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# HOMO GENERATOR IN THE POSTMODERN DISCUSSION:

From a conversation with  
Jean-François Lyotard<sup>1</sup>

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Note: I first met the most important postmodern philosopher in 1991, when he accepted my invitation to hold a lecture at the New School for Social Research in New York. That both of us work primarily in phenomenology, and that Nietzsche and Heidegger strongly influenced our work, certainly contributed to a rapid deepening of our relationship. But more importantly, Lyotard was an extraordinarily genial and generous soul. Despite his immense workload of teaching duties all over the world and his numerous publications, he took the time for a conversation with a younger philosopher. What is more, his feelings of friendship motivated him to active support of my plans for an interdisciplinary doctoral program, one that conceives of media and communications in a philosophical and thus novel way. Lyotard was a member of the first American Council of the European Graduate School and was supposed to teach in Saas-Fee as well. His untimely death prevented this, but his thinking continues to inspire us (see <http://www.egs.edu/jeanfrancoislyotard.html>). The following excerpts, which appear for the first time in the Festschrift in honor of the phenomenologist Paolo Knill, another friend, are taken from a conversation held on April 22, 1992 at Yale University, where Lyotard spent a semester as the Henry Luce Scholar at the Whitney Humanities Center. The discussion took place in English, a foreign language for both of us, and Lyotard never got the opportunity to edit the transcript. Video and tape recordings were made, and Lyotard expressly authorized me to change the wording to ensure that our philosophical points would prevail over any inadequacies in the language we used in the discussion. It goes without saying that under these circumstances, I assume responsibility for the entire

text. My paper “Homo Generator: The Challenge of Gene Technology” (1985) was the first of several publications that presented interim reports on my work that built upon *Ereignis Technik: Heidegger and the Question of Technology* (1980) and *Technik und Gelassenheit* (1983). After 20 years, the book *Homo Generator: Ethics for an Artificial Life* will appear in 2002, perhaps still too early.

Schirmacher: My phenomenological demonstration that the human being is first and foremost Homo generator can be all too easily misunderstood. Even the explanatory subtitle “Ethics for an Artificial Life” runs the danger of being drawn into the ideologically charged controversy around the natural and the artificial. The last thing I am trying to do is replace with virtual worlds the unfolding nature of the human and the environment! And the question of what ethics means demands immediate, if provisional, clarification; otherwise one would run astray in the search for some moral imperative, a “should,” for value systems or for natural law. Let us begin with artificiality. To this notion, whose usage today is limited to the sense of the fabrication and imitation, I give back its most important connotation: the proximity to art and autopoiesis. Artificiality is not a normed framework, not Heidegger’s Gestell, but points to the autopoietic praxis of art as its fundamental trait and includes within its scope surprise and fulfillment. Artificiality in this “founded” sense (Husserl) is charged with determining the constitution of the human life-world, whose nature has always been and is completely engendered by us. As Homo generator we generate worlds with materials whose “what” is given but whose “how” we must invent. In the pre-technological age this generating of worlds was ascribed to the gods; at the climax of global mechanization, to the shamans of science; and it is only now, in the encroaching post-technological epoch, that the immense world-engendering powers of Homo generator become evident. This creation is by no means purely cerebral; neither is it limited to the realm of perception, but concerns the whole person and embraces embodiment and communal action as well. An artificial life is led as the art of life, by a person who exists authentically, whose ethic is anthropologically characterized by openness. Since the founding of the modern age by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, this prospect has inspired daring projects in the most diverse minds. I mention here only

Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bataille, Heidegger, Sartre, Arendt, Foucault, Lacan, Levinas, and Deleuze.

