



TECHNOLOGY AND AS SOCIAL IMAGINARY

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Technology and/as Social Imaginary Vol. II

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An Introduction to Technology and the Social Imaginary

As is now well known the modernist *avant garde* in the early part 20th Century dedicated itself to contesting the modern separation of technology from both art and from everyday life. This was encapsulated in the aims and aspirations of the surrealist movement as well in the revolutionary technological fantasies of the futurists. In this way, modern technology had an important part to play in new modernist ideas of art where the perceived power of modern technology to dismantle the individualism of bourgeois high culture amounted to a new modernist 'cult of technology' (see Huyssen 1986). These avant garde movements were centrally involved in the development of a 'productionist' modernist social imaginary of a perfectly, ordered, dynamic and hygienic world – the Brave New World of 'Our Ford, Our Freud'. Here a variety of thinkers viewed technology through the prism of industrialisation in having produced a particular and peculiar experience of life – uniform, rationalised, standardised and utilitarian where everything exists in order to *um zu*. In this way the modernist cultural revolutionaries explored the consequences of modern forms of technological production and consumption for the development of human consciousness and for the development of fully technological forms of life that reside beyond the technocratic hierarchy of experts and the mechanistic styles of social interaction that threatened to reduce cognition to the 'componentiality' of the assembly line (see Berger et. al., 1974).

Many sociological and philosophical studies of technology continue to focus on the production and consumption moments of the human-technology nexus. In so doing, they focus on the stages of a device's development and use where the nature, function and meaning ascribed to any specific device is still open and unsettled, where political factors are still important determinants of technology use. However, the world has modernised further and technology has emerged as an all embracing *umwelt* rather than a device or a thing – and recent technological change has brought with it a raft of new technological innovations that seem to have undermined the older modernist social imaginary. In this regard, many new electronic, virtual, machines of the post-war world not only threatened the viability of older modernist imaginaries but presaged the emergence of a new one where new kinds of intelligent, cybernetic, worlds redefined what we mean not only be experience but also perception, thought, time, history and the imagination itself. Much of the contemporary cultural environment has now become 'technological' and 'technological' in a new more metaphysical sense to the (largely instrumental) conception that was at play in the modernist social imaginary. Technology resonates more directly with primary discursivities of to the lifeworld and it becomes seamlessly connected to everyday life.

Technology, today, is in and of the lifeworld and yet at the same time radically other to it (this is the paradox that any adequate philosophical conception of technology must face); it represents the totally familiar yet at the same time continues to disrupt and re-route established structures of feeling. Today technology has become an affective force, connected to sensation and sensuality in new ways, but also a force that is reconnecting with older pre-modern discourses. In our new technological condition, the technological as it becomes concerned with speed/movement and new forms of the sensuous it increasingly takes on a spiritual, 'holistic', significance and a more primordial *telos* in relation to human practices and institutions.

All of the papers in this special issue of *Im@go* (the first issue of what we be a two-part publication) explore this changed situation *vis-à-vis* our relationship to modern technics and the issues that it presents for how we are to understand our emergent techno-social imaginary. All of the papers contained here are searching for new philosophical and theoretical openings in relation to a changed and changing technological landscape, openings that will require new senses of inter-disciplinarily and conceptuality in they are to prove illuminating. Only by such means will philosophy and social theory be able to rise to the challenge of describing the basic forms and forces involved in shaping the second industrial world, in the manner in which Walter Benjamin did in relation to the older one.

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Imaginary, technique and human nature: a morphological reading

Pier Luca Marzo

Abstract

The paper that follows intends to explore the interface between the imaginary and technique in relation to the question of human nature. The route that will be taken in this exploratory journey will be traced via the conceptual maps of morphology that began to appear with Goethe's studies of nature. Following this cartographic tradition, I claim that human nature is a particular energetic field activated thanks to the relationship of two polarities: one is the imaginary and the other is the technique. Into this energetic field the life of the social-historical forms – in which each human community takes a specific place in the world; to be born, to live and to die cyclically. Therefore, this is the final destination of the journey that is offered to the reader here.

