

On the Iconography of Creative Man in the Age of Enlightenment and Idealism

Dietrich HARTH

In their mythologies all cultures objectify and intensify the characteristics of self-perception the causes of which they — according to the level of civilization — transfer to both inner and outer nature. The texts of all creation myths treat then with varying features the constellation of the three great symbols: God, Nature, Man. Diverse are the rules by which they can be combined. The Lord-of-the-World rule, for example, privileges God above nature and man. *Genesis I* makes use of this rule, but with a disconcerting inconsistency in its application. In the course of the biblical tale, God and man become more alike, so that man may consider himself sovereign over nature, closer to God than some stalk planted by human hands, or some insect categorized by human intellect.

In order to avoid a disquieting confusion between God and man, the status of the Divine later was subsequently enhanced metaphysically. “*Creatura non potest creare*”, as the Church Fathers and scholastics used to say. Only God is capable of creation without material. He is a Being in a vacuum, and nevertheless the centre of a tangible world, which he conjured up from the void.¹⁾ The Genesis text explains how this can be understood in a mirror-image reversal: God calls the world into being with his very words. The first creator — it can hence be later said — is the first poet. In an anthropological perspective, this means *poiesis ex nihilo*: i.e. God is a human invention without an empirical basis, a *non-derivable* symbol of the over-determined abilities of man.

This tradition is translated into an anthropomorphic image in Michelangelo’s fresco of the creation in the Sistine Chapel. The original poet, produced by the need for something completely different and yet recognizable, points to Adam, the first man, who reciprocates, pointing back toward God. Michelangelo’s powerful image does not preclude the possibility that man, according to Marsilio Ficino, is *quidam deus*, a kind of god²⁾, a secondary god (*homo secundus deus*) to whom mother nature (the matter) is entrusted. Man in analogy to *prima causa*, may creatively refashion, if not improve upon her.

During the Renaissance creative man enters the European stage as the great leader of cultural evolution: a sign of the emancipation of arts and sciences from the authoritative blueprints of the cosmologies and theological world-views. This problematizes human creation, so that the “second god”, creative man, is soon distinguished by name from the artisan who, according to the instructions of a metaphysically induced plan, must shape a given

1) Cf. Vinzenz Rűfner: “Homo secundus Deus. Eine geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum menschlichen Schöpfertum”. In: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 63 (1955), 255 seqq.

2) Rűfner op. cit., 271.

material. But even the *homo artifex* is reflected larger than life in the gods as well, from the myths of Demiurgos in classical antiquity to those medieval depictions of the Christian God as a craftsman, holding the book of ideas or wisdom in one hand, and the scales of geometry or a compass in the other.³⁾

The new name "Genius", which implies creative impulse instead of imitation, goes hand in hand with a social and aesthetic distinction unknown until the dawning of the modern age. It is a name which grants its recipient — as the early Latin form *ingenium* shows —, a power which is equally inexplicable as nature's powers of creation: "Homo creator nascitur, non fit." Creative man seems to be more a child of nature than of culture. Therefore he appears especially suited to making lasting changes to the earthly world, because nature, according to an early view, does not operate by leaps and bounds, but goes its way continuously and inexorably.

With this shift of meaning in the relationship among the three great symbols God, nature, and man, marking the beginning of the modern age, the interest in the natural world shifts to the centre of cultural activity. At first, it becomes tangible in the inflationary use of the imitation-of-nature formula which refers to the imitation of nature's inherent power to create well in the eighteenth century.⁴⁾ But this doctrine is gradually removed from awareness, so that the process of cultivation and civilization inevitably leads to a loss of nature.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is well known as one of the originators of such an awareness. In his paradox concerning the history of arts and sciences, in the first *Discours* of 1750, he takes up the phrase "je ne sais quoi", referring to the inexplicability and naturalness of genius.⁵⁾ Rousseau continues by citing as examples the founding figures of scientific analysis: Bacon, Descartes, Newton. They ran, as he writes, through an immeasurable course full of obstacles in order to achieve their goal: the scientific genius as the runner constantly in motion, who overcomes all resistance.⁶⁾ An image of progress emerges which the French encyclopedia article "Génie" (on which Diderot at least collaborated) further develops a few years later: "Le mouvement, qui est son état naturel, est quelquefois si doux qu'à peine il l'aperçoit: mais le plus souvent ce mouvement excite des tempêtes, & le génie est plutôt emporté par un torrent d'idées." Curiosity, the author adds, is the driving force (leur mobile) and the desire to discover sets the genius in motion.⁷⁾ Nature's mobility is still included in the scene of cultural cosmology. However, attention is then drawn to anomaly, namely that abrupt, unpredictable phenomenon which simultaneously accelerates the process of cultural development and forces the traditional hierarchy God-nature-man to collapse.

