



Gnosis in Cyberspace? Body, Mind and Progress in Posthumanism

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Abstract

Religion and transhumanism are often regarded as competing or even opposing worldviews. European media philosophers tend to identify common elements in both systems which depend on the metaphysical reception of ideas related to the body and cyberspace. The posthuman aim of a virtual and immortal existence inside the storage of a computer seems to be a continuation or a revivification of the ancient Gnostic philosophy. By focusing on the physical aspects of posthumanist utopias, the article shows that posthumanism can hardly be interpreted as Gnosis but rather as a mere utilitarian philosophy.

1. The Body in Cyberspace

Religion and transhumanism are often regarded as competing or even opposing worldviews. European media philosophers tend to identify common elements in both systems which depend on the metaphysical reception of ideas related to the body and cyberspace. The posthuman aim of a virtual and immortal existence inside the storage of a computer seems to be a continuation or a revivification of the ancient Gnostic philosophy. But apparently, we have forgotten our bodies.

It might be one of the most palpable peculiarities of post-modern philosophy to assess the disappearance of the body and the end of bodily senses. Jean Baudrillard (1994), Dietmar Kamper and Christof Wulf (1984), and many others have done a lot of remarkable observations and analysis on the development of our bodies in the age of medial[?] reproduction. The diffused *reality* of the body is mooted. As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek noted, "we live in a society with coffee without caffeine, with chocolate without sugar and with virtuality as reality without reality" (Žižek & Negt 2001).

When Florian Roetzer edited the two volumes of the *Art Forum International* in 1996 on the future of the body, the utopias of the posthuman body were discussed by a wide range of art and media theorists and philosophers. Their different contributions centered potential and utopian transformations of the body in the context of genetic engineering and prosthesis technology (Deitch 1996; Roetzer 1996; Steels 1996; Stelarc 1996). In a most extreme example, the American robotics researcher Hans Moravec presented his vision of an absolute virtual, human existence as the end goal of evolution. The human personality – the human "mind" – should be scanned as a perfect simulation and should continue to exist thenceforward as an immortal being inside the storage of a computer (Moravec 1996).

By this small article in the *Art Forum International*, Moravec became the most prominent reference point for many European philosophers and cultural theorists who dealt with posthumanism. Unfortunately, most of these publications only mentioned Moravec's name but did not take into account his concepts (Boehme 1996; Hayles 1999:35; Zons 2001:16).

The release of the human personality from its "carnal corporation," as Moravec had described it, was identified as a gnostic or even platonic motif in the post-modern cultural debate – cybergnosis and cyberplatonism became a saw (List 1996).

Its prophets such as Marvin Minsky or Hans Moravec are Gnostics, because they intend to overcome the world of matter and corporality, in order to create a "pure" sphere of mind ... The scrap heap earth and the grub sack of the human body are the sacrifice, which can be performed light-heartedly ... since earth and body are stamped by perdition. (Boehme 1996:259)¹

But do we have to interpret every utopia of a separation between the human body and mind as a kind of Gnosis? Is it correct to characterize the posthuman utopias of a disembodied existence in cyberspace as Gnosis or as a new variety of Platonism? Here, we will discuss these questions.

Hence, it is necessary to introduce some further differentiations in the extensive discourse of medial[?] utopias of bodies. At the same time we have to become epistemologically aware of our well beloved gnostic or platonic glasses, with which we prefer to perceive every kind of overcoming the human body. Since at this point the explicit bodily utopias of posthumanism shall be analyzed we first have to determine the very center of posthumanist thought in comparison with transhumanism. Afterwards the gnostic interpretation of posthumanism will be outlined and compared in different aspects with the philosophical concepts of Gnosis.

2. Posthumanism and Transhumanism

After Thomas Blount had defined the word *posthuman* in his *Glossographia* (1656) as something in the future ("following or to come, that shall be"), the American culture theorist Ihab Hassan (1977) was to my knowledge the first who used the term posthumanist for the philosophical ideas of overcoming the human race as well as humanism (Blount 1656; Hassan 1977; Simpson & Weiner 1989:197; Krueger 2004:107-112). In his novel *Schismatrix*, the science fiction author Bruce Sterling (1979) signifies a future species as *post-human* that is demerged in the two sub-species of *Shapers* and *Mechanics*. After the robotic researcher Hans Moravec had proclaimed the vision of a post-biological and supernatural future of humankind in his constitutional work *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988), the term "post-biological" was increasingly replaced by the notion of "posthuman" in succeeding publications of the 1990s (Dery 1996:371; Hayles 1999:343; Regis 1990:7, 144).

