of neo-Darwinism and the converging technologies (biotechnology, information technology, nanotechnology, neurosciences, cognitive science, robotics, and artificial intelligence) that are intertwined with it. Whereas classical Darwinism challenged the human place in the

cosmos mainly in a theoretical sense, technologies like genetic modification, neuro-enhancement and electronic implants have the potential to 'overcome' *Homo sapiens* as we know it in a practical sense.

Genetic modification, neuro-enhancement, electronic implants and distributed explants offer unprecedented possibilities to modify the human life form, whereas synthetic biology, robotics, artificial intelligence and artificial life might even create new artificial life forms. Given the ontic necessity of the human expressivity and artificiality, the question is not *whether* we will use the technological possibilities to (continue to) modify ourselves, but rather for what purposes, in which direction, and in what manner. At first, these questions seem to belong to the normative branches of disciplines such as ethics, and social and political philosophy (concerning the goals) and technical disciplines (concerning the means). Besides the question if goals and means simply can be distributed that way, which I personally do not believe to be the case (see De Mul 2010b) – herein lies a fundamental task for philosophical anthropology 2.0. After all, in order to be able to answer the ethical questions for what purposes and in what manner we should apply these technologies, we should not only answer the question what exactly the living thing *is* that we want to modify or transform[10], we should also try to figure out what kinds of life forms are possible given the constraints of the 'raw material' we are working with.

In a number of respects, the *theoretical* challenge 'philosophical anthropology 2.0' faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century strongly resembles the challenge of 'philosophical anthropology 1.0' at the beginning of the twentieth century. Plessner's main opponent in *Die Stufen* is Descartes; that's why the second chapter of the book is entirely devoted to a fundamental and subtle refutation of Cartesian dualism and a preparation of Plessner's alternative thesis, which departs from the notion of double aspectivity of 'the living thing.' Although Plessner is far from being the only twentieth century critic of Cartesian dualism, in many ways this dualism is still prominent in the theories that surround the converging technologies, even when these theories often are presented as anti-Cartesian.

This, at least, is the critique that Max Bennett and Peter Hacker direct against the dominant movement of contemporary neurosciences. In their much discussed book *Philosophical foundations of neuroscience* (Bennett

10 "The constitution of hermeneutic as anthropology needs a foundation in a science of life, a philosophy of life in the sober-minded, concrete sense of the words. First, it is necessary to gain clarity about what may be referred to as alive, before further steps be taken to a theory of the experience of life in its highest human strata" (GS IV, 76).

and Hacker 2003) they argue that the whole history of neuroscience is characterized by a profound dualism, although during its course it transformed from a substance-dualism into a structural dualism. In their discussion with Daniel Dennett and John Searle – published under the title *Neuroscience & Philosophy. Brain, Mind, & Language* (2007) – they summarize their critique as follows:

> The greatest figures of the first two generations of twentieth-century neuroscientists, e.g. Sherrington, Eccles, and Penfield, were avowed Cartesian dualists. The third generation retained the basic Cartesian structure but transferred it into brain-body dualism: substance-dualism was abandoned, structural dualism retained. For neuroscientists today ascribe much the same array of mental predicates to the brain as Descartes ascribed to the mind and conceive of the relationship between thought and action, and experience and its objects, in much the same way as Descartes – essentially merely replacing the mind by the brain (Bennett et al. 2007, 131).

According to Bennett and Hacker, expressions like 'The brain sees…,' 'The brain interprets…,' 'The brain decides…,' etc., which we find in almost all mainstream neuroscientific literature, are victim to what they call a mereological fallacy, which "involves ascribing to parts attributes that can intelligibly be ascribed only to the wholes of which they are parts" (ibid., 131). After all, it is not the brain that sees, interprets or decides, but the whole person.

The critique of Bennet and Hacker is clearly inspired by the later Wittgenstein and Ryle: in their view a mereological fallacy – or 'pars pro totology' – is an evident example of a category mistake. However, as sound as their critique, which is entirely in alignment with Plessner's anti-dualist hermeneutics of organic life may be, as Wittgensteinian 'therapists' they mainly criticize and do not offer an alternative to mereological neuroscience. As Bennet and Hacker argue, the progress of neuroscientific research, as fascinating many of its findings may be, is suffering severely due to the fact that these findings are often misinterpreted from a dualistic perspective. Far from being able to actually explain the phenomena, these theories mask the absence of any substantial explanation by redescribing them in misleading terms (ibid., 161). For this reason there is a strong need for a more adequate interpretation of neuroscientific research, which could "facilitate it – by excluding nonsensical questions, preventing misconceived experiments, and reducing misunderstood experimental results" (ibid., 162).