3) Milton C. Nahm: "Creativity in Art". In: *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. I, New York 1973, 577-589. As to the absence of a creativity discourse in Antiquity cf. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz: *Geschichte der Ästhetik*, vol. I: *Die Ästhetik der Antike*, Basel/Stuttgart 1979, 51 et pass.

4) Cf. Hans Blumenberg: "Nachahmung der Natur". Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen, in: H.B.: *Wirklichkeiten, in denen wir leben*. Stuttgart 1981, 72seqq.

5) Rudolf Wittkower: "Genius: Individualism in Art and Artists". In: *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. II, New York 1973, 305.

6) Rousseau: *Œuvres complètes*, II, ed. M. Launay, Paris 1972, 68: "C'est par les premiers obstacles qu'ils ont appris à faire des efforts, et qu'ils se sont exercés à franchir l'espace immense qu'ils ont parcouru."

7) *Encyclopédie*, Tome 7, Paris 1757, 583. Cf. also the article *Éclecticisme*, quoted by Herbert Dieckmann: *Studien zur europäischen Aufklärung*, München 1974, 17, note 19.

Henceforth movement, storms, and raging rivers belong to the standardized inventory of metaphors in the widespread debate about man's creativity. Even Francis Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* opens with a frontispiece which allegorically depicts progress in the sciences as a circumnavigation of the "Orbis Intellectualis".⁸⁾ Around 1667, in the reports of the English Royal Society, parallels are often drawn to the voyages of Columbus: Newton, we read in a report of the Royal Society, is the "Columbus of the heavens", given the task of discovering "an America of knowledge". Additionally, Edward Young's influential work *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) celebrates Bacon as a brilliant traveler through the world of reason and as an example of the discoverer of the aesthetic worlds hidden within. Thus Young seeks to tear himself away from the doctrine of imitation.⁹⁾

Meanwhile, the allegory of the voyage of discovery limits creative activity to a more or less methodical search for existing spiritual and artistic continents which remain hidden, neglecting thus invention and innovation. Admittedly, the actions of the circumnavigators are interpreted as something heroic, since they defy the dangers of untamed natural elements. Therefore invention is considered as truly heroic as a founding action which stems from an unquestionable origo and establishes a new efficacious order. The belief that man could tame nature and channel its wild resources corresponds to his trust in the power of invention. Already at an early stage, comparisons are drawn in this context between inventors and heroes, a kind of demigods, and the gods of classical antiquity. Who hasn't heard of Prometheus in this context? This ancient figure is especially interesting as a parabolic representation: he personifies man's cares about the future which as a self-relying being he must control, because he is an incomplete, an imperfect being. Prometheus simultaneously personifies the power to create culture and the sufferings which result from rebelling against the old order.¹⁰⁾

The power of invention, however, the only means through which the genius is able to define himself as a Promethean worker, is in all theories the plastic, that is, the formable and form-destroying imagination or fantasy. In the figure of Prometheus, who is neither the subject nor the object of worship, the concurrent nature-taming and -exploiting potentials are embodied much more convincingly than in a god of creation. But for the artistic genius in an emphatic sense, this is not enough. He seeks to be distinguished from the technical-scientific genius by means of a specific strategy of "stepping out of oneself". This is an attitude of mental distortion called enthusiasm, which Shaftesbury and the Abbé Du Bos had already contemplated with different results at the beginning of the century. In the course of the debate, the ancient concept of enthusiasm took on a new sense, implicitly indicating a turning away from the old judeo-christian conviction that man resembles God and is nothing except his tenant on earth. This was a crucial step in liberating human imagination as

8) Bernhard Fabian: "Der Naturwissenschaftler als Originalgenie". In: *Europäische Aufklärung*, ed. H. Friedrich/F. Schalk, München 1967, 51.

9) Cf. the German translation by H.E. von Teubern [1760]: *Gedanken über die Original-Werke*, ed. G. Sauder, Heidelberg 1977, 60.

10) Cf. Raymond Trousson: *Le thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne*, 2 vols, Genf 1964.

potential self-design from the doom of clerical control.