Keywords

Nature / environment / form / imaginary / technique

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Introduction

The unhistorical resembles an enveloping atmosphere in which alone life is generated only to disappear again with the destruction of this atmosphere. It is true: only so far as man, by thinking, reflecting, comparing, dividing and joining, limits that unhistorical element; only so far as a bright lightning flash of light occurs within that encircling cloud of mist—that is, only through the power to use the past for life and to refashion what has happened into history, does man become man: but with an excess of history man ceases again, and without that cloak of the unhistorical he would never have begun and dared to begin. (Nietzsche, 1980: 11)

The following paper intends to explore the interweaving between the imaginative and the technical dimension by linking it to human nature. The route that guides this voyage of discovery will be traced via the conceptual maps of morphology, which appeared after Goethe's studies on Nature. He was the first cartographer of life forms who tried to lead science to think with nature rather than about nature. This approach was not totally unheeded by the paradigms within the rising natural sciences. There were some German thinkers of Kultur who between the end of the 19th century and the 20th century took up the Goethian way to understand, in vital terms, historical social processes. It is not by chance that Nietzsche, one of the first followers of this movement, recalls the poet-scientist in the opening of his essay *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Nietzsche, 1980: 7). Nietzsche stresses that human time is not all inscribed in history; there is an unhistorical dimension as well. This dimension does not refer to a metaphysical level, like the one which bypasses the spirit in Hegelian history. The Nietzschean unhistorical dimension is an elementary place, a natural landscape – as can be noted in the passage cited above – so full of energy able to generate and destroy the historical world cyclically. In this breakdown of human temporality you can see how Nietzsche finds in Goethe that elective figure with whom to interact in order to identify the historical-landscape that binds human temporality to the dynamics of life. The imaginative and technical spheres will be defined as the polarity of activation of this unhistorical energy field; and from this the unrepeatable historical-social forms in which human communities



have always lived in the world find both their centre of configuration and the origins of those erosive currents that, dissolve in a cycle. This is the theory that I will try to develop on the journey that I am suggesting to the reader.

I. The energetic nature of Nature: physis and/as gestaltung

To begin to enter the unhistorical world, it is necessary to fulfil the transvaluation of values – to use another Nietzschean expression – that is the matrix within our traditional way of thinking towards the construction of the concept of nature, especially that of human nature.

It is unavoidable, when dealing with that concept, not to refer to the famous debate between Chomsky and Foucault aired in November 1971 on Dutch television¹. Thanks to the ability of Fons Elders, the moderator of the debate, the meeting was able to transform the television studio in an epic joust between two knights of the critical thinking of the era. What was at stake was the very notion of human nature. After almost 50 years, the scientific debate has only served to prolong and radicalize the rift that opened during the Foucault / Chomsky dispute and this without there being a TV studio to duel in.

The mandatory step on our journey towards an account of human nature must be found in this studio. Try and imagine for a moment sitting in the Dutch audience listening again to the words of that day in November. Foucault, from the prestigious 'castle' of Collège de France, from the start immediately shows his impatience at the term nature and even more to that of human nature. As evidenced by his acute reasoning, human nature is nothing natural; it is on the contrary that epistemologically revelatory indication of the new scientific discourse which appeared at the end of the 18th century². Until then, Foucault continues, living beings were part of a broader framework that ranged from minerals to man. Biology and medicine distinguished the part of these beings included in this generic framework through the concept of life through which more a quality was designated to these beings; it carried out the task of outlining the boundaries of their rising discursive order. Even the concept of human nature for Foucault performs a similar

¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfNI2LOGf8>

² "It seems to me more likely that the transformations of biological knowledge at the end of the eighteenth century were demonstrated on one hand by a whole series of new concepts for use in scientific discourse and on the other hand gave rise to a notion like that of life which has enabled us to designate, to delimit, and to situate a certain type of scientific discourse, among other things. I would say that the notion of life is not a scientific concept; it has been an epistemological indicator of which the classifying, delimiting, and other functions had an effect on scientific discussions, and not on what they were talking about. Well, it seems to me that the notion of human nature is of the same type." (Foucault, 1974: 17)



function by whoever unknowingly uses it – and it is what he gently scolds his contender for in the woven linguistic structure of the knowledge power nexus (Foucault, 1974: 43). On the other side of the table, Chomsky, from the equally prestigious castle of the Institute of Technology in Massachusetts, responds blow for blow to the cutting remarks from his adversary. While agreeing with some of Foucault's points, the question for him is not all due to a language game produced by scientific structures. Apart from this, for the American linguist, there is a certain biological organisation that characterized the human cognitive structure that remained unchanged from Homo du Cro-Magnon³ onwards. This is what drives him to track down man's originating core, which is organically based and has a set of values such as justice, creativity and non violence (Chomsky, 1974: 42-43). Chomsky thinks the evolution of science, despite its jagged path, is responsible - and has to recognise these founding human values through which it is possible to free man from those residues of history which repress him in dominant social systems such as those produced by the State, by the multinationals or the police (Chomsky, 1974: 39). These are the values Chomsky specifies that legitimize disobedience, at times violent, if oriented at a higher level of justice which is closer to humanity.

Therefore, human nature is a cultural artefact produced by scientific discourses as Foucault argues, or is it the inner organic nucleus in man's cognitive structure indicated by Chomsky?

Rather than determine whose side I am on, I believe the historic moment has come to highlight their unintentional point of contact. Both of them brought back the idea of nature either to something, or a substance; a linguistic object for Foucault or something organic for Chomsky. These are the two conceptual points of view that still generate today that insidious narrow concept that just as the mythological monsters Scylla and Charybdis that separate Sicily from Europe, seem to swallow the reflections of those who choose to enter. To navigate these discursive eddies, which are only the resurfacing of the archetypal dichotomy of nature-culture, I will refer to as physis; to that term with which the pre-Socratic world declined the term nature (Heidegger, 2000). It is possible to read in a fragment by Heraclitus:

³ "Well, I think that as a matter of biological and anthropological fact, the nature of human intelligence certainly has not changed in any substantial way, at least since the seventeenth century, or probably since Cro-Magnon man. That is, I think that the fundamental properties of our intelligence, those that are within the domain of what we are discussing tonight, are certainly very ancient; and that if you took a man from five thousand or maybe twenty thousand years ago and placed him as a child within today's society, he would learn what everyone else learns, and he would be a genius or a fool or something else, but he wouldn't be fundamentally different." (Chomsky, 1974: 36)



Imaginary, technique and human nature: a morphological reading

P. L. Marzo

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That which always was, and is, and will be everliving fire, the same for all, the cosmos, made neither by god nor man, replenishes in measure as it burns away. (Heraclitus, 2001: 44).

The view of nature as outlined in the fragment does not find its reference in something; physis, on the contrary, is a generative elemental power of the entire cosmos: that of fire. These are the measurements by which it replenishes and burns in a way that makes the world appear and disappear. A processual creative cycle that in itself is the origin and the end - surpassing both the demiurgic will of gods and the hybris of man. In fact they are not the centre of emission of this revelatory power of the cosmos, but only passive spectators who can impose nothing on its flickering. It seems evident that such a vision of nature is what makes every objectification misleading; to do this would be to leave the eternal rhythmic movement that makes each life form instrumental in its fiery dynamic..

Only a few decades later, with the beginning of philosophy, will the Heraclitean physis cease to be a flow, to become the field of changing and deceptive phenomena to be redefined within the immutable categories of logos. A vision that, within our tradition of thought, begins to separate the world; the physical, which is the centre of the mutability of natural phenomena, from the metaphysical, centre of immutable truth. In this division, philosophical thought wanders in the metaphysical world in order to explain the physical one and not vice versa (Heidegger, 1997).

