Implications of fashion:
desiderata of life as an artwork

The true thread that runs through the garment of the fashion myth has been spun out of the fibres that restore the reference back to anthropological basic conditions and refer to human life as a work of art. It is alarming, however, that advertising for fashionable consumer products speaks to the individual in his totality, while certain sub-disciplines of knowledge seek to reduce the individual to one or a few phenomena. While reductionist tendencies of biology reduce the individual, for example, to a genetic basis and derive all further human thought, attitudes and actions from this, advertising (apparently) fulfils a human wish for entirety. The fatal thing about this is the (apparent) disregard of human entirety by certain disciplines of science which as truth-seeking and knowledge-creating entities might perhaps grasp the individual in his or her entirety, whereas advertising ostensibly – and indeed for marketing-strategic reasons – aims at an entirety and presents itself in such a way as if it was intending an improvement of the entire individual, while in fact it is only trying to improve one thing: the sale of consumer items.

Even so, it has to be noted: Fashion advertising at the same time also sheds light on various human domains the importance of which should not be underestimated for the individual as a being which is unconfirmed (NIETZSCHE), open to the openness of Being (HEIDEGGER), 'thrown' into Being (CAMUS), eccentrically positioned (PLESSNER), aware of his death (WEIZSÄCKER), *kritisch-krisisch* (WISSER), and utopian-ecstatic (GRÄTZEL). Consumption as a form of pseudo-therapy offers the individual in partial domains of his being answers to his questions regarding how to conduct his

life, since advertising, via the implanting of meta-goods in consumer goods, offers the individual a back-reference to philosophical-anthropological basic human conditions.

Thematising ways of dealing with the issues that arise from these basic human conditions is the task of philosophy, especially philosophical anthropology, ethics and philosophy that deals with the fundamental issues of human existence. No matter what one may call this philosophical discipline, it refers to a tradition that has existed since Antiquity and that has a new version under such titles as *Aesthetics of Existence*,[1] *Philosophy of Life*,[2] *Experiencing the Philosophy of the Art of Living*[3]. In parts of academic philosophy this discipline has a legitimacy problem, because the 'philosophy of life' – in some instances not unjustifiably – has been condemned as popular philosophy or fashion philosophy.[4] A renaissance of an academic philosophy of existential problems of human existence, however, is essential.[5] For the existential *lacunae* that are left behind as believing religious communities and extended family structures lose their significance are not first filled by those with the *best* solution but by those with the *quickest*.[6] If one admits that consumer goods are also bought because of the attractiveness of certain meta-goods, one can assume that other strategies – e.g. pedagogical ones can have equal success if they serve the contents of these meta-goods. Michel FOUCAULT speaks in this context of a philosophy that focuses on the practical lifestyle which he refers to as the *"art[s] of existence"*[7]. *"By this is meant conscious, willed practices through which people not only determine their rules of behaviour but also seek to transform*

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1   Cf. FOUCAULT 1984, 18-21 and 313-319 as well as FRÜCHTL 1998, 124-148

2   Cf., e.g. SIMMEL 2000, 209-425

3   Cf. SCHMID 2000

4   Cf. RICKERT, 1920 Cf. SOLIES 1998, 12-22

5   What is called for here is not a one-sided concentration of academic philosophy on a philosophy of existential issues of human existence but a relegitimisation and constantly renewed questioning of these fields of philosophy with which it once had its beginning.

6   Since such *lacunae* in human existence are constantly being inundated in an 'information overflow', there is no need to ask why pedagogically mediated contents do not penetrate deep enough.

7   FOUCAULT 1984, 18

themselves, to modify themselves in their particular existence and to make their lives into a work of art that enshrines certain aesthetic values and corresponds to certain stylistic criteria."[8] These 'arts of existence' or 'self-techniques' as FOUCAULT refers to them have lost importance since Antiquity. FOUCAULT views his investigations of sexuality as a first contribution to an aesthetics of existence and of self-technologies.

With the *Philosophy of the Art of Living* an attempt was made to call this neglected discipline back into play. The question of the art of living *"tends to be raised where traditions, conventions and norms [...] are no longer convincing and individuals start to worry about themselves."*[9] Wilhelm SCHMID understands by the philosophy of the art of living *"the theoretical reflection of life as it could be lived consciously".*[10] Here, life is to be conceived as a work of art, the last brushstroke of which is only completed by death and that can only be finally evaluated as seen as a complete whole after the death of the individual.[11] Life, like the work of art, can be evaluated both according to objective and subjective criteria.[12] Both from the perspective of the observer as from that of the creator of the work of art, the work can appear to be unfinished or complete, successful or a failure. The *material* of the art of living is life as it is lived.[13] Since the work of art of life will only be completed at the end of life, during life it is always *"work in progress"*[14].