But what is posthumanism? In the scientific literature there is a variety of inconsistent definitions, which mostly identify posthumanism with transhumanism. Katherine Hayles for example characterizes posthumanism by the fundamental philosophical assumption that human beings are determined by their pattern of information and not by their devaluated prosthesis-body, so that human beings can be understood as a kind of machine (Hayles 1999:2 et seq.). Jens Schroeter defines posthumanism completely differently as a conglomerate of technological visions of human transformation from genetic engineering to diverse cyborg utopias (Schroeter 2002:84 et seq.; Richard 2000:72). Leading thinkers of the pragmatic transhumanism underline some other aspects defining the term posthuman:

¹ All German quotations are translated into English by O. Krueger.

A posthuman is a human descendant who has been augmented to such a degree as to be no longer a human. Many transhumanists want to become posthuman. As a posthuman, your mental and physical abilities would far surpass those of any unaugmented human. You would be smarter than any human genius and be able to remember things much more easily ... Posthumans could be completely synthetic (based on artificial intelligence) or they could be the result of making many partial augmentations of a biological human or a transhuman. Some posthumans may even find it advantageous to get rid of their bodies and live as information patterns on large super-fast computer networks.²

Referring to our basic question of Gnosis and posthumanism it seems to be all the more appropriate to clarify the difference between posthumanism and transhumanism.³ Although these two terms are used interchangeable in some common discourses we can identify two diverse groups of texts within the transhuman and posthuman discourse. Mainly there are two circumstances that require a differentiation: first, transhumanism and posthumanism have different origins and second, their goals and the structure of their arguments differ.

The beginning of transhumanism in the 1970s can be localized particularly in California, dominated by the visions of the futurist Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (*FM2030*), the commitment of the psychedelic movement's mastermind Timothy Leary and the ideas of cryonics as Robert Ettinger has worked them out. Above all they focus the enhancement of human beings' mental and physical powers by technology or psychoactive substances (Esfandiary 1973; Ettinger 1972; Leary & Sirius 1997).

In contrast to these transhumanist thinkers, the physicist Frank Tipler, the AI researcher Marvin Minsky, the robotic researcher Hans Moravec and the IT entrepreneur Raymond Kurzweil, which in my view belong to posthumanism, center themselves among cybernetic visions of the simulation of human beings – in no way do they refer to the early transhumanists such as Esfandiary, Leary and Ettinger. The immortal existence in virtuality is the human aim for such posthumanist thinkers, and such a goal will be achieved by the end of 21st century even according to their most pessimistic estimations.

Transhumanists devote themselves to more pragmatic questions of life extension and mind enhancement technologies, such as life-prolonging diets, smart drugs and prosthesis technology or even the prospects of cryonics while these applications are almost never mentioned in posthumanist writings. Although the edge is fuzzy, one could point out that posthumanism shapes the aim and transhumanism expresses the way to overcome the present biological human being.

The disregard for the present and practical matters in posthumanism reflects the distinctive differences with respect to transhumanism. While in transhumanism human beings and their descendants are the subject of evolution, artificial intelligence and robots are the future agents of evolution and progress in posthumanist reasoning. Here, human immortality in a virtual habitat is only a concomitant phenomenon of the autonomous progress of artificial intelligent, posthuman beings. While posthumanism is focused on the idea of an artificial "progeny" of humankind, transhumanism remains anthropocentric.

For posthumanist reasoning and for the question of an existence in cyberspace, the idea of the technological immortalization has insofar a fundamental and constitutive significance as only by this means the continuity of humankind can be guaranteed. A posthumanist philosophy, created by human beings, that proclaims the total annihilation of biological evolution and life in favor of machine's evolution, would be unthinkable without this very

² See <http://www.transhumanism.org/resources/faq.html>, retrieved on 01.11.2003.

³ Although the term *transhuman* is much older it is ascribed to the Californian futurist Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (1930-2000) by the transhuman movement (Krueger 2004: 109-111). See <http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Words>, retrieved on 01.11.2003.

charity of an immortal existence. Thence, the idea of *uploading* human beings into an absolute virtual existence inside the storage of a computer takes the center stage of the posthumanist philosophy – and this is the context of the question of Gnosis in cyberspace.