Such a hermeneutics of organic life might also be helpful to develop a more adequate understanding of the research and experiments in the domains of robotics, artificial intelligence and artificial life, which are also still strongly misunderstood from a structural dualism. We could think here of thought experiments about downloading the mind in a machine, as described by, for example, Hans Moravec and other so-called transhumanists (Moravec 1988, 1999; for a critical discussion see De Mul 2010a, 243ff.).

Moreover, the theoretical debates that currently surround the converging technologies also show – in a new shape – the same unfruitful opposition which characterized the debate around 1900. In the case of molecular biology and the debates about genetic engineering, for example, we again witness the opposition of a 'greedy reductionism,' defended by popular biologists like Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 1976) vs. a 'greedy transcendentism,' nowadays mostly defended by creationists with a Christian background. The unfruitful discussions – if we may call the mutual debunking that way – between the representatives of both groups push for a new, 'third way.' Herein lies an important task for a Plessner-inspired philosophical anthropology 2.0.

With regard to the determinism in molecular biology, the prospects of a hermeneutics of organic life, are clearly more promising than they were in the two decades immediately following the publication of Dawkins epochal book in 1976. The 'one gene, one function' approach that initially characterized DNA research, which – for theoretical and/or funding reasons – was still dominant at the beginning of the human genome project, lost its popularity with the growth of our knowledge about the complexity of the expression of genes. As we realize nowadays, genes cannot only play different encoding roles depending on the specific 'genetic network' in which they are operating, their expression is equally dependent on their interaction with all kinds of intra – and extracellular influences. Moreover, as system biologists like Denis Noble have shown, the reductionist approach and metaphors such as 'selfish genes' become even more misleading in the context of multilevel systems biology:

> Higher levels of organization, such as tissues, organs and system, constrain and order the lower levels through what we may call downward causation. [...] Viewed from the perspective of the organism, or even from that of its environment, DNA is a database from which the organism extracts the information required to make the proteins it needs in the right quantities in the right places. This form of downward causation is effected through epigenetics: chemical marking of the genome to determine which genes are used or silenced at a given time. Genes therefore don't

> have much chance to be selfish; they are more like the 'prisoners' of the organism. [...] Like the pipes of a huge organ (there are organs with as many pipes as there are genes in the human genome!), they are 'played' in different ways by the different cells, tissues and organs of the body to produce the 'music of life.' And when we succeed in identifying 'genetic programs' in the body, they turn out to be the functionality itself (Noble 2008; cf. Noble 2006).

While causation on the molecular level is susceptible to a *mechanistic* explanation, an additional layer of *functionalist* explanation is needed as soon as we enter the domain of multilevel systems such as tissues and organs, where mechanical processes become a function of this higher level of organization. On this level, we can no longer separate these physical processes from the functionality itself. Seen from a Plessnerian perspective, we could say that on this level we witness the emergence of double aspectivity that characterizes the 'living thing.' Moreover, the metaphor of the music of life, which Noble uses, opens the space of yet another, third layer, that of a *hermeneutics* of organic life, in which tissues, organs, organisms, and groups of organisms interpret both their 'genetic scores' and their environment. We could image a 'poetics of genetics' that would study the different modes of interpretation we find in the different levels of organic life (cf. Borgstein 1998).

Moreover, in the age of converging technologies, such a hermeneutics of organic life, that also includes the 'prehuman,' should be complemented by a hermeneutics of artificial life, that studies the art of interpretation as it is and will be found in 'posthuman' forms of life. Starting from a sheer syntactic interpretation of the mechanical computers as we know them today (comparable to the basic levels of interpretation on the molecular level), via the pragmatic interpretation as we find in the more complex robotics systems that are currently being developed (and which may be compared to the way multi-level systems in 'living things' interpret the DNA database and their environment), such a hermeneutics of artificial life might lead us to the semantic types of interpretation, which we already find on the level of human life. And perhaps this development may even lead further to modes of interpretation that are far beyond the grasp of the embodied intelligence of human beings.

Although the understanding of such posthuman life forms may finally remain out of reach for human intelligence, we should realize that the stages of organic and artificial life are continuous entities: together they form a continuous chain of countless life forms. As the example of telepresence

has showed us, we are already involved in the creation of next-level life forms. This at least opens the prospect that we might be able to understand the emerging new forms of life up to a certain level. In the concluding part of this chapter, I would like to try, looking at the development of the converging technologies and using Plessner's three anthropological laws, to formulate some general intuitions about post-anthropological life and the three affiliated post-anthropological laws.