Advertising implants meta-goods into fashion consumer items that have *topoi* of the art of living as their content and thereby establishes the link to basic human conditions. If one assumes that fashion consumer products are also bought because of the attractiveness of the meta-goods that are attached to them, the question is what role these contents play in a human life that is to be formed as a work of art. A philosophy of the existential issues of human existence can have many *topoi* as its content. In the context of

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8   FOUCAULT 1984, 18

9   SCHMID 2000, 9

10 SCHMID 2000, 10

11 Cf. SCHMID 2000, 353

12 SCHMID on the other hand assumes that life has to be compared with the modern work of art, which evades objective assessment criteria. Cf. SCHMID 2000, 79

13 Cf. SCHMID 2000, 71

14 SCHMID 2000, 73

this investigation, three of these would seem to be of pre-eminent importance and could possibly serve, in the following outline, as a point of departure for further research towards a philosophy of existential questions of human existence:

1. The 'staging' of a personal life-plan that constantly has to be corrected and the mediation of this between an individual human nature and social requirements.
2. Melioration via ascesis: This refers to the selection of life-improving options as well as the concentration on selected options and their practising.
3. The removal of taboos, thematising and problematising of the phenomena age(ing), dying and death.

In those instances where a philosophy of life takes account of actual individual problems of human existence, it transforms itself into life-counselling that can only be meaningfully conducted in an individual conversation. Where it remains completely theoretical and abstract, it offers no individual assistance. That which lies in-between is the reflecting on existential issues that affect all individuals (human existence as such) at some point and in some form or other. Within this framework, the three existential problem areas of human existence mentioned above – used by advertising to market fashion consumer items – will be examined further in relation to certain aspects of their potential manifestation in the actual life of the individual outside of fashion. The following three subsections aim to motivate a continued and intensified examination of these *topoi* once more within a scholarly context and hopefully provide a contiguous contribution to a philosophy of the existential problems of human existence.

INDIVIDUAL EXISTENCE AS ENTELECHY IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The individual seeks recognition in the social context and to that end, among other things, employs imitative staging with the aid of fashionable clothing. The human mind cannot be conceived without this staging, this *mise-en-scène*. *"Performing would thereby be a comestible without which*

humans could not survive."[15] The "stage" is the human's immediate surroundings, in particular the social surroundings, where the individual gains approval via an appropriate 'redeployment onto this stage'. For the 'mise-en-scène' in a social context, that fundamental anthropological condition is a *sine qua non* where the individual is constantly and repeatedly 'damned' to relinquish his actual position in space, time, social context and his momentary individual attitude in order to adopt a new one. We are dealing with an *"excentric positionality"*[16] or a *"utopian-ecstatic"*[17] basic human condition. Referring back to the disparity noted by PLESSNER between individual human nature and social role, an attempt will be made here to mediate between the disparate extremes.

It must be assumed that the individual is unable to be completely absorbed in either his own personal nature or in a "role". Because of this, a human being constantly oscillates between individial human nature and demands made by the social context. Since the individual in his existence as a human being needs the social framework or, more generally, the "other", he is unable to leave the other out of account in the structuring of his own life. On the other hand, the individual is unable to 'leave' his personal human nature, his 'existence', for any length of time in favour of a particular role, because he is always obliged to 'take with him' his own individual nature, wherever he goes – even to his own death. He is incapable of fleeing from this innermost self.[18] He has to realise *"that nothing can save him from himself."*[19] The individual is just as unable to avoid for any length of time his personal human nature or his existence as his social context, which is why he has to mediate this disparity. This mediation results in a structuring of individual existence in the social context. The human self is made up from the mediation between individual nature and models from the social context. Advertising for consumer items frequently allows goods

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15 GRÄTZEL 2003, 1

16 PLESSNER 1982, 9; Cf. 10-15

17 GRÄTZEL 1997, 13

18 The lonely traveller, who moves on every few days from one place to the next, is regularly 'caught up with' by his existence. He will then only become conscious of it at the latest when he has processed the new impressions from a new environment.