The historico-cultural crossroads created in medieval times between philosophy and theology will cause a second degree of separation between the physical and the metaphysical world. In this case it will be God that takes the place of the logos becoming, as we read in the book of Genesis, the creator of everything in the world: day and night, the earth and seas, the plants, the animals and also man, who is a copy created in his own image and likeness. Also in this case nature becomes a product, a *natura naturata* through the work of *natura naturante*, of God (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 26-27).

Modernity radicalized this disjunctive thought, producing the secularization process that will make of nature a mere *res-extensa*, as Descartes calls it (Descartes, 1998). After the logos and God, it is only the *res-cogitans* of the modern individual that gives reasons in geometric terms of nature reduced to a purely material extension devoid of every magical-religious value.

Foucault and Chomsky, in this context, have merely continued to foreground this genealogy of separation and reification of nature. Even for them, nature is not a flow of energy, but rather a hypostatized world; an inert object for fervent discussion without having its own word - an alien dimension from elsewhere, from the world of ideas, from God's creation, from the intellect which doubts, or from the structure of science. In the modern era it has been the unfashionable science of Goethe which has become the



emerging source of a conception of physis as energy flow concealed from our tradition of thought. As with Heraclitus, even for Goethe nature is neither immutable, nor closed, nor fixed but an idea at work, as he categorically states in the following passage:

The Germans have a word for the complex of existence presented by a physical organism: Gestalt [structured form]. With this expression they exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character. But if we look at all these Gestalten, especially the organic ones, we will discover that nothing in them is permanent, nothing is at rest or defined —everything is in a flux of continual motion. This is why German frequently and fittingly makes use of the word Bildung [formation] to describe the end product and what is in process of production as well. Thus in setting forth a morphology we should not speak of Gestalt, or if we use the term we should at least do so only in reference to the idea, the concept, or to an empirical element held fast for a mere moment of time. When something has acquired a form it metamorphoses immediately to a new one. If we wish to arrive at some living perception of nature we ourselves must remain as quick and flexible as nature and follow the example she gives. (Goethe, 1988: 63-64)

As well as the Heraclitean cosmic flare, even the continuous oscillation of the whole of the natural realm finds its measure in the form of crystals, in physical phenomena, in plants, in insects, in the higher animals up to man. Each form, is according to Goethe, the particular expression through which to grasp empirically the entelechy of nature; that harmony in which each part participates in the whole movement. Therefore, for morphology, nature is not defined as a place that serves as a container for the various partitions of organic matter contained within it; it is a continuous creative flow that is in each form, both in discontinuity and continuity. For Goethe, this discontinuity and continuity is to be found in the static quality of the form (Gestalt), in that micro-cosmos that differentiates, for example, a plant from an insect; whereas the continuity is to be located in the formative process (Bildung), in the movement expressed by the micro-cosmos which allows both the plant and insect to metamorphose. Analogy is the Goethean method through which to read this discontinuity continuity since:

Everything that exists is an analogue of all existing things; that is why existence always and at the same time looks to us both separate and interlocked. (Goethe, 1998: 1665)

Unlike the similarity which relates two distinct elements by searching for their mutual similarities, analogy finds such similarities in a third element, which is present to a certain extent in both. This third element for morphology does not exist in itself, but is immanent in variable proportions between the form and the movement through which nature operates across the spectrum of the phenomenal world - from the inorganic to the