My ethics for an artificial life lays the trace (Derrida) of a non-metaphysical existence, for Homo generator becomes capable of a life after post-modernity within the scope of the post-technological world, which is separated from the technological age by an abyss encountered by Kierkegaard's leap. Nevertheless, it is not the object of such theses to rehabilitate the obsolete notion of a universal philosophy. Rather, they have survived the postmodern criticism, which has made any reliance on authorities impossible and has destroyed the idea of a unified world-view. Yet the indisputedly systematic extrication from the postmodern condition takes place via a postmodern decision, which—like my basic phenomenology of the post-technological world—does not propose a new being, a new history nor even a completely different world view. Rather, the situation can be viewed thus: the leap is imperceptible, the post-technological horizon goes unnoticed, and the ethical fulfillment behind our backs is barely noticeable. The seismographically recorded derangement is minimal, a turning-away from the mundane normality of the postmodern world toward an equally self-evident affirmation of artificial life. From the standpoint of cultural criticism, this affirmation obviously invites suspicion. But its beginnings can be observed in the first generation that grows up within the scope of the post-technological horizon and does not even notice, for it knows nothing else. When all technologies are simply available without having been asked for, the time of self-enjoying hedonists (Deleuze) and “media monads” (Schirrmacher) has arrived. With the irresistible spread of western technologies, the leap to artificial life has become unavoidable for non-western cultures as well, even if the speed and the intensity of this process may vary greatly. That anthropologically, we are the “artificial beings by nature” (Helmuth Plessner), unabashedly “eccentric” and anthropomorphic at once, precludes our development in the image of a cybernetic machine. While information technology and genetic technology are two of the most striking means to the active development of humanity and to the ethical realization of the art of life, the cyborg myth (Donna Haraway) must not be narrated metaphysically. For it is by no means a matter of bringing together the human and the machine, of engendering a hu-

man-machine symbiosis, because the technologies themselves are always already our existential, autopoetically authored acts, in which each existence itself is at stake. Robots as “mind children” (Hans Moravec) are unambiguously anthropomorphic, and therefore such questions that try to pass themselves off as ontological are in fact meaningless: “Is a cyborg a human or a machine?” “Does artificial intelligence represent the next stage of evolution?”

Lyotard: It is certainly possible to describe the human being as an artifact, for everything in the world is manufactured and therefore artificial. One could even view each living cell as a technical system in this sense: it is an open and complex system, always capable of generating energy and converting it into activity. Such a description, in the manner of system theory, is given preference in the natural and social sciences, and this is by no means accidental. From the smallest systems all the way up to the galaxies, one has a hypothesis at hand that enables one to understand everything, including the human being. Instrumental rationality and causal thinking are elegantly avoided in the process, for these systems are not means to some purpose and therefore not instrumental (but rather possess instrumentaria of their own). The human system has produced computers and related information systems in order to satisfy a need—for informational knowledge—that previously lurked in the dark, thereby improving the quality of its own—human—activity. This novel knowledge then engenders a new kind of energy and transforms it energetically. When we, justifiably, view things in this way, then the whole world, including the human world, is artificial. Our idea of the cosmos, too, is necessarily implicated, for we cannot know what the cosmos-in-itself is. The concept of artificiality provides us with a good understanding of so-called reality as well as a practical, successful way of dealing with it.

Schirmacher: But would this interpretation of artificiality not deny its origin, which I find in the self-conception and in the capriciousness of the human being? [Bekäme nicht die Energie das Subjekt der Entwicklung ...] Would not energy become the subject of development, and would we not become *sub specie aeternitatis* a mere subsystem? What must be clarified above all is the extent to which any system theory is dependent upon the notion of given laws and conditions, whereas

my idea of artificiality emphasizes the art of a fulfilling life, which must always generate its own context. Can Homo generator be a system?

Lyotard: In my view, neither the universal system nor the marginal system is subject to laws or determined by rules, and all the less so when we begin to consider complex systems. Extreme flexibility and fundamental indeterminacy characterize these systems, to which, as we are now beginning to understand, our brain belongs. Physical systems of all orders of magnitude obviously belong to this group of complex systems. Physicists maintain this curious differentiation between determined and undetermined loci, in the latter of which chance prevails. The human being is extraordinarily complex, the most complex life system we know, and this is so for the very reason that we possess the capacity for language, and in language have a symbolic system at our disposal. That in the realm of language we find ourselves at a locus of indeterminacy, explains sufficiently why and how we experience our existence as open, why we must always first determine things, why we need our imagination, but also how our sense of responsibility came about. At the same time, it can be shown that the notion of systems having white spaces and abysses, loci that are not already determined, is by no means one that leads us astray.