19 SARTRE 2000, 176

and their meta-goods to appear as founders of models that tend to make thinking about individual human nature superfluous, because a sufficient foothold on the social stage of everyday life is ensured via the model: *You are completely yourself if you wear this or that brand.*

The existence of a person or his individual human nature is just as unique as the patterns of whorls on his fingertips or his genetic fingerprints, but it is influenced by factors outside himself. So it is only possible to speak theoretically of such an individual nature in the sense of 'originality', because it is influenced by many external factors, so that its 'original form' is no longer recognisable. Similarly, the social environment – especially the immediate environment – is influenced by the existence of the individual. Also in the case of the environment, i.e. that of other individuals, it is no longer possible after a certain length of time to determine without further ado who has influenced what. Both human nature and social environment are subject to reciprocal influence and constant interaction. In the individual's self-design draws from two sources: one based on models outside himself, e.g. his social milieu (or possibly models from the past, especially history, myth and literature), or he makes use of what he finds *within himself* (which, as mentioned, is not uninfluenced by external influences). A simple and certain variant of human self-design – at least at first glance – consists in the imitation of 'successful' models, as this imitation can follow guidelines and its result is assessable. If, however, the individual remains caught in this imitative variant of self-design, he will at some point have to go off in search of his own personal nature, because he feels a lack of authenticity. Quite often, such phases of 'seeking for identity' come after leaving a profession or when the imitation of a model or the almost complete adoption of a role has broken down.

As a rule, the individual is a 'practical eclecticist' that amalgamates his self-design out of various external models and intentions of his own personal nature. The individual must therefore realise his existence by means of a constantly renewed act of self-design in the social context, because realisation is only conceivable within this context and because the individual needs the recognition of others. The self has to be redesigned *over and over again*, because the social context, the outside world as a whole – as well as the existence of the individual – are constantly changing. Even so, he must never forget or repress the originality of existence in this act of self-design,

since this originality of existence is the very condition of human life-design, which, if he neglects it, will lead him astray.[20]

An extreme variant of self-concentration while neglecting the social context would be the hermitism, such as NIETZSCHE ascribes, for example, to a phase of ZARATHUSTRA's life: ZARATHUSTRA spent ten years of contemplative solitude in a mountain cave *'without tiring of it'*[21], before he grew weary of his wisdom. ARISTOTLE also assumes that the contemplative form of life, which he describes as being the best, since it is *"the most venerable"* according to human nature,[22] does not represent an autonomous form of life. For the contemplator also needs the virtues of the second-best form of life,[23] which locates him as a *politikon zoon* in the social context. For the individual to be embedded in the social context, he therefore needs both individual-ethical and social-ethical virtues.

If one compares the influence of the individual on his life in the social context with the soul as the entelechy of the body in the Aristotelian definition of the soul, one gets a model that explains the 'mis-en-scène' of the individual: Each individual existence is a 'realising' element of the social fabric. The single individuals form the nature of the community; they are – as the soul for the body – its constituent elements. The individual must thus design himself in such a way that his personal nature represents the 'realising' of his social role(s): *Individual existence is the entelechy of the individual as part of the social whole*. The individual has constantly to redesign himself into the social context in accordance with what he finds within himself in ever-changing form. He must amalgamate his social role with

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20 On the one hand, the individual loses his direction in forgetting his originality of existence throughout his life, because to orientate himself both mentioned threads are necessary to a certain extent: social context and individual nature. On the other hand, he will go proverbially 'round the bend', because he has lost sight of his individual nature and his existence. Just think, for example, of the monk MEDARSUS in E.T.A. HOFFMANN's *Elixiere des Teufels* [The Devil's Elixir], whose multiplication of identity drives him insane and leads him to lose authenticity. He first has to take the cruel road of guilt to atonement and is able via research into his own family history to gain an awareness of himself.

21 (from his thirtieth to his fortieth year) NIETZSCHE 1988, 5

22 ARISTOTLE *EN*, 1141 b 3-4

23 Cf. ARISTOTLE *EN,* 1178 a 24-26 and 1099 a 31– b 1

and outside his own personal existence in designing himself in obeisance to an *'individual law'*[24], according to which this individuality raises a particular role beyond the mere fulfilling of a role.[25]

Only a few specific qualities of an individual which might serve as guidelines for an authentic designing of his life can be quantified such as absolute pitch or a particularly sensitive sense of smell and taste. Apart from qualities that can be traced back to genetic aptitudes in a person, there are also socio-cultural qualities – such as acquired knowledge about the theory of sound formation or specialist expertise in oenology, for example – the acquisition and use of which are not, however, dependent on genetic aptitudes. Lastly, there are qualities that an individual has acquired *en passant* and unconsciously, such as qualities and interests that the individual discovers by chance and at some point in his life.