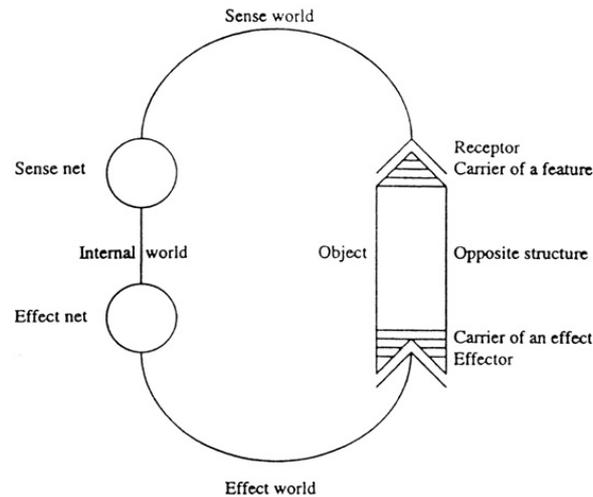


organic. For Goethe, this is the cognitive solution for avoiding that decomposed and-static vision of nature produced by the classification of Linneaus, his great enemy along with Newton. In 19th century the Goethean route to universal science after Nietzsche was followed by the morphologists of social life as Simmel, Spengler and Jünger (Marzo, 2007). Each of them identifies in social form and historical dynamics those analogical proportions of nature that characterize the human environment. It will be the focus on environmental concepts in the following passage that will allow me to begin to weave the relationship between imagination and technique in such a way as to understand both the similarities and discontinuities that exist between the animal and human environments.

II. Animal environments: nature in a world of bubbles

Until the publication of the essay *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (Uexküll, 2010) by the biologist and zoologist Jakob von Uexküll, the natural sciences took for granted the existence of a life common to all organisms, an idea which prolonged the paradigm in biology of the Newtonian universe based on the invariance of space-time. This, as is known, was paradigmatic up to the exposure of the theory of restricted relativity developed by Einstein in 1905. A few decades afterwards Uexküll's studies produced a similar paradigmatic transition bringing the theory of relativity into the world of organic life. Through a passage in unknown invisible worlds, Uexküll shows the reader how each species is placed in its own space-time, that defines its Umwelt - its environment. In this way Nature becomes made up of specific environments, of demarcated bubbles within which the species perceive only a partiality of the world; which relates to the characteristics of their organic forms. Take for example the tick which, as Uexküll tells us, is the minimal being without eyes that can orient in the world with its sense of smell and launches itself from the branch of a tree only when it smells the butyric acid of mammals to suck their blood and lay its eggs (Uexküll, 2010: 42). What does Uexküll's tick tell us?

That not all natural space-time enters its environment, but only that perceived within its sense of smell calibrated by the odour of its victim, beyond which natural space ceases to exist. Other species, like the tick, are in a relative relationship with the world. This, according to that functional circuit that Uexküll - in a table from his essay (Uexküll, 2010: 48) – he represents in this way:



The scheme is valuable not only because it exemplifies the concept of environment, but also because it allows me to begin to disclose the relationship between image and technique. If on the left of the circuit we find the organism, that space is made up of perceptive and operative organs, then on the right is the object, that aspect of the world with which it is in relation. The image is what occupies the upper part of the scheme proposed by Uexküll; that level within which each body gives form to the perceptual data based on its own sensory kit. In this sense the image is obviously not referable to that tricky world of shadows that, from mythical Platonic's cave, our tradition of thought has separated from the real world. The image is, on the contrary, the framework within which the complexity of the stimuli from the surrounding area is seduced based on the perceptual characteristics of the organism; thanks to this process of representation, the organism can enter into sensory contact with the object that arouses its attention with that part of the world its environment reveals as a 'whole'. Let us use the subtlety of Simmel's thought to requalify the term image;

We are convinced that all representations of what exists are functions of a specific physical and psychological organization which do not mirror the outside world in any mechanical way. The images of the world of an insect with its mosaic eyes, of an eagle with its almost inconceivably keen sight, of an olm with its buried, functionless eyes, of ourselves and of innumerable other species, must be profoundly different from each other; and we must conclude that none of them reproduces the content of the external world in its inherent objectivity. Nevertheless these representations, which have been characterized at least negatively, form the presuppositions, the material and the directives for our practical activity, through which we establish a relationship with the world as it exists in relative independence of our subjectively determined representation. (Simmel, 2004: 333-334)