Schirmacher: An open anthropology along those lines is what I have in mind, such as has been developed in Germany by Plessner, Adorno, and Ulrich Sonnemann and in France by Bataille, Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze, and Kristeva. But given your description, how could the charge of objectivism be refuted?

Lyotard: Every notion of objectivity or reality [... itself ...] [*sic*] when the question of reality has to be posed each time anew by scientists. Is this chair real? What would “the reality of the chair” mean in micro-physics? Not even our senses can answer this question any longer in the virtual world. The results of our perceptual activity are objects we form in an artificial manner with the help of our filters. Space and time, too, are formed in such a way as to make them useful—a human being, a cell, a butterfly, each mode of being manufactures its own reality (for the non-human world we naturally only assume this).

Schirmacher: In the natural sciences and to a certain extent in the social sciences as well there seems to be at least a reality substitute: what is

real is what I can calculate. This quantitative model of the world, which the use of computers has made dominant in society, is nevertheless instrumental, not artificial. In artificial life, only what my life [causes to be fulfilled; *gelingen läßt*] can count as real. A functioning information technology may well be a part of this, one that does not subject me to surveillance and coercion, but which supports my openness and prepares the adventure of everyday life. Yet it seems to me that all information which presupposes that something can be defined and depicted in numbers is capable only in extremely rare cases, if at all, of accounting for essential characteristics of a life. Essential action and thought aims at the ambiguous, the dark, the open, the exalted, and can never be captured by a halftone screen [raster].

Lyotard: Doesn't this mean that you are clinging to the anthropological notion of an existence of one's own? You turn against a relativistic arbitrariness and likewise criticize the idea of an objective existence. On the one hand you think in a postmodern way, on the other hand your objections to my system-description could be an indication that you take up an existential position between subjectivism and objectivism which is close to that of the early Heidegger and Sartre as well.

Schirmacher: Not consciously at any rate! My fundamental phenomenology of the human being in the post-technological world has from its very starting point extricated itself from the dualisms of subjectivity vs. objectivity, and centrism vs. decentrism: whoever directs his gaze at the human being, and accepts oneself as evidence, finds no native trace of such dualisms whatsoever. Authentic human living is anthropomorphic living—one who so lives knows of no other world beyond the human horizon and can experience no phenomenon in any way other than in relation to himself. But the human being in his mortality in no way sees himself as the determining center, for fallibility, weakness, and uncertainty are fundamental human characteristics. Nor is human natality any indicator of fecund subjectivity, seeing as each birth is attended by innumerable other phenomena that we “generate”—i.e. reap, urge onward, and liberate—in the sense of an ethics of fulfillment. Homo generator follows an “economy of extravagance” (Bataille), in which the self satisfies [complies with] the silence of language as well as the over-exuberance of activity that laughs in the face of death. From Heidegger's

projected model of “Being and Time,” what remains in the post-technological world is Sartre’s existential model, but this model, too, has changed radically. What once, as the “series of our deeds” was supposed to determine the essence of the human, neither possesses the inner consistency that would render it capable of generating a series nor can it be limited to our deeds: a “reflexive apathy” (Jacques Poulain) denies itself to a consensus community devoted to whatever cause. To exist anthropomorphically is for Homo generator nothing for which it must fight: in the face of the alienated versions of the anthropomorphic, from the gods to the notion of scientific objectivity, he remains calm [gelassen]. There is no bogeyman [scapegoat, Feindbild], nothing against which an ego itself would have to be constituted, but communication is in and of itself [von sich her] the platonic dialogue of the soul with itself, and the human being develops as a finite event [Ereignis] in the sense of the late Heidegger.

Liotard: Thank you for this detailed representation, which allows me to pose a further question in reference to your concept of Homo generator: what do you mean by “generate?” One could very easily understand this process in the sense of system theory, and then Homo generator would succumb to the criticism to which you subjected the concept of system. Homo generator would be an abstraction, a species among other living species, and no one would be able to know or see this Homo.