It is a question of discovering, selecting, mediating and cultivating as large a number of these qualities as possible and of including them within the framework of self-design. This finding of qualities – a step in the direction of ideal conception of self-discovery – changes by means of the selection, synthesis and cultivation into self-discovery. The theme of self-discovery, taking account of individual qualities and life possibilities focuses one's gaze on the question as to how one ought to deal with these qualities and life-options, wherever they may come from, so that the individual is able, according to his aptitudes, to change things *for the better*.

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24 Cf. SIMMEL 1968. Since a general law, such as the human categorical imperative, does not grasp the individual in his unity and totality (cf. 191), its activity is limited in concrete action. For this reason, an individual, objective behavioural principle has to be chosen that is always dependent on the whole human being as a unity and on the context for the action, an *'individual law'* that cannot be fixed conceptually (cf. 229).

25 This constellation of role and individual existence can be compared with SIMMEL's conception of how the actor has to enter into a role: *"how an actor is to conceive a role does not arise – not even as an ideal requirement – from the role itself but out of the relation of his artistic disposition to the role"* (SIMMEL 1997, 424).

MELIORATION BY MEANS OF ASCESIS

Lifestyle, which, according to its usage in advertising, is actually a style of consumption, occurs via the linking to meta-goods as being a way of living. Advertising explains how people can give their life style and enhance it. To over-simplify, one could claim with KAZANTZAKIS that: *"the greatest sin is contentment."*[26] Seen from a more general point of view, behind every stylisation or aestheticisation there lies a wish for improvement: melioration. Humans constantly think and act in the comparative.

Life can be conceived as a work of art that is first completed in death, a work of art which in turn is part of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk', collectively processed by many other people throughout their lives, with the intention of improving it. In this work of art – as in the portrait of Dorian GRAY – the modes of human thought, behaviour and action are reflected. *"Our works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments, Hence, too, the folly of that impossible precept, Know thyself; till it be translated into this partially possible one, know what thou canst work at."* [27] Complete self-awareness or self-discovery, because of the human lack of self-knowledge and constant self-metamorphosis, is strictly speaking impossible. *"Socrates' 'Know thyself' has as much value as the 'be virtuous' of our confessionals. They reveal a nostalgia at the same time as an ignorance. They are sterile exercises on great subjects."*[28]

NIETZSCHE's *homesickness without a home* reveals that the self cannot be discovered, since human existence is determined by the *nowhere and in vain*.[29] Therefore it is a question of constantly re-constructing the self, using what is available or what becomes available via deep 'delving' into one's own individuality and in the social context. As humans we must always

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26 KAZANTZAKIS 1973, 37

27 CARLYLE 1991, 223; Cf. MEINHOLD 2013b; MEINHOLD 2011

28 CAMUS 1999, 26. CAMUS means THALES rather than SOCRATES. Cf. DIOGENES LAERTIOS 1990, I, 1, I [Thales], 40: *"From him [Thales] comes the 'Know thyself', which Antisthenes attributes to Phemonoe in his 'Diadochae'; from her, Chilon has made it his own."*
(http://lastchanceforcommonsense.blogspot.com/2009/05/albert-camus-mith-of-sisyphus.html)

29 Cf. GRÄTZEL 1997, 13

dare to undertake this self-construction or self-discovery, constantly aware of the fact that we are "*actors in an unknown play*".[30] The first means of self-discovery lies in working out what one's real wishes consist in and where those fields lie in which an individual can actively seek to find out where it is worth expending effort. For this, something threefold is needed, the individual stages of which have to be repeated in an alternating, often incalculable sequence and which even so, like SISYPHUS' rolling of the rock, have a deeper meaning that the individual has to carve out for himself anew every day. We are dealing with an ascetics that, theoretically speaking, can be divided into three stages: selection, concentration and practice.