From 'artificial by nature' to 'natural by artifice'

The law of *natural artificiality* does not provide any reasons for repudiating the converting technologies driven cyborgization of man as unnatural, as this process has characterized the co-evolution of the human species, culture and technology from the very beginning. Although Plessner only witnessed the very first steps of this process when he was already relatively old, he certainly did not turn down this development. In the 1975 foreword to the second edition of *Levels of the Organic and Man*, he writes: "Phenomena such as regulation, control and memory, which for long have been regarded as the Arcana of the living substance, have lost their uniqueness in the light of cybernetics. Perhaps too fast, but these electronic models entices us into analogies. And these are fruitful too" (GS IV, 15).

However, the converging technologies promise – or threaten, depending on one's perspective – to reverse the relationship between the natural and the artificial. When we think of synthetic biology, for example, we witness the development of a whole array of techniques that modify existing live forms with the help of genetic modification, metabolic pathway engineering, genome transplantation, the creation of entirely new life forms with the help of BioBricks, extended DNA (xDNA), and the creation and use of additional nucleotides, which expands the four-letter language of DNA to a six-letter language (ETC Group 2007). This so-called 'alien genetics' is only one way the cyborgization of life is taking place (De Mul, 2013). We could add numerous other strategies that are being developed, such as the neurotechnological and nanotechnological engineering of organic life, the addition of electronic implants and distributed explants, up to the creation of artificial intelligence and artificial life. Natural selection, which has been the motor of the evolution of life on earth for several billion years, and which in the short human culture already has been complemented with breeding, is increasingly becoming an *un*natural selection of artificial elements. As a consequence, trans – and posthuman life will increasingly be '*natural by artifice*.'

From 'mediated immediacy' to 'immediate mediality'

The second anthropological law formulated by Plessner, the law of *mediated immediacy*, seems to undergo a dialectical radicalization and reversal as well. In the age of intentional bionic artifacts, the realization of the boundary (*Grenzrealisierung*) of the human body will be increasingly modified by implanted intentional bionic artefacts, profiling technologies, remote control etc. In at least two important ways, the situation we have today differs from the past. First, in comparison with previous forms of technical mediation, these artefacts are increasingly *made* and *invented* instead of being found or discovered (cf. GS IV, 397). Second, due to their invisibility, we will also become less and less aware of the mediated character of their mediation, leading to an 'invisible visibility'. Plessner defines mediated immediacy as "that form of binding [between two terms] [...] in which the mediating intervening term is necessary in order to accomplish or secure the immediacy of the connection" (ibid.). In the case of living beings, this intervening term is the human body (cf. the contribution of Maarten Coolen in this volume). 'Immediate mediality,' on the other hand, refers to the fact that in cases of poly(ec)centricity or meta-eccentricity, immediacy is the result of a technological mediation that is constitutive for human experience and without which the experience wouldn't be possible at all.

Mediated immediacy also refers to the fact that cultural and technological artefacts, though dependent on human creation, gain a certain independency and start to determine human life. In the case of intrusive technologies, this has profound consequences for the control we have over our body. They are characterized by *immediate mediality*, as the independence of our technological creations increasingly loses its metaphorical character. When Bruno Latour calls laboratory instruments agents and writes about the "tragic dilemma's of the safety belt," he admits that he in a way is overstating his case (Latour 2002). However, synthetic biology and artificial life are creating agents in the full sense of the word, *real* agents, whose behavior is difficult to predict and even more difficult to control. And when we merge these agents and human bodies, for example, in a conceivable case of engineered permanent deep brain stimulation, this would affect the human lifeform in a fundamental way.

In the past decades, sociologists like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have introduced the notion of a risk society, which is closely connected with the fact that modern society increasingly manufactures new types of risk because of the unforeseen side effects of our technological actions (Beck 1986; Giddens 1990). By producing intentional bionic artefacts, the

converging technologies not only manufacture risks, but also fundamental uncertainty with regard to their effects. Whereas classical risk governance tried to control simple and complex risks by precaution measures, it is increasingly confronted with uncertain and ambiguous risks that urge us to redefine the very notion of precaution.