Schirmacher: Homo generator is an open [determination, Bestimmung], a concept only now beginning to unfold, that might well be interrupted, to begin anew, and then perhaps double back. There exists no Homo yet, but rather he is a self-fulfilling prophecy. He generates himself in his most important technologies, once simply in breathing, sleeping, gathering food, procreating, fighting; today in solar technology as well, in genetic technology [biotechnology], and in the media. There exists for us the force, the power, and the opportunity to generate—that alone is what is referred to by the concept “Homo generator.”

Liotard: But perhaps the will to power, as in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*, is too strong as well?

Schirmacher: Nietzsche had the mentality of an artist, who creates his own aesthetic Olympus, and his will to power refers back to its engenderer, and is will to will, as Heidegger correctly saw it. Nevertheless,

I do not share Nietzsche's optimism, for perhaps only a pessimist has the right to be optimistic, if you will allow this remark from the president of the International Schopenhauer Society. Even if Nietzsche, as hardly another philosopher did, precisely analyzed cultural nihilism as the ideological end of metaphysics, as a cultural critic he remains anthropocentric. How does he know all that, and does he not overestimate the scope of his insights? My Homo generator is a single, unmistakable person, not a species. I myself exist not being-in-the-world in Heidegger's sense, but am being-for-the-world (Deleuze).

Lyotard: Very well, if you withdraw to the position of being a person, there are theoretically no problems: it is ethically accepted that the concept of person necessarily implies freedom, and responsibility as well, whose objects one can choose for oneself. But are you not afraid of making things too easy for yourself? Isn't "person" a concept that every ethics presupposes?

Schirmacher: It's not as simple as all that, for in the traditional understanding the freedom of the person is always limited, if perhaps only voluntarily, as in Nietzsche's aristocratic ethics. There is a difference between "freedom from" and "freedom to", and every society absolutely wants to regulate the latter (Isaiah Berlin). But even if one were to follow de Sade, and see oneself as being allowed, even morally compelled, to do what one is able to do, one would still remain unfree in the sense of Homo generator. Does my life achieve fulfillment? This is the only ethical question. Freedom is a secondary concern, for I must first find out how my life is to achieve fulfillment; i.e. is in the strict sense ethical. This is the most difficult task for Homo generator, for the war technology of metaphysics and all institutions established by it, from the family to the courts of law, intentionally confuse the ethical sense, which for this reason only small children exhibit in a completely unselfconscious way. The non-negotiable claims to justice, fulfillment, and proportion in a personal ethic of fulfillment are feared as asocial just as persistence, prudence, composure [tranquility, Gelassenheit] and generosity are lauded as modes of the worlds of ethics. Simply perceiving whether my life is achieving fulfillment, and avoiding error in this judgment [not deceiving myself in the process], is the hard work that you mentioned in the postmodern context of justice. It is easy for anyone to maintain that he



has lived his life, but such a language game does not do justice to itself: for we cannot deny that we are for but a few moments certain of having truly and fully lived.

Lyotard: Very well, but what does it actually mean to live one's own life? Would this refer to something beyond? Something that is more than mere existence, more than a being-here-and-nowhere-else? Is something realized with this life?

Schirmacher: No, there is no transcendent measure, only a self-examination, which of course we always already carry out in the form of a self-evaluation. In puberty and later as a midlife crisis, this exhibits itself in an often spectacular manner. But this evaluation remains far too limited to personal circumstances, social and professional success, or one's own health and is therefore unduly personalized. My total life, 24 hours a day, in its [with-ness?, *Mitsein*], in my environment, must be evaluated without any preconceived opinions: one can no more exclude the computer I work at than the dreams and wishes that no one knows but me. The decisive difference from tradition, however, is that this evaluation can never be undertaken from without, and no one can ever tell another whether he has lived or not. The condescension of ethical theories that believe they can judge my fulfillment or lack thereof because I myself am supposedly incapable of doing so is nothing but the relic of a defunct paternalism. Homo generator generates his own self-confidence too!