By asceticism one generally means something like austerity, or an austere way of life. Recently, slogans of the type *"cheap is good"* have also become virulent in the media, where by 'avarice' 'monetary asceticism' is meant. Considering asceticism under the primacy of austerity does not, however, capture the broad dimension of the original concept (gr. *askesis*), which roughly means *practice, occupation* and *profession*. The verb *askeo* brings us yet closer to the true meaning of the term asceticism: *askeo* means *to manufacture, produce* and *process* in a *technical* or *artistic* way, but it also means *to exercise, practise, adapt oneself to something, decorate* and *adorn* or *embellish*. Asceticism further refers to schooling or disciplining the mind, and for the Stoics the element of austerity comes to the fore as control over one's thoughts and urges. To adopt the popular conception of asceticism for a life as a work of art, the term *ascetics* – which refers to the above-mentioned original meaning of *askeo* – has to be strengthened. By ascetics, the triad of *selection, concentration* and *practice* is referred to, the concrete content of which has to be attuned, repeated and re-defined in the practical conduct of life. *"For Anthropology on the other hand, it [ascetics] must count as belonging to the really high categories. It is even possible [...] to conceive it as being a continuation of the process of becoming a human being."*[31]

Especially in Western societies the *selection* of options – because of *multioptionality* (the almost inexhaustible possibilities of conduct of life) and because of an 'information overflow' – the inundation of the individual by useful information (or useless information: what Harry G. Frankfurt

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30 GRÄTZEL 1997, 19

31 GEHLEN 1993, 66

calls *bullshit*)[32] – plays a first important role in the forming, stylising or aestheticising of life. For the selection of options a person must on the one hand 'invest' time – an investment that as with economic goods can later bear fruit – and acquire a corresponding know-how in order to liberate himself or herself from a *"self-incurred immaturity"*[33]. For the selection of options on the other hand enlightenment regarding these options and their scope is necessary. As with the production of a work of art, it is a question of selecting when dealing with the aestheticisation or melioration of life's materials and motives.

The selection of options is followed by a *concentration* on selected materials, intentions and models. Here too the influences from 'inside' (e.g. intentions) and 'outside' (models) as well as that which contains both aspects manifest themselves – influences that can be attuned in a mediation according to the principle of entelechy. In day-to-day living, this concentration is the convergence on a centre that is never completely reached, since the person concentrating and that which is to be concentrated on are always in transition. Metaphorically speaking, this concentration in life is similar to pouring of water out of a large bucket into a bottle with a narrow neck on board a ship on high seas.[34] When dealing with life as a work of art, concentration is thus a matter of mediating between the selected materials and including them in the work.

What emerges in the approximation towards an ever-fresh re-determinable centre then has to be practised. This practising involves an expenditure of time and work, effort and struggle – especially with oneself.[35] In the processing of a work of art, this practice expresses itself in a constantly renewed attempt to bring the work to relative completion and perhaps inimitability as well. Renewed selection will constantly be necessary in order to lay aside the previously used materials and motives and to add new ones, to

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32 FRANKFURT 2005; Cf. MEINHOLD 2009a

33 KANT 1999, 26

34 The process of *Education* can also be clarified by the use of this 'pouring out' example; as age increases, the opening of the neck of the bottle admittedly becomes narrower, but the proficiency of the mind doing the pouring becomes greater.

35 This also by the way corresponds to the basic meaning of *Djihad* (*Dschihad*: Arabic = 'effort').

concentrate on these and their connections with what has been used up to this point and to practise their use. These three stages of ascetics, by means of the cited reference of HORKHEIMER and ADORNO can be related to HOMER's ODYSSEUS. When passing the sirens, ODYSSEUS has to decide (selection) whether he is to attempt to defy or give in to the *"irresistible promise of pleasure as that experienced from their singing"[36]*. He has two options to choose from. Warned by CIRCE, a deity, he knows the consequences of his choice in this situation: pleasure and death, or austerity and life. He decides on the latter. In the *concentration* on his decision to resist the sirens, he fills the ears of his companions with wax and orders them to row for their lives, after he has had them lash himself to the mast. *Practice* is shown in his order to have himself lashed yet tighter to the mast should the temptation arising from the song of the sirens increase.[37]