Only imagination is capable, as formulated by the Scottish scholars William Duff and Alexander Gerard, of bringing out “new truths”, “new images”, “new associations”, even “new sensations”. The Swiss critic Breitinger and the German philosopher Baumgarten once again use the Columbian turning point as a metaphor and speak of “new worlds”; the young Goethe insists on “a new creation”.¹¹⁾

New worlds, new creation, these are the unifying categories, but their polemic counterpart must be sought in the old order. The genius as an agent of the new (order) should not supersede the old (order) by retrogression into the past. On the contrary, as most writers are convinced, genius produces the new order as a figure of origin in a moment or flash. Genius interrupts continuity and displaces the normative standards of tradition. This is especially evident in those cases where its dealings are now over-interpreted analogously to *creatio ex nihilo*. Tradition becomes a repertoire to be used at will, a repertoire that has to be constructed according to laws which are not given but set as a task.

As early as in the seventeenth century, it was said of Shakespeare, as the compulsory symbol of creative man for the following generation of poets, that he threw away the optical lens of the book in order to search for nature within himself. The inner voice is the voice of free imagination which renounces all authority. It is a hidden nature, not directly accessible to either perception or conceptual description; in other words, a nature which takes on paradoxical features in the context of aesthetic considerations, operating with an innate necessity. This inner voice sets free that arbitrariness which distinguishes man as a self-creating being from all other animals. While the Scottish scholars still concede to genius the arbitrary combination of memories, others attempt to free it completely from the burden of tradition. Thus the modern genius turns out to be a virtuoso of oblivion not belonging to historical changes. “Il devance son siècle qui ne peut le suivre,” says the French encyclopaedia. Diderot identifies genius with the “esprit prophétique”; La Mettrie uses the term as a synonym for the power of imagination which, like nature, incessantly destroys and just as often renews itself.¹²⁾

As it is indicated in the *advanced* theories of genius, the arbitrariness of the creative subject in dealing with given examples, categorical terms, norms and rules, can be described as a free, autonomous play of imagination. Here an arbitrariness shows up that seems to be the real substance of human creativity. In this arbitrariness, the self-relation of the creating subject turns up in front of its own consciousness, and hence his objective work becomes legible as an autograph that seems relatively free of external coercion. To this day the rational intellect often claims for itself the role of a ponderous, grouchy, inhibiting and

11) William Duff: *An Essay on Genius* [1767], ed. J.L. Mahoney, Gainesville 1964, 89. Alexander Gerard: *An Essay on Genius* [1774], ed. B. Fabian, München 1966, 30, 64. Joh. Jacob Breitinger: *Critische Dichtkunst*, Zürich 1740, 110 seqq. Alexander G. Baumgarten: *Aesthetica* (1750/58), § 511; Joh. Wolfgang Goethe: “Zum Schäkesspears Tag” [1771]. In: *Berliner Ausgabe*, vol. 17, 188.

12) *Encyclopédie* op. cit., 584. Cf. also Dieckmann op. cit., 24. Julien Offray de La Mettrie: *L'homme machine*, suivi de *L'Art de jouir*, ed. M. Solovine, Paris 1921, 92: “c'est ainsi que l'imagination, veritable image du temps, se détruit et se renouvelle sans cesse.”

directing power. Indeed, the relationship between the powers of reason and imagination has long been a controversial topic. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the status of imagination was gradually enhanced, so that its range of effect soon reached from intuitive cognition to aesthetic expansion of ordinary experience. But that was definitely true for all acts which could be considered creative in political, military and technical practice as well as in the arts and sciences. The difference between labour and artistic creation was therefore almost negligible for the early theorists in the creativity discourse. In the figure of genius they apparently wanted to show that man is generally able to determine his own evolution, taking the future form of his civilized world in his own hands. The enhanced status of the imagination had consequences for the attitude of the European to both his own tradition and non-European cultures as well. To a certain extent this enhancement loosened up the rational space-time control mechanisms of chronography and geography and brought forth poetically, dynamically changing structures. Here anything and everything may be combined: In the light of this view, Shakespeare and Pindar are contemporaries, and the Orient or Athens is located on the foothills of the Alps or on the banks of the river Rhine. In this manner, an important chapter in creative change was induced, because it removed restrictions from the conventional world-views and gave them a dynamic touch by means of imagination. Henceforth, there emerged a kind of syncretism, which soon distinguished European civilization from all others.

In the free play of imagination, doctrines are shattered, and the barriers between sensual perception and intellectual analysis are torn down. Abstractions and illusions (fantômes) are called into being (paraphrase of the *Encyclopédie* article)¹³, passion disregards the moral distinction between good and evil, and fantasy ignores the logical distinction between true and untrue. Therein lies, as the *Encyclopédie* author knows, a danger for the political and practical consequences of cultural creation