Lyotard: But then do there exist immanent criteria for a life that achieves fulfillment, when one rejects as you do the judgment of others? Could health be an example of such a criterion? But then how would things stand with Antonin Artaud, who lived on the brink of insanity, ruined his health, and in the end couldn't even sleep?

Schirmacher: When the balance between body and mind, as Spinoza conceived it, is disturbed, it becomes difficult to speak of a fulfilled life, of course. "Health is not everything, but without it everything is nothing," Schopenhauer emphasizes, and that society profits vampire-like from the failure of certain individuals, should likewise inspire in us a healthy distrust of romanticized suffering. Vincent van Gogh created great art and thereby contributed a bit to the fulfillment of other lives, but he destroyed himself in the process. But only van Gogh himself can

pass such judgment (and perhaps he did just that between his states of intoxication)!

Lyotard: We have the ability to perceive in occurrences the event [Ereignis] (Heidegger) that affects us and at the same time expresses [pronounces] us. And we are receptive indeed, since in the strange first years of our lives we were called upon [...] without at the same time being in a position to be able to control events. This means in an exact sense to remember our childhood, and this process is likely the source of that to which you refer as generating. Someone like van Gogh is not trying merely to express something of course, but is bearing witness for the dark thing that he himself is. But can one say this of the computer, which will always be something that was never born?

Schirmacher: Beware of a misleading ontologization! What is correct is solely that the computer does not belong to the class of human beings created through birth, but is a cerebral creation [Kopfgeburt] that grows up cybernetically. What we have here are not two modes of existence, but only our existence—in another form. On the other hand, I would like to emphasize here your reference to early childhood, Lacan's pre-mirror phase [Vor-Spiegelstadium], for this formative experience prior to any word-language evidently insures that no conscious criticism can interrupt the flow of generating. As ashamed as we are of living in an intuitively childlike manner, no education of conformist enlightenment is able to keep us from trusting our own feelings more than theories. What I call responsible answers to no authority but is feedback from the ego itself, and the words are used only to mislead. Therefore, the ethics for an artificial life in its very beginnings breaks with the discursive world. It shows no consideration to the language community with its language regulations, but acquires a feeling for what actions mean in the context of the event [Ereignis]. Intuitive knowledge, characterized by Spinoza as the authentic human knowledge, is in small children as overwhelming as it is taken for granted. Thus, we have all at one time been artificial beings, each for himself and without any intention, at once powerless [unconscious/ohnmächtig] and creative, the gods of our own worlds, world-designing [world-creating] monads. Since the mirror phase [Spiegelstadium] it has been drummed into our heads that this I-myself identity is merely an ideal ego, an early-childhood

omnipotence fantasy, which does not accord with the given reality. As true as this may have been, it has never quite convinced us, as the lasting success of advertising demonstrates, and in the post-technological world, reality is yesterday's news and it need not concern us any longer. Whatever the nature of the world's given circumstances may have been, that have forced us into the struggle for survival and thus into denying our own ego [the ego itself], Homo generator will refuse to accept any of the former constants. As the artificial ones of nature we will become like the true children (Goethe) and will produce worlds without being purpose-oriented or wanting to reign over them.

Lyotard: That sounds good. But aren't you being a bit too naively trustful as regards feelings? Aren't feelings the very things that are hard to grasp, and are we not in general incapable of understanding them? The so-called feelings are surely powerful, but they can also adversely affect the so-called person. We ought to be able to answer for our feelings, but in truth we don't know what they mean. We continue to learn throughout our lives, but often enough we die without figuring out what feelings mean. Therefore I doubt whether this opacity of feelings can form a good basis for responsibility; the opposite seems to be true: feelings are things that withdraw, hide, disappear. Neither am I very trustful of that to which Lacan refers as "the thing," something that is here and that is witnessed by us, but of whose meaning and just how it has become the source of generating we haven't a clue.

Schirmacher: Could it be perhaps that the difficulty lies in your never having changed your traditional viewpoint? You are still trying to understand the other instead of paying attention to the ego itself, as it transpires [ereignet] in feelings. Not how I feel about someone or something is what I should pay attention to, but what this feeling contributes ethically, i.e. toward the fulfillment of my life.