3. Posthumanism

There are four most relevant authors that I would like to assign to posthumanism—Frank Tipler, Marvin Minsky, Hans Moravec and Raymond Kurzweil—who share the vision of human life simulations in cyberspace.

Frank Tipler (*1947) is professor of mathematical physics at *Tulane University*. Together with the English cosmo-physicist John D. Barrow he published his chief scientific work, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* in 1986 (Barrow & Tipler 1986), which included a teleological interpretation of the history of the universe. However, Tipler shot to fame with his book *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead*, published in 1994.

In his cosmological perspective Tipler assumes that the universe is closed and that it will end in the point Omega. Till then intelligent life – that is humankind and its artificial progeny – must gain the total control of the whole universe, while at the same time the amount of information, that is produced by living beings, will converge towards infinity. When the sun collapses in about five billion years, the only chance to survive, according to Tipler, lies in a pure virtual existence of humankind in gigantic computers. Tipler identifies the aiming point of cosmological history, the point Omega, with god (Tipler 1995). The book was criticised mainly because of the "hostile takeover" of religion by physics and even the internationally well known theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg contributed a differentiated commentary on Tipler's theory. (Birtel 1995; Ellis 1994; Pannenberg 1995).

In opposition to Tipler the posthumanist visions of American cyberneticist Marvin Minsky are characterized by a blatant criticism of religion. His influence on posthumanist philosophy can hardly be overestimated, since the co-founder of MIT's *Media Lab* was the mentor of several of today's posthumanist and transhumanist thinkers.⁴ Minsky's significance for posthumanism is most notably based on the formation of the cybernetic idea of human beings. Thus, human beings are defined as a pattern of information which could be simulated by a computer (Minsky 1982; 1988; 1994). He combines his excellent reputation as AI researcher with his engagement for transhumanist organizations.⁵

Hans Moravec (*1948) is director of the largest American robotics institute, the *Mobile Robot Laboratory* of the *Carnegie-Mellon University* in Pittsburgh. In 1988 his controversial work *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* appeared and is regarded as the proper foundation of posthumanism for many adherents. Yet, the foreword of the book sounds like a preamble of posthumanism:

Engaged for billions of years in a relentless, spiralling arms race with one another, our genes have finally outsmarted themselves ... What awaits us is not oblivion but rather a future which, from our present vantage point, is best described by the words "postbiological" or even "supernatural". It is a world in which the human race has been swept away by the tide of cultural change, usurped by its own artificial progeny ... within the next century they will mature into entities as complex as ourselves, and eventually into something transcending everything we know – in whom we can take pride when they refer to themselves as our descendants ... (Moravec 1988:1)

Moravec assumes that these posthuman artificial intelligences have the same relation to humankind as children have to their parents. Moravec has repeated this message for one

⁴ Raymond Kurzweil, Luc Steels and Sasha Chislenko have been his students.

⁵ Minsky joins the congresses of American transhumanists and since 1997 he is a member of the scientific advisory board of the cryonic foundation Alcor.

and a half decades, now, and also his second monograph *Robot: Mere Machines to Transcendent Mind* sparked large interest in the USA (Moravec 1999). Moravec's significance for the posthumanist philosophy is due to the fact that he was the first to conceive a technological possibility of immortalization as a scientist in 1988. Precisely he depicts the technical way of this so called "transmigration", that will according to Moravec be available in 2018:

You've just been wheeled into the operating room. A robot brain surgeon is in attendance. By your side is a computer waiting to become a human equivalent, lacking only a program to run ... The robot surgeon opens your brain case and places a hand on the brain's surface ... Instruments in the hand scan the first few millimeters of brain surface ... These measurements, added to a comprehensive understanding of human neural architecture, allow the surgeon to write a program that models the behavior of the uppermost layer of scanned brain tissue. This program is installed in a small portion of the waiting computer and activated ... The process is repeated for the next layer ... In a final disorientating step the surgeon lifts out his hand. Your suddenly abandoned body goes into spasms and dies. For a moment you experience only quite and dark. Then, once again, you can open your eyes ... Your metamorphosis is complete. (Moravec 1988:109 et seq.)

While humankind will slowly die off in the real world, Moravec's vision promises a never-ending virtual existence in the storage of a computer. This particular point of Moravec's *Mind Children* marks the specific technical operation of immortalization for subsequent posthumanist authors: the human brain is the template for a scanning process, which leads to the immortal existence in cyberspace.