The central point of ascetics is practising and exercising, for via this a work of art or life as a work of art can be brought to (relative) completion. A problem of Western societies is their profusion of options and the lack of competence when it comes to selection. If bliss – as Edgar Allen POE postulates – corresponds to the intensity of spiritualisation in an object or the dedication to a task,[38] the discomfort of many people in Western societies stems from the concentration on too many objects. When there is weak selection, which retains too many objects from the options for concentration and practising, concentration and practising become less intensive than if the selection had been based on less objects. Multi-optionality and the pressure of an economy that is only prepared to recognise growth (especially monetary), but not stationary status (and thus produces an ever-increasing number of options) result in a shift of priorities in the direction of a use of the multiplicity of diverse options at the expense of a competence of selection that has been unable to keep pace with the increase in optionality. This occurs when there is a simultaneous deployment of individual resources on the concentration and practising of an increased number of objects. One ought not at this point to speak of a further division of labour, when reference is made to a concentration on a lesser number of objects, but rather to call upon the individual to make use of competences for selection.

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36 HORKHEIMER/ADORNO 1971, 33
37 Cf. HORKHEIMER/ADORNO 1971, 32-35
38 Cf. POE 1841, 175

The increase in the quantity of the options, which results in an increase in the number of objects to be processed, is reflected in the extension of the average life-time with too little attention being paid to the holistic quality of the extra life-time that has been 'won'. The neglect of the quality of this 'additional' life-time leads us to the *topos* of the repression from life of age(ing), dying and death.

PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH AND THE ART OF DYING

Fashion is a pseudo-reincarnation or *reinvestination*, the fashion consumer is 'reborn into one's apparel'. On the one hand, the consumer when buying an item of new fashionable clothing migrates (again) into a new apparel, something similar to the Pythagorean idea of the metempsychosis of the soul, which, after the death of the former body, migrates time and time again into a new body. On the other hand, the almost immortal, suprahistorical phenomenon of fashion is born into constantly new fashionable styles, or, to put it another way, the suprahistorical phenomenon of fashion constitutes itself through the changing styles of the prevailing fashions.

With *reinvestination* fashion corresponds to the *Zeitgeist* of contemporary consumer cultures, which are unwilling to acknowledge age(ing), dying and death and therefore repress any evidence of such issues and their signs. Nowadays, elderly and dying people do not usually expect death in the familiar social context, in society, but isolated in homes or hospitals. Death, but birth too, are cases for the hospital – they almost seem pathological to us. Since death symbolically "lurks" in bacteria, viruses and dirt, a culture of hygiene developed on the basis of a fear of death – one where one disinfects, applies make-up and designs both the living and the dead.[39] Death is persecuted like a disease that has to be eradicated. The underlying cause for this persecution of death and signs of death lies in the fear of one's own decay and dissolution.[40] BAUDRILLARD speaks of a ghettoisation of elderly people and death. One manifestation of this is the locating of new cemeteries outside the towns and, in particular, the segregation of old people in nursing homes. The third stage of life becomes a kind of third world

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39 Cf. BAUDRILLARD 1982, 286

40 Cf. BAUDRILLARD 1982, 286

and an asocial ghetto. So in Western societies, "social death" befalls people before physical death does.[41] Man is afraid of death and is therefore also scared of signs of death. *"Death is the only thing that ever terrifies me. I hate it. [...] Because one can survive everything nowadays, except death."*[42]

Western culture separates life and death from each other as positivity and negativity, thereby demarcating life as good from death as evil. In other cultures, however, life and death are viewed as one totality.[43] Through the strict separation of life and death and the negative connotations given death, an artificial extra value is ascribed to life at the expense of death. Life thereby becomes the repression of death and is degraded to survival;[44] *"nowadays, being dead isn't normal"*[45] , nor having to die. The modern conception of life and death is defined by the image of the machine that either functions or is broken.[46] An incorrectly functioning machine is either repaired or shut down. Since is it not allowed to kill a person as one can switch off a machine, and by definition man viewed from modern medical perspective is never completely healthy, it is a question of constantly checking him medically, of waiting and keeping him alive. The killing/suicide of an individual when desired as a result of intolerable and irreparable suffering is only legally permitted in very few states.