Lyotard: So how is it with your feelings? As event [Ereignis]? Something or someone awakens a feeling within you, and that kindles in you the expression or the transference of your own feeling, over which you have no control?

Schirmacher: I don't want to control the feeling, more like set it free. The best feelings simply happen and if they were instrumentalized they would just go to ruin.

Lyotard: Very well, but the alternative to a good feeling is not necessarily instrumentalization. The question is, for example, what is the best way to deal with a small child, and what is a good way to be spoken to by one about feelings?

Schirmacher: Because he cannot resist the child, the adult learns so much that is new. For Levinas this was the core of an asymmetrical ethics: the other gives you an order you cannot resist.

Lyotard: But at the same time Levinas had a very strong sense for the law as well.

Schirmacher: I know, but that's something I lack completely.

Lyotard: The law is not only respectful with regard to the others, it must also be taken over from oneself in a particular way. This way cannot be reduced to general tolerance; the law regards as very dangerous a world where everything is allowed. That is why it is our duty to forbid the child something, for sometimes this is necessary in its own interest. A curious situation results: on the one hand the necessity of having no law, to be blind to law, for we of course do not possess this law nor are we capable of formulating it. But on the other hand we can have the feeling that there is a law there and that to instrumentalize someone, a child for example, violates the law. By this I want to say that we are inconsistent, and that it is therefore impossible to bring about a balance and to have a complete, fulfilled, and happy life. It seems more to be the case that we are compiled or generated by something that is in a certain sense intolerable. Even van Gogh was not very happy, even if he was capable of generating a reality for his work. He spent his life in terrible fear, and yet he seems to me to present a good example that Homo generator—and generating itself—is a work of unavoidable suffering.

My second comment has to do with how it takes us human beings two to three years before we are capable of communicating in the traditional way. That doesn't mean that during this period we are mere objects, rather that we are spoken to and influenced by a multitude of words, conversations, acts of tenderness, feelings, movements, and gestures. Things and contraptions influence us as well, good machines included, long before we can respond to them appropriately, with the aid of language.

Schirmacher: But this will not essentially change in the future either!

Lyotard: That's correct, things will continue this way in life. But we know nothing at all of the consequences this will have. It shows once again how completely contradictory our feelings and our ways of thinking can be. Therefore it seems to me that the child is not something that simply grows up, almost unconsciously, and allows us to be addressed through it by the event [Ereignis]. What happens? Nothing. One needn't manufacture things in a tragic way; the tragedy of life does not exist by necessity. But I cannot agree with the notion that we live our lives. On the contrary, we are incapable of living our lives, and this is our honor, exactly this, that we are not capable of doing so.

Schirmacher: I don't agree with that.

Lyotard: I am sure you agree.

Schirmacher: I agree about the suffering, and also that the concept of balance has to be recast. Balance has as little to do with the new-age yin-yang mishmash as it does with well-rounded cheerfulness or a harmony between body and mind. Balance is the model [Entwurf] for a struggle whose outcome will always remain uncertain.

Lyotard: But doesn't one need a yardstick [Maß] for that? Shouldn't you have to be able to count?

Schirmacher: Perhaps one needs proportion, but in Goethe's sense, who says to the moment "Do tarry, you are so beautiful," and yet fears this very tarrying. It is the hope for eternal happiness, the [Nu] of the mystic, and therefore a hope that never fulfills itself. The yardstick [Maß] is given through absence, life is lived by means of its inability to be lived. In this I agree with you indeed, but not with the dualistic undertone that neglects the third standpoint (and the [Geviert]). It is my honor to deny myself to the positively lived life, but also to death and unnecessary suffering. Consciously I will fail, but behind my back I will just as inevitably achieve fulfillment. Such fulfillment entails necessary suffering, the rupture and the parting, but protects it within the inattentive and the unfamiliar. Homo generator is not the maker, neither the confident nor the timid one, for as Homo faber we would remain obligated to our planning, to the system of knowledge. An open horizon, appropriate to generating-as-transpiring [ereignen], proclaims the multiplicity of artificial life.

