Between bios and techne

Usually “cyborg” (cybernetic organism) 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
“reflexive modernization” (Beck et al. 1994), 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

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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, 69ff.). 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, 27ff.). 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. This is

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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 RFID’s, 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 cyborgs4 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 positional-ity.” 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. 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

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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 cyborgized 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

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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?

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
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. 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

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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. 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

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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 extinguished” (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

Bibliography


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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