Therefore, the images are not something ephemeral; they are those forms of representation, which despite their partiality, provide the species with that material that presides over the practical action. It is here that we encounter the other pole of the Uexküllian scheme, the operational field that along with the perceptual circuit that makes up the animal environments. If the image elaborates the stimuli, the operational scheme is the answer with which the organism expresses its forms of representation in action, as happens with the tick. It is the elaboration of its olfactory image of the world that activates its operational plan by which it tactically drops onto its victim's fur to suck its blood. In every animal environment, these are the operational tactics that define the essence of the secondary technique as Spengler explains:

If we are to understand the essence of Technics, we must not start from the technics of the machine age, and still less from the misleading notion that the fashioning of machines and tools is the aim of technics. For, in reality, technics is immemorially old, and moreover it is not something historically specific, but something immensely general. It extends far beyond mankind, back into the life of the animals, indeed of all animals. [...]Technics is the tactics of living; it is the inner form of which the procedure of conflict — the conflict that is identical with Life itself — is the outward expression. (Spengler, 1976: 9)

Therefore technics is not a human specificity: in as much as it is a tactic of life it is what unites all beings, the technics of a form of life is also expressed with degrees of such sophistication as to produce both language and artefacts. Around the middle of the 20th century, Frish, while observing the world of bees, managed to decipher part of their refined language made up not of phonemes but as a choreography expressed by their dances (see Frisch, 1971). It is therefore neither the presence of language that indicates the difference between man and other species nor indeed the technical construction ability. As Lorenz's ethological studies indicate, numerous species - from mammals to insects - express adaptive tactics able to modify their own environments through ingenious constructions. (Lozenz 2008). One cannot say, for example, that the beaver, known to be a skilled architect of dams, or the ant, the planner of real cities with underground anthills, well before the advent of humanity, are not expressions of elaborated construction technics. As well as the image, it is also the technique that binds analogically all forms of life.



III. Man's techno-imaginative environment: a second social nature

Having compared analogically the dimension of the image with the technical one it is necessary to include those specific proportions that differentiate the human environment from the animal one. Of course, man is positioned in his own perceptual and practical space-time, but with a particularity which is his variability. It is this quality which opens that functional circuit between image and technique that characterizes the human environment. Let us begin from the perceptual image, for example an oak, as Uexküll (Uexküll, 2010: 152-156) always says; in its uniqueness it can become the subject of various image constructions. The rational image of an old forester will allow him to perceive it as something from which to derive a woodpile from the movement of his axe. The fairytale image of a young girl immersed in her childhood world can perceive it to be an evil human face to escape from. Basically, man is capable of giving life to endlessly variable images because he also has an imaginative capacity unlike other animals. We can try to locate the imaginative dimension by making use of Damasio's studies on the mind (Damasio, 1994). He says it coincides neither with the body, though it is its essential basis as a sensory receptor, nor with the brain where its prime organic location can be found. The mind, for the Portuguese neurologist, is that neural destination capable of integrating body and brain into a third dimension, thanks to which man can escape from the immediacy of the here and now by generating a creative type of 'open-thinking' with multiple possibilities of interaction in the world that he encounters in his environment. The brain integration of sensory image with mobile or physical ones is what predisposes the neural basis for real mental activity, which in turn processes it in images within a third disposition. As Damasio says:

I propose that subjectivity emerges during the latter step when the brain is producing not just images of an object, not just images of organism responses to the object, but a third kind of image, that of an organism in the act of perceiving and responding to an object. I believe the subjective perspective arises out of the content of the third kind of image. (Damasio, 1994, 242-243)

Imagination is the activity constantly at work through whatever these images of the third kind take form in, by virtue of which we obtain the eccentric consciousness of being actors and spectators at the same time when leading our existence. In this way the mind becomes not only the producer of perceptual and motion images, as happens in other species with brains, but also of the meta-cognitive images placed over the here and now by virtue of the fact that it has the possibility to vary creatively its response patterns of the world. Imagination lies precisely in the capacity of the human mind to interrupt the stimulus-response circuit that binds the other species in the space-time immediacy (see



Marzo 2012). Man is that amphibious being able to be both in the present and out of it, that chronic state of semi-estrangement defined by Gehlen (Gehlen, 2010: 383) through which he can design his existence in terms of action not reaction.