Lyotard: If you remain wary of an ideology oriented toward Epicureus or Goethe, I will allow you that the event [Ereignis] always depends on the individual: an occurrence becomes an event because a feeling perceives it as an event. As long as computers are not permeable to [feelings?], they hinder the event for people.

Schirmacher: That is why the computer society we have today is only a caricature of the inchoate artificial life, for the very reason that total certainty [Sicherheit] is valued over open perception, insensitivity over feeling. But this is already being broken open from within: that the entirety of programs are non-rationally controlled, that the interaction of the electronic network-world cannot be predicted, are promising signs.

Lyotard: But doesn't the concept of a life of one's own remain suspicious? André Malraux, about whom I wrote a biography, maintained a very critical position against this concept. My so-called own life consists of course only of events into which I have inscribed myself, which I—often quite literally—scribed to myself. Whether love, family, profession, politics—what in all that is my life, is due to the ability to sign with my name and my body (my hand) whatever I have chosen in terms of events. He who signs is always right!

Schirmacher: Just like the Soviet Encyclopedia (may it rest in peace), which bore a different handwriting after every party congress.

Lyotard: A very good example!

Schirmacher: That is why my ethics for an artificial life has to do only superficially with self-realization, ego identity, or social success. For no one can really know whether his life will achieve fulfillment, and all the less can one make any reliable pronouncements about the fulfillment achieved by one's fellows. One cannot recognize the good life by its fruits any more than one can recognize the motives that have prompted us to action; neither observance of the laws nor the freedom of "live as you want to live" are helpful when it comes to self-evaluation [assigning a value to oneself]. No therapy can teach me how to recognize my event! Homo generator extricates himself from the alternative between cosmocentric and anthropocentric, and in the interstitial life of feelings escapes the ideological struggle between survival and death. Feeling, intuition, care, justice, deconstruction are indicators of a life behind our backs, the imperceptible perception of which must become

more perceptible for the further development of artificial life. It is therefore not enough for Homo generator to become conscious of his absolute responsibility for the created worlds, if he wants to be able to answer them ethically. Homo generator does not have to wait for the post-technological age to generate his answer, but rather this answer has kept us alive (in an artificial life), without it having been necessary to approach it with mere cryptic allusions. Doesn't it seem as though it were time to look for Plato's daimon, Leibnitz's monad, Hegel's absolute idea, Kierkegaard's seducer, Nietzsche's superman, Adorno's natural beauty [Natuschöne] and Heidegger's event [Ereignis] in their worlds? For these are figures—as tottering and unsteady as they might be—of a life fulfilling itself, and their worlds are therefore in and of themselves worlds of ethics. We know practically nothing about these worlds of ethics (or only—as Schopenhauer specified—in the form of Nothing); yet Homo generator generates these worlds continually and lives in all of them, [wie von selbst], always already. One actually ought to remain silent about all of this, for word-language does not allow us to say what has to be said.

Lyotard: Yes, because all words express a certain ideology.

Schirmacher: I am quite painfully conscious of that, and even poetic language can only occasionally flee what Heidegger termed the age of ideology. Nevertheless, there is no need to resort to apocalyptic visions here: a fundamental phenomenology of the post-technological world gives cause to speculate that Heidegger's [turnaround; Kehre] for future generations is in many ways already (generated) reality. Metaphysics has come to its conclusion in modern technology and has at the same time made itself obsolete: images and concepts are entwined with the media and tell without inhibition about everyday and imagined praxis, but no longer put themselves in the place of a life that achieves fulfillment. Get a life before you get a theory! No theory will be able to or will want to try to catch up to the fact that Homo generator lives in the worlds of ethics, since philosophy of course—as Hegel already recognized—is on principle an after-the-fact thought, when the forms of life have become old. But reflection [Nach-Denken] too has its genuine world; its honor is open deliberation, and its strength lies in its subversive resistance to ideologies, which otherwise inevitably develop into prescriptions.

Liotard: I value your philosophical work that has led to Homo generator—for the critical debate of the postmodern in the context of our times it appears to me to be of decisive significance.

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## N o t e

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