Life is considered as something good or as a consumer product, while death is seen as something evil and as a deficiency.[47] Since death is something evil and life something good, life is *per se* considered to be better than death. That leads from the moribund person being compelled to live on and survive to the "prohibition to die". *"Thou shalt not kill"* becomes *"Thou shalt not perish"*.[48] Suicide is therefore aimed subversively against society, which exerts all its energy on maintaining life and preventing death. The equivalence laws of a democracy are transferred to the phe-

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41 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 257

42 Wilde, Picture of Dorian Gray, chapter 19

43 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 232

44 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 200

45 Baudrillard 1982, 198; italics in the original

46 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 251; Cf. Meinhold 2011

47 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 272-274

48 Cf. Baudrillard 1982, 277

nomenon of death:[49] The death of an individual in our society is to be just (dying from a illness or an accident is viewed as unjust); only a natural death at a ripe old age – after a just life-span – is just about considered to be acceptable, and the first steps towards its elimination or delay are attempted with the aid of genetic engineering.

A god can give and take life as a supreme authority: he sits on the threshold between life and death. BAUDRILLARD writes in *Impossible Exchange*, with NIETZSCHE in mind, that a cunning god by 'exchanging' the life of his son with the sins of humanity has placed the latter in the awkward position of not being able to offer any adequate counter-exchange, which fixes him in a lasting inferior position.[50] Medicine and legislation can not only promote life but also eliminate it (e.g. by switching off life-prolonging medical apparatus or by introducing the death penalty) or at least restrict it (incarceration). Medicine and legislation thus occupy the "divine" barrier between life and death.[51]

Because of his human nature, man must concern himself with death and is not permitted to completely professionalise this issue and relocate it outside the personal sphere. He is the creature that in the course of his biographical socialisation becomes aware of his own future death and therefore is compelled to address the question of the Before and Afterwards of death. *"We come out of a dark abyss; we end up in a dark abyss: the bright space between the two we call life. – Immediately after our birth the return already starts; Beginning and End at one and the same time; every moment we are dying."*[52] With these words Nikos KAZANTZAKIS' begins his book *Ascetic*; he writes further: *"For that reason, many people have announced: The aim of life is death."*[53] Seen from this ultimate position, human life could be called the entelechy of death. For life carries within it this final goal. Since death contributes to the structuring of human life, it is however not only a goal in the sense of a final arrival of human life in the continuity

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49 Cf. BAUDRILLARD 1982, 256-257

50 Cf. BAUDRILLARD 2000, 14-15

51 Cf. BAUDRILLARD 1982, 204

52 KAZANTZAKIS 1973, 7

53 KAZANTZAKIS 1973, 7

of the cosmos[54] but also a central instance of life that co-determines its content. Man would live his life differently if he was not mortal.

The preoccupation with death is becoming increasingly institutionalised in Western societies and, as part of a division of labour or because of the increasing discrepancy between subjective and objective culture, is being taken away from the individual. While the person who deals professionally and commercially with ageing and death, runs the risk of treating it like a commodity (e.g. the care of the elderly). Dealing with death is thereby relocated from everyday life into the professional sphere and the confrontation with it causes the individual – because he has been weaned from having any dealings with death – to become petrified with fear, since he mainly knows about it from the simulated framework of the media. Death disappears – pointedly turned – from life and is diffused into the commercial sphere, into the media and the commercial framework of professional dealings with the phenomena of ageing, dying and death. Since death is no longer something from our everyday context or at least it is not something real, man is afraid of "shadows": the signs of dying and death. *"Whoever can look death in the eye is not afraid of shadows."*[55]

A philosophy of life or art of living that wishes to concern itself with the existential problems of human existence must, then, also be a philosophy of death or art of dying. *"The art of living goes hand in hand with the art of dying."*[56] For the content of philosophy is not only to problematise human existence in its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) between the "dark abysses" but also to embrace the first and, in particular, last thrownness of human existence: birth and death as well as their connections with living.

Life is a constant "throwing" (drafting), and the individual can try to make this throwing a self-throwing as often as possible. Analytically speaking, life can be divided into three distinctive phases of throwings: birth, life, death. Birth is a "throwing" from the womb of the mother, to which the foetus is only involved to a small extent or at least only instinctively. This is

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54 For death as the instance that re-establishes continuity, Cf. BATAILLE (1994, 15-27).

55 EURIPIDES

56 SCHMID 2000, 352

also implied by the passive construction: *to be born*.[57] If one ignores the theory of karma, the self is not responsible for this first throw. The self-throwing is limited to the first phase of life, where the individual has a consciousness at his disposal.[58] That the self is to throw or redraft itself during life is the content of the philosophy of the art of living. The self's last throwing, represented by the throw out of life, can at times also be formed or co-formed by the self. At this juncture, something should be said about the stoic philosophy of suicide: If in certain cases this final form of self-redrafting rationally represents a solution for the suffering individual, whose physical state in all probability cannot be improved, then suicide ought not to be rejected.