The successful IT entrepreneur Raymond Kurzweil (*1948) brought his newest book *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* to market, coming along with a professional publicity campaign in several countries (Kurzweil 1999). He was even nominated as the leading thinker of posthumanism by many feature authors, who criticized his technocentric prophecies (Borchers 1999; Guillaume 2000; Tenbrock 1999). In his 1999 book, Kurzweil introduces the beginning of humankind's end: in 2099 human beings and machines will have merged and humankind will have overcome its biological conditionality.

4. The Gnostic Interpretation

Several media philosophers and postmodern thinkers construe this virtual utopia of posthumanism as an expression of Gnostic philosophy. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek and the Californian author Erik Davis conclude that posthumanist and technocentric visions which argue for overcoming the human body in favor of an existence in virtuality imply a Gnostic dimension of cyberspace – here, Davis uses the striking term *techgnosis* (Davis 1998: 123 et seq.). While Žižek identifies the overcoming of the human body as overcoming of human sexuality (Žižek 2000), Davis recognizes the virtual existence inside a computer based on binary logic, information theory and mathematics as an scientific expression of the antique platonic assumption, that behind the world of matter there is a higher reality of mathematics and geometric structures (Davis 1998:124 et seq.). In addition, the German sociologists Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf identified Gnostic motives in the ongoing technological euphoria:

Civilization as transformation of the body into mind was and still is on the other hand an abstraction of the body. Its spiritualization, which was favored by enlightenment sympathizers, comes along with pure light; matter is black and dark. Thus, it was self-evident that it would surpass the senses, above all the senses of distance. There was a direct path from the strategy of improvement to the substitution of physical abilities. (Kamper & Wulf 1984b:12)

In his treatise on the future and reality of cybersex, the Finnish author Hannu Eerikäinen even interprets the whole cyber-discourse as a total overcoming of the body:

The grand message of the cyber discourse is that we are living in a cyber-culture empowering us to transcend into cyberspace where we can surf as cybernauts set free from all the constraints of corporeality and matter, in the primal state of the matrix, in pure virtuality. (Eerikäinen 2000:38)

As we have seen in the beginning these ideas suggest a Gnostic or Platonic interpretation of the virtual existence in cyberspace according to Hartmut Boehme and Elisabeth List. The Gnostic idea of a body of light is equated with the posthumanist fiction of electronic and visual simulations of bodies in cyberspace (Boehme 1996; List 1996; Heim 1993). Since posthumanist authors never explicitly sympathize with Gnostic traditions, the question arises as to why the idea of a virtual existence is hastily construed as a Gnostic perception by Žižek, Davis and many others.

One cause can be seen in the fact that the idea of cyberspace already implies metaphysical assumptions. In 1993, Michael Heim alluded to the metaphysics of virtual reality – but this euphonic metaphor, which was frequently cited by postmodern authors, was based solely on the single sentence of a less known computer scientist and Michael Heim's free association of religious and cybernetic goals.⁶

Another reason for the potential misinterpretation may be found in the Platonic rhetoric that is part of the occidental culture and that is used sporadically by posthumanist authors. Sometimes religious metaphors such as the “liberation of the physical ties” (Davis 1998: 123) are employed. But it would be ignoring the semantic contexts of these metaphoric catchwords if one takes these isolated expressions as the fundament of posthumanist reasoning. Thus, Hans Moravec alludes to an age of mind (*Zeitalter des Geistes*) and a state of mind (*Staat des Geistes*) in his highly regarded contribution in the German *Kunstforum International*, but what follows here is merely a quantifying listing of the greater power and the expected wealth, storage capacities and computation rates of the posthuman entities – no Gnostic arguments at all (Moravec 1996: 108-112). This paradigmatic misinterpretation demonstrates the necessity of a more accurate analysis of posthuman utopias because the structures of posthumanist reasoning referring to the overcoming of the biological body and to the existence in cyberspace are significant for the legitimating of a Gnostic interpretation of posthumanism.

5. What is Gnosis?

The term Gnosis – or the meaning hidden behind this idea – is one of the most controversial questions of historical, theological and philosophical research. But as far as Cybergnosis and Cyberplatonism are mentioned in the context of posthumanism, a specific attribute of Gnostic philosophy is focused: namely the disdain of the world.