From a 'utopian standpoint' to a 'tragic standpoint'

Plessner's third anthropological law, the law of the utopian standpoint warns us, today in an even more radical sense than Plessner could have ever imagined, not only for being too optimistic about the controllability of this project of cyborgization of man, but also for being too optimistic about its contribution to (trans – and post)human well-being or happiness. The technological modification of our positionality and the distribution and transformation of our eccentricity might intensify the alienation that is inherent in the eccentric life form and that constantly evokes our attempts to overcome this alienation. If something will be overcome, it will not be our alienation, but rather our specific form of life.

Living things die. As Marjorie Grene expresses it in her analysis of Plessner's philosophical anthropology:

> The inevitability of death, the approach of death, taken together with the whole spiral-like process of development that has preceded it, show us further, that living things, unlike inanimate objects, have a destiny. [...] Living individuals and only living individuals, with their Janus-like direction to and from the world around them, to and from the bodies that they both are and have, are *destined* to live as they do – and to die (Grene 1966, 259).

> It is our eccentric positionality that gives to our existence the ambiguity – of necessity and freedom, brute contingency and significance – which it characteristically displays (Grene 1966, 274).

Another, ancient word for this ambiguity of coinciding necessity and freedom, brute contingency and significance is 'tragic' (De Mul 2009; De Mul 2014). It is not only individuals who can die. In the evolution of life on earth, it is the destiny of all species that suffer extinction sooner or later. Perhaps it will be the destiny of man to be the first species that will create – both out of freedom and out of ontic necessity – its own evolutionary successors. This project will display both the grandness and the dreadfulness of the human

life form. In this sense, philosophical anthropology 2.0 is coloured by a 'tragic humanism.' Perhaps this *tragic standpoint* is the price we have to pay for developing a level beyond eccentric positionality. We might be tempted to call it inhuman, but as Plessner concludes his essay on inhumanity: "Inhumanity is not bound up with a specific historical age [...], but is rather a possibility that is given in man, to ignore himself" (Plessner 1982, 2005).

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Appendix

Plessner's Collected Writings (*Gesammelte Schriften*)

Helmuth Plessner. *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS). 10 volumes. Edited by Günter Dux et al. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980-1985.

H. Plessner, GS I: Frühe philosophische Schriften I
- Die wissenschaftliche Idee. Ein Entwurf über ihre Form [1913]
- Krisis der transzendentalen Wahrheit im Anfang [1918]

H. Plessner, GS II: Frühe philosophische Schriften II
- Untersuchungen zu einer Kritik der philosophischen Urteilskraft [1920]
- Kants System unter dem Gesichtspunkt einer Erkenntnistheorie der Philosophie [1923]
- Kants Kunstsystem der enzyklopädischen Propädeutik [1976]

H. Plessner, GS III: Anthropologie der Sinne
- Die Einheit der Sinne. Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes [1923]
- Anthropologie der Sinne [1970]

H. Plessner, GS IV: Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie
- Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie

H. Plessner, GS V: Macht und menschliche Natur
- Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik ds sozialen Radikalismus [1924]
- Macht und menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht [1931]
- Über das gegenwärtige Verhältnis zwischen Krieg und Frieden [1939/1949]
- Die Emanzipation der Macht [1962]

H. Plessner, GS VI: Die Verführbarkeit des bürgerlichen Geistes
- Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes
- Deutschlands Zukunft [1948]
- "Kannitverstan." Hollands Verhältnis zu Deutschland [1952]
- Analyse de deutschen Selbstbewußtseins [1960]

– Die Legende von den zwanziger Jahren [1961]
– Ein Volk der Dichter und Denker?1964]
– Wie muß der deutsche Nation-Begriff heute aussehen? [1967]

H. Plessner, GS VII: Ausdruck und menschliche Natur
– Zur Geschichtsphilosophie der bildenden Kunst seit Renaissance und Reformation [1918]
– Über die Möglichkeit einer Ästhetik [1925]
– Zur Phänomenologie der Musik [1925]
– Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewußtsein des anderen Ichs [1925]
– Sensibilité et raison. Contribution à la philosophie de la musique [1936] Mit deutscher Zusammenfassung: ZurAnthropologie der Musik [1951]
– Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens [1941]
– Zur Anthropologie der Nachahmung [1948]
– Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers [1948]
– Das Lächeln [1950] – Ausdruck und menschliche Existenz [1957]
– Der imitatorische Akt [1961]
– Zur Hermeneutik nichtsprachlichen Ausdrucks [1967]
– Die Musikalisierung der Sinne. Zur Geschichte eines modernen Phänomens [1972]