Therefore if imagination is that dimension in which man enters into a relationship to the world in terms of possibility and not of need, it is through its technique that this creative potential takes concrete form. The potential creative imagination is possible due to the particular morphology of the human body. It does not have a particularly heavy sensorial armour, and is genetically without offensive weapons, claws or teeth, and orients awkwardly with its instinct; man is an animal without innate qualities, with a body naturally devoid a technical characterization capable of specializing it (see Gehlen, 2003).

To resume the previous example, it is the beaver that is naturally specialized technically, apart from its sharp claws and slender body, it is already adapted to the construction of dams. The same can be said of the ant that by virtue of powerful jaws can dig the ground for the urban structure of its anthill, but cannot build dams. Both of these species incorporate into their particular anatomical morphology a technique that gives them a perceptual world and an operational one, in such a way to place them in their environmental bubble. The anatomically perfect shapes of the beaver and the ant, link them at the same time to a specific operational chain enabling them to always build with small variations just dams and anthills.

Instead, in man his organic form is undefined and his operational schemes are, consequently, undefined. To interact with the world as other animals do, man must stabilize simultaneously his body through artifices both in material forms (clothing, tools, objects, weapons, architectures) and intangible ones (languages, expressive forms, beliefs) which are capable of closing technically the natural deficiency of his body.

The classic natural/artificial dichotomy shows its limitation here, in fact any human artefact can be considered as a “missing piece of the body” that our specie produces externally to complete its organic nature; for that reason, we can consider these artefacts as a sort of objectification forms of operational schemes through which our species rebalances and strengthens its organism. for that reason, we can consider these artefacts as a sort of objectification forms of operational schemes through which our species on the one hand rebalances its organism and on the other its strength. With the lever, probably one of the first rudimentary tools, man began to experience the possibility of being able to move a volume of weight superior to his own natural muscle strength, and in this way he was able to build (artefacts) something he was not able to do previously. Yet, since then if he wants to do what he previously could not – build particularly strong defensive walls, organise a state, grind grain, irrigate the fields, divide the atom, drill into the skull to let out demons, write with cuneiform characters and so on – he will be forced to appeal world of artefacts. You could say that the animal is tied to its environment by its bodily



restrictions the same way as man is tied to his technical environment in order to stabilize his body. Within this supportive environment man is not only the creator but also the creature as every technical gimmick – language, fire, writing, the law code, printing, biotechnology and so on – is redefined from time to time and even the plasticity of his body.

Therefore the goal of human life is not only to produce technological tools; this is what animals do like the beaver with its dam. Man's operability is essentially a creative process of a second nature expressed in technological forms produced – to paraphrase Goethe – 'in a mobile and formative manner according to the example that nature offers us' (Goethe, 1988: 64).

Imagination - and here we go to the other term that we are most interested in – is related to the mental faculties within which man well before the agricultural phase has always cultivated this second nature. The invention of agriculture itself, moreover, is one of the fruits that man has collected from the technical cultivation of his imagination. It was not only the technology of the plough to have given way to agriculture but also having been able to understand the temporal chains expressed by the natural cycles and to bring them back to a state of semi-estrangement of man's imagination in that human external time that presides the creativity of his actions. In terms of the overall relationship between the different phases ranging from sowing to the harvest implies a capacity of observation of the changes set out from the present, in which you can capture from time to time one of the phases (Marzo 2012: 31-32).

The interweaving between the potential creative field of the imagination and the creativity power of technique is therefore what allows man to cultivate his second nature; to give life to the self-produced environment that distinguished him from every other animal and what is more joins him analogically to that continuous oscillation produced entirely by the intelligence of nature in motion.