The anthropological and cosmological dualism is characteristic for the Gnostic world view. A good unknown deity of a metaphysical sphere is confronted with one evil deity or several evil beings, which have created the baneful, visible and material world. This dualistic nature is also reflected in the nature of human beings: the human body is regarded as the prison of the divine essence, of the human mind – the *voũç*. In many Gnostic movements the human mind is interpreted as an imprisoned part of the deity that has to be released from his mortal frame in order to reunite with the deity on a higher ontological sphere. The consequence of this attitude is the persistent contempt of the body and all physical actions, primarily sexuality (Berger 1984; Heimerl 2003: 189 et seq.).

⁶ The MIT scientist David Zeltzer characterized virtual reality as the Holy Grail of computer sciences, because the perfect simulation of reality, which we know from science-fiction, would probably never be realizable. This metaphor proves, according to Heim, the esoteric essence of virtual reality, which encourages him to start a philosophical staccato from King Arthur till Wagner's *Parsifal* (Heim 1993: 123-128).

This element of the release of the mind from the body is implied in the terms of Cyberplatonism and Cybergnosis. However, the contexts, the complex reasoning and substantial aspects are completely different in the Gnostic idea and in posthumanism. But this difference is clouded by recent perceptions which are shaped by Christian, Platonic or Gnostic patterns. It might be appropriate to describe the holistic world utopia of the French philosopher Pierre Lévy as a kind of Cyberplatonism or Cybergnosis but this does not seem to be adequate for posthumanism as we will see sequencing (Lévy 1994).

6. The Body in Posthumanism

All the posthumanist authors which are treated here – Tipler, Moravec, Minsky, and Kurzweil – share the idea of the self-abandonment of humankind in favor of artificial intelligence. Already in 1964 the Polish writer Stanisław Lem named this idea a "curious form of euthanasia, something like a comfortable civilized suicide" (Lem 1981: 340). But the vision of a technical immortalization of humankind is always connected with it: an existence in virtuality should guarantee eternal life with eternal youth, endless wisdom and endless wealth for everyone and everlasting self-development partly even in a spiritual dimension till Tipler's vision of a union with the Christian god. But what will happen with the body? Can we speak of a Gnostic release from the body?

It seems to be appropriate to distinguish three aspects of this very question. First, the idea of man in posthumanism – the relation of body and mind; secondly, the utopias of bodies in their virtual existence; and finally, the scale of progress in posthumanist philosophy.

6.1 The Idea of Man in Posthumanism

According to posthumanism, human beings are determined materialistically. There is no soul, no metaphysics. Referring Descartes and LaMettrie the human body is defined as a complex machine (Minsky 1988:30-39; Barrow & Tipler 1989:513-522; Tipler 1995:124; Moravec 1988:72; Moravec 1999:110-124; Kurzweil 1999:5). Here, posthumanism receives a cybernetic paradigm that has been generated mainly by Norbert Wiener in 1940s and 1950s. Accordingly, the identity of the intelligent thinking human being is not based in its body but on the mere information that is contained in the body:

We are beginning to see that such important elements as the neurons, the atoms of the nervous complex of our body, do their work under much the same conditions as vacuum tubes, with their relatively small power supplied from outside by the circulation, and that the book-keeping which is most essential to describe their function is not one of energy. In short, the newer study of automata, whether in the metal or in the flesh, is a branch of communication engineering, and its cardinal notions are those of message, amount of disturbance or "noise" ... quantity of information, coding technique, and so on. (Wiener 1961:42)

It is quite evident that posthumanism is essentially based on this cybernetic paradigm. This paradigm sees a human being from a scientific perspective as a machine and from the perspective of communication technology as a pattern of information. Thus, posthumanism decontextualizes a non-semantic definition of information that has been pragmatically developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in the context of communication technology – but from their technologically determined context the concept of information was used to create an ideology that ties personal human identity to a disembodied pattern of information (Shannon & Weaver 1962:95-106). Norbert Wiener's definition of human beings as a message and his speculations on transferring this message by dint of a body scan in 1950 seem to be only a few steps apart from analogous considerations of Hans Moravec when the latter suggests storing this "human message" in a computer and bestowing upon it an eternal existence.

