

White Heart

Nave, chancel, choir: A triad of steps to the promise. You enter the space, where once God was worshipped as the Creator of everything that is. Now the sacred has evaporated from here - a faint, ancient scent of it perhaps lingering. In the nave, you expect the tranquility of contemplation, but the hammering of the rotating cylinders in the chancel lays brutal claim to your ear. It is the mechanized syncopation of progress.

In an earlier day, they used to say: Life is not an experiment. Life is something you are given, as a gift. But for a long time now, the machine has no longer been satisfied with this. It experiments with the organism. It drives tubes into this artificially swelled monster of a heart that almost crushes you in the choir. Is it the swell-headedness of a research that wants to perfect humanity? What creature is this heart meant for? For Superman?

Today this is more than merely a philosophical dream. Superman is gaining real shape and contour in the new biotech laboratories. This is no tinkering around with parts of corpses à la Dr. Frankenstein. Rather it is bio-design in computer simulations produced by new life synthesists. Just as this heart was first designed on a screen, and only then awakened to artificial life, the bio-engineer designs new species, new men with superman features. Nowadays, this is known as "transhumanism". The idea is not merely to help nature along its way. Thanks to technology, the idea is to take the development beyond man, to leave the "old" human existence behind. The heart is only one phase of this development. Scientists are already working on an artificial brain. And this marks the onset of "human enhancement," an ambitious project for improving and enhancing our abilities - from physical ones in sports to the intellectual ones in research and culture. Moreover, man is even to be improved morally - perhaps with help from a pill for altruism?

It is religious music we hear in the background. These are sweet tones of salvation that Marvin Minsky, pioneer of artificial intelligence, strikes. Twenty years ago he was already dreaming of computers that could be controlled by thoughts alone; that we could upload ourselves in an immaterial world, that we would lead lives freed of all the

ballast inherent to our physical make-up. Angels in electronic heaven. Minsky has many apostles who proclaim these glad tidings today.

But there is also another question intermingling with these tones of technological jubilation: Can this go well? Will all of this effort, this technologically-scientific bombast, really lead to the goals desired? These new hearts and brains, these new "transhumans" that can get to be 200 years old, strangers to illness, with intelligence quotients of 150 and having the emotional and moral maturity of a Gandhi or Mother Teresa - is this the *conditio humana* of the future?

The white heart is a sad heart, longing for a body, for the warmth of a natural place. But there is no nature anymore. Or more precisely: It is synonymous with the machine. *Deus sive natura*, the philosopher Spinoza once said, nature and God are one and the same. Today they say: *Deus sive machina*, the machine and God are one and the same.

A black hole pulsates at the core of the white heart: the uncanny and irresistible feature with the promise of imitating life, no, of building life oneself. This construction site is located in the miniscule, the power of the designer lies in the nano-world. And there he stands, the Divine printer who says: Look, I am the new life. Give me your data. You are only a copy.

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About the author:

Eduard Kaeser is 65 years old. He studied physics, philosophy and history of science. He has been publishing for more than 15 years, his thematic emphasis being anthropology in an age of advancing technization in the world we live in.

Books: "Der Körper im Zeitalter seiner Entbehrlichkeit", Passagenverlag Vienna (2008); "Kopf und Hand", Manuscriptum Publishers Leipzig (2011). In preparation: "Technotopia" (Schwabe Basel, publication expected 2013/14).

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