This techno-imaginative human environment does not exist in itself, but it is always manifested through socially and historically determined morphological realms where second nature is cultivated to produce specific cultural landscapes. In them, the creative power of technology is manifested in mutually operative collective action and the imagination in the collective consciousness producing the social imaginary. Let us see if we can define better the relationship between technique and imagination in the social world beginning with the reciprocal action that Simmel defines as follows:

A collection of human beings does not become a society because each of them has an objectively determined or subjectively impelling life-content. It becomes a society only when the vitality of these contents attains the form of reciprocal influence; only when one individual has an effect, immediate or mediate, upon another, is mere spatial aggregation or temporal succession transformed into society. If, therefore, there is to be a science whose subject matter is society and nothing else, it must exclusively investigate these interactions,



these kinds and forms of sociation. For everything else found within "society" and realized through it and within its framework is not itself society. (Simmel, 1971: 24-25)

Therefore, as stated by Simmel, society originates not from the mere juxtaposition of individuals but when they begin to be in favour or against each other, creating forms of association with the most different purposes in which social life cultivates its culturalized nature. The various social institutions (religious, political, economic, scientific, recreational, aesthetic, legal, communicative and so on) are the symbolic systems that regulate the organizational devices that regulate the legitimacy of functioning; architectural places where the headquarters are, and the tools they use for their practices are all those associative forms produced by the continuous movement of everything that has its technical epicentre in mutual action.

The continual movement of reciprocal action is what the field potential finds in the collective mind and it is more than the total of the minds of the affiliates that it is made up of. This supra-individual mind is what elevates in the collective consciousness to produce social imaginary. It is that image-world in which every social group finds the framework of a lasting sense with which to stabilize a relationship with the world and guide the interaction in the construction of a certain social reality.

To resume Uexküll's relativization in the world of bios, one could say that the human environment itself is composed internally of sub-environments set up by the endless variations of reactions between reciprocal actions and the social imaginary. These historical social environments are mutually in a socio-ecological relationship according to certain degrees of reciprocal influence. It is considerably more porous and labile than animal environments that have a way of being contaminated, hybridize, conflict, coexist and even to generate other social imaginaries, which as a whole produce that continuous process of metamorphosis that we call history and that in human nature has its historic origin.

A mythological epilogue

Greek mythology tells the story of Prometheus – one who reflects in advance – and Epimetheus – one who ponders afterwards – which allows us to make an epilogue of the journey just ended. In the story (Kerényi, 1994: 175-179) the two titan brothers were commissioned by the gods to give each animal species a special quality. However clumsy Epimetheus, while doing this, forgot man, and had nothing left to give him as a gift. In our discussion we dealt with Epimetheus' forgetfulness by speaking about the non specialization of our body. Prometheus, to remedy his brother's forgetfulness, stole sparks from the fire of Hephaestus' forge – the god of technics – to give as a gift to man whom he befriended but at the same time condemned himself. The theft of fire unleashed the



wrath of the gods to the point that Zeus commanded Hephaestus to build chains to imprison Prometheus on the peak of the Caucasus and call an eagle to rip open his chest. In the light of our discussion we could say that in Greek myth the fire that we received from Prometheus as a gift is that part of the cosmic fire of Heraclitean physis that can flare up and produce different measures of animal environments described by Uexküll. According to the Goethean way of analogy, we have identified these measures in the relationship between image and technique which gives shape to man's techno-imaginative environment. It is the social use of the Promethean fire that forges the second nature within which our species meets its humanity. The fire of Prometheus is usually traced back to the technical creativity of metal processing and more generally to the creativity of man's transformative arts. Yet this fire as we have conceived it however is also what enlightens the darkness in which man is immersed and produces the visions of the imaginary social world. It is these two qualities of fire that burn in human nature that I have tried to weave by talking about technique and imagination; a fire that burns in human nature and that, by flaring up and dying down, according to the measure of social forms, gives life to the continuous oscillation of the historical world.

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