According to the cybernetic paradigm, human beings are information processing machines of which the immaterial program with its specific instructions constitutes the singular human personality. The history of ideas enables us to understand how posthumanist authors

perceived Descartes' philosophy. While the dominance of the soul over the body is valid only in Descartes' proof of existence, posthumanism makes the thinking principle – the information processing functions of the human brain – absolute: they are the very essence of the human being.

6.2 Utopias of Bodies

This pattern theory of identity, which is the fundament for the idea of existence in cyberspace, must not hide the fact that this does not mean the end of all corporal utopias in the posthuman visions. How do Tipler, Moravec and Kurzweil depict corporeal existence in cyberspace?

According to posthumanist authors, all kinds of reality will be available in this virtual state, so every immortal human being can pick out his most enjoyable world and realize special corporeal utopias. Human beings can change their appearance if desired. You are allowed to savor all culinary pleasures you long for, and you are able to touch and feel other virtual beings. Frank Tipler answers a question that commonly arises among his male unmarried students: "Will there be sex in heaven?" – whereas "heaven" is equated with a virtual existence by Tipler (Tipler gives regular lectures on his Omega-theory at New Orleans's Tulane University).

... since some people desire sex, the answer has to be yes, sex will be available to those who wish it ... However, the problems which sex generates in our present life will not occur in the afterlife ... it would be possible for each male to be matched not merely with the most beautiful woman in the world, not merely with the most beautiful woman who has ever lived, but to be matched with the most beautiful woman whose existence is logically possible ... about two thirds of adult humans experience at some point in their live an intense passion for a member of opposite sex which is not reciprocated: this is the phenomenon of unrequited love. The Omega Point has the power to turn this passion into *requited* love in the afterlife. (Tipler 1995:256 et seq.)

Hans Moravec and Raymond Kurzweil also create paradisiacal male fantasies referring to the prospective virtual existence of men: you will discover new dimensions of sexuality partly with virtual playmates and without any fears of impotence or risks for your physical health (Kurzweil 1999:146-149): "... not just sex. Not even just very good sex. *Incredible sex*, without such penalties as AIDS or unwanted pregnancy or even the wrath of a jealous lover." (Moravec & Pohl 1993:74).

Posthumanism promises a release from our concrete body but by no means is there an end to physicality or even sexuality!

6.3 The Scale of Progress

Finally we have to ask for the plausibility of the posthumanist idea of progress. Why do bodies *have to* be overcome according to posthumanism? That's the question for the scale of progress which defines the normative foundation of the prospective progress.

It is distinctive that the measure of information processing is the fundament of progress in Tipler's concept. As far as Tipler determines life with information processing, every kind of progress signifies an increase in information processing. Even the final unification with god and the resurrection (or simulation) of the dead depends on the future power of information processing devices for handling huge amounts of information that are needed for this "perfecting" (Barrow & Tipler 1986:55-65).

Likewise Marvin Minsky identifies *thinking* in terms of problem solving processes as the basic purpose of intelligent systems – he condemns men's trivial entertainment (such as football or pop music) as wasting thinking capacities of our precious brains. Therefore the continuation

of biological life would be nothing but the prodigality of the robots' future thinking capacity: "We owe our minds to the deaths and lives of all the creatures that were ever engaged in the struggle called Evolution. Our job is to see that all this work shall not end up in meaningless waste." (Minsky 1994:113)

Hans Moravec and Raymond Kurzweil also connect progress with the increase of information processing, although they focus on technical and quantitative comparisons between biological brains and past and prospective capacities of computers. Colorful graphs on the increasing number of calculations per second are combined with the assumption of an increasing intelligence of those thinking systems (Moravec 1988:51-74; Moravec 1999:51-72; Kurzweil 1999:9-39, 189-252).

The fundamental for posthumanist authors referred to here is the maximizing of information processing capacities. Progress of humankind and bodiless virtual existence are not legitimated by metaphysics – e.g. as a transformation into a higher ontological state – but are invoked in the context of a mere utilitarian understanding of progress and evolution.

In posthumanism, the material world and the biological body of human beings is not generally regarded as a principally evil sphere that must be overcome. One can even notice a certain respect for the abilities of the human mind by the AI researchers such as Minsky and Kurzweil. There is *no* fundamental dualistic world view of an ethically and ontologically condemnable world and, for example, a higher metaphysical state of being in a virtual sphere. Moravec's and Tipler's vision of transforming the whole universe into a thinking entity by technical means opposes the Gnostic assumption that there is already a metaphysical reality.