H. Plessner, GS VIII: Conditio humana
– Die physiologische Erklärung des Verhaltens. Eine Kritik an der Theorie Pawlows [1931
– Die Aufgabe der Philosophischen Anthropologie [1937]
– Mensch und Tier [1946]
– Über den Begriff der Leidenschaft [1950]
– Über das Welt-Umweltverhältnis des Menschen [1950]
– Mit anderen Augen [1953]
– Über Menschenverachtung [1953]
– Über einige Motive der Philosophischen Anthropologie [1956]
– Die Frage nach der Conditio humana [1961]
– Elemente menschlichen Verhaltens [1961]
– Immer noch Philosophische Anthropologie? [1963]
– Ein Newton des Grashalms [1964]
– Der Mensch als Naturereignis [1965]
– Zur Frage der Vergleichbarkeit tierischen und menschlichen Verhaltens [1965]

- Ungesellige Geselligkeit. Anmerkungen zu einam Kantischen Begriff [1966]
- Der Mensch im Spiel [1967]
- Der Mensch als Lebewesen. Adolf Portmann zum 70 Geburtstag [1967]
- Das Problem der Unmenschlichkeit [1967]
- Der kategorische Konjunktiv. Ein Versuch über die Leidenschaft [1968]
- Homo absconditus [1969]
- Trieb und Leidenschaft [1971]
- Der Aussagewert einer Philosophischen Anthropologie [1973]
- Zur Anthropologie der Sprache [1975]

H. Plessner, GS IX: Schriften zur Philosophie
- Vitalismus und ärztliches Denken [1922]
- Über den Realismus in der Psychologie [1922]
- Über die Erkenntnisquellen des Arztes [1923]
- Das Problem der Natur in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie [1930]
- Geistiges Sein. Über ein Buch Nicolai Hartmanns [1930]
- Die Frage nach dem Wesen der Philosophie [1934]
- Phänomenologie. Das Werk Edmund Husserls
- Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Frage nach der Objektivität historischer Erkenntnis [1944]
- Gibt es einen Fortschritt in der Philosophie? [1947]
- Levensphilosophie en Phaenomenologie [1949]
- Über die Beziehung der Zeit zum Tode [1952]
- Deutsches Philosophieren in der Epoche der Weltkriege [1953]
- Das Identitätssystem [1954]
- Das Ärgernis des Denkens: Zum Thema: Schuld und Aufgabe der Philosophie
- Moderner Wissenschaftsbegriff und philosophische Tradition [1956]
- Zum Situationsverständnis gegenwärtiger Philosophie [1958]
- Bei Husserl in Göttingen [1959]
- Husserl in Göttingen [1959]
- Holland und die Philosophie [1966]
- Das gegenwärtige Interesse der Philosophie an der Sprache [1966]
- Was bedeutet Untersuchen in der Philosophie? [1968]

H. Plessner, GS X: Schriften zur Soziologie und Sozialphilosophie
- Zur Soziologie der modernen Forschung und ihrer Organisation in der deutschen Universität [1924]
- Die Utopie in der Maschine [1924]

- Abwandlungen des Ideologiegedankens [1931]
- Die Entzauberung des Fortschrittes [1936]
- Over het object en de beteekenis der Sociologie [1938]
- Aspekte sozialer Gesetzmäßigkeit [1949]
- Nachwort zum Generationsproblem [1949/1966]
- Sociologie e Anthropologie [1950]
- Über Elite und Elitebildung [1955]
- Die Funktion des Sports in der industriellen Gesellschaft [1956]
- Zur Lage der Geisteswissenschaften in der industriellen Gesellschaft [1958]
- Zur Frage menschlicher Beziehungen in der modernen Kultur [1959]
- Der Weg der Soziologie in Deutschland [1960]
- Das Problem der Öffentlichkeit und die Idee der Entfremdung [1960]
- Soziale Rolle und menschliche Natur [1960]
- Wissenschaft und moderne Gesellschaft [1961]
- Universität und Erwachsenenbildung [1962]
- Über die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen der modernen Malerei [1965]
- Selbstentfremdung, ein anthropologisches Theorem? [1969]
- Technik und Gesellschaft in Gegenwart und Zukunft [1969]
- Selbstdarstellung

In addition two additional volumes with texts not included in the *Gesammelte Schriften* have been published:

H. Plessner, *Politik – Anthropologie – Philosophie. Aufsätze und Vorträge*. Edited by Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing. Reihe Übergänge, Wilhelm Fink Verlag München 2001.

H. Plessner, *Elemente der Metaphysik. Eine Vorlesung aus dem Wintersemester 1931/32*. Edited by Hans-Ulrich Lessing, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2002.

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