The throw out of life is however not an art that is solely limited to dying or suicide. In physical and biological terms, the human being already starts to die in instalments from birth onwards, without causing everyone lasting existential problems during the whole of life. Perhaps the individual ought during life to set out emotionally and mentally on the path towards death. Since he knows that he will die sooner or later, it would be wise to deal with this approaching border situation in some way. Yet such practising of ageing, dying and death must not end in exclusively concentrating on this. Death is the most extreme form of being able to let go. So it is a question of practising "being able to let oneself fall", followed by a powerful rising to one's feet once more. Opposed to "Every day thou shalt die" [59] there is an "Every day thou shalt be born*"[60]*. Certain steps in life would thereby be potential steps out of life or into a new one. What ensues in the course of initiation rites can take place in a similar form as an iterative meliorating exercise that entails a cathartic effect.

One has to ask oneself to what extent an approach to such an exercise exists in dealing with a subject that claims an individual's totality. In such exercises, the individual can become so involved that he possibly com-

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57 From a medical-biological point of view, the foetus is however actively involved in the prelude to and course of birth.

58 From a purely linguistic point of view, one can only speak of an 'in-dividual' after the cutting of the umbilical cord. In the debate about the concept of the person, one only speaks of an individual when twins can occur no more.

59 KAZANTZAKIS 1973, 95

60 KAZANTZAKIS 1973, 95

pletely forgets and overexerts himself, although not to the point of self-
extinction but to arriving once more at his own basis, out of which he can
recharge himself. We find such exercising taking place in meditation, in to-
tal absorption in work that one loves or in being together with people we
appreciate or love. Dealings with objects and persons that careful consid-
eration has judged to be good and that challenge and even overexert the in-
dividual as a totality, are similar in approach to practising dying and being
re-born, which give rise to a catharsis, a lasting therapeutic 'feel better'
situation. In order to experience these states as a kind of prelude to death
and "virtual rebirth", however, it is necessary at the moment of exhaustion
for death to be made conscious as well as rising again with renewed
strength also to be made conscious.

Wilhelm SCHMID recommends as an actual exercise, one which is an
asset both for dying persons and for those "accompanying" such a person,
what he calls *"dying with others"*[61].

"*Dying with others* is more than merely 'accompanying' them, for it is the experi-
encing of death as if it were one's own. All preconceptions of death are without ef-
fect as long as the self does not experience their seriousness itself, sees this in front
of it and empathises with it. This experience fundamentally changes one's perspec-
tive on life. [...] Experiencing the death of the other person as if it were one's own:
There is no more lasting practising of death. [...] Whoever has died another person's
death does not return to life as the same person. [...] Seeing life from now on with
the *gaze of the dying person*, testing one's own life and perhaps changing it."[62]

In SCHMID's opinion, the dead live on in the living person. The individual
must allow the dead to dwell within him and give the dead person a place in
his own life. Such views (very pertinent, for example, in African traditional
thought), however, challenge the borders of philosophy as a science, and
beyond this borders there lies an unascertainable realm of the metaphysical
and transcendental.

If one looks back from the perspective of what has been said up to now
at advertising for fashion and fashion consumer products that fill the gaps
of the metaphysical and transcendental with meta-goods, then the consum-

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61 SCHMID 2000, 352 [italics in the original]

62 SCHMID 2000, 352-353

ing individual gains power over himself and exercises a certain power over concerns that refuse to allow the consumption of such products, such as – in HEGEL's master—servant dialectic – the servant does with work for his master. The servant kills himself, thereby disempowering his master. Anyone who has recognised the meta-goods praised by advertising, has seen in them the mirror of his own wishes, but who then addresses existential problems of his own being from the ground up instead of resorting to pure compensation goods, metaphorically kills his own desire for consumption and disempowers the supplier. The power of the consumer lies in conscious renunciation and in resorting to alternatives to consumption that do not seek to implant any, or only a few, meta-goods in consumer products – or that are morally justifiable, as products at least.[63] By doing so, he gains sovereignty over himself and exerts a pressure on the marketer that, as a result of amassed influence, forces him at least to alter his strategies.

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63 Roughly speaking, products that commit themselves to durability, holism and fair trade. Although such products have also become increasingly loaded with meta-goods since the 1990s.