The human body with its limited mental abilities has simply become obsolete in the course of technological developments of the past centuries. In the view of posthumanism it is as antiquated as the record has become obsolete after the introduction of compact disks. But the older sound storage medium is not characterized as "bad" in principle. The parallel with a record is quite evident since older audio recordings necessarily shall be preserved as much as human life and accordingly human culture shall continue in all posthumanist visions. The German philosopher Guenther Anders has already depicted the image of the challenged body of the working man who has to compete with the power, precision, and speed of machines. Here, the human body is not only in an inferior position, but also seems to be a barrier for the future progress:

Man is the saboteur of his own achievements. "Saboteur" not because he would lay violent hands on his products ... but because he as a "living being" is fixed and not free; in contrast the "dead things" are dynamic and "free"; because he, as a child of nature, as a born being, as body, is too well-defined, to join in the daily changes of machines' world ... (Anders 1983:34).

It is due to the French philosopher Paul Virilio that we have a substantial analysis of the phenomena of movement and pace in the history of modernity. On the basis of his observations he generated the thesis of immense acceleration of action in nearly all dimensions of the life-world. After the discovery of the speed of light and the distribution of electronic communication devices the "time of light" is the absolute measure of time for action (Virilio 1996:26). As a consequence from this experience with technology the feeling of an increasing inertia is created, according to Virilio, since television, Internet etc. encourages the immovable mobility – disabled persons are the pathological model of the terminal-citizen who is upgraded with interactive prostheses (Virilio 1996:34). Referring to Marvin Minsky, Virilio concludes that the urge for eliminating distance has been carried forward inside the "living human machine" by substituting biological organs (Virilio 1994:114).

Under this perspective, the expected acceleration of information processing (nothing else is life according to posthumanism) gains its existential relevance which culminates in the substitution of humankind by the faster machines. The body of human beings is obsolete because the neural "information processing" is considered to be too slow to compete with the light speed of electronic media and computers. Therefore, the human body has to be overcome by the criterion of cybernetic efficiency and not because of Gnostic motives.

7. Conclusion

The diffuse idea of cyberspace with all its connotations is often equated with Gnosis, Platonism or even Hermetics and is mainly presented as the essence of postmodern media theory and posthumanist or transhumanist futurology. Hitherto the considerations above have shown that the use of the term Cybergnosis or Cyberplatonism in the context of posthumanism are inappropriate – as far as Gnosis is not understood as a totally arbitrary notion which fails any analytical potential. Neither the idea of man, nor the motives for overcoming the human body, nor the physical utopias of virtual existence can be named Gnostic. Deconstructing the posthumanist sources, we can recognize very clearly that the Platonic dualism of body and mind is not accepted by the materialistic philosophy of posthumanism. If someone pretends that Minsky and Moravec are proper Gnostics, this uttering reveals more about the metaphysical implications of postmodern media theory than the reality of posthumanism.

In the context of the posthumanist discourse, our bodies are not obsolete because they are ethically evil or because posthumanists long for an existence in an ontologically higher reality or virtuality. The posthumanist reasoning is completely different. Because the ongoing increase of computer's information processing capacities and the anticipated integration of the human personality by uploading suggests an enormous augmentation of efficiency, the virtual existence seems to be promising. The arguments are not Gnostic but utilitarian! Also the idea of overcoming the body, which is considered to be central by Žižek and Davis, must be examined. In posthumanist visions, bodies do not disappear at all: what has to be overcome is the material, real, concrete biological human body while simultaneously a vast number of new body images were created. This ambivalent phenomenon might be terminologically comprehended by the differentiation between body (*Koerper*) and corporeality (*Koerperlichkeit*). Posthumanism proclaims the overcoming of the body but not for the overcoming of corporeality since the future visions are characterized by definite physical actions – sexuality plays a decisive role here. If Gnosis means that not only the concrete material body shall lose its significance but also that physical actions are stigmatized, it is not appropriate to characterize posthumanism as a Gnostic philosophy. Referring to Slavoj Žižek's introductory words, posthumanism postulates the vision of corporeality without a body but not of mind without a body.

In conclusion, this analysis perhaps has demonstrated that it is expedient to consider the semantic contexts of philosophical ideas – even if it seems as if they have much in common. A metaphysic philosophy such as Gnosis and posthumanism have different aims and different structures, although both might be able to establish sense in people's (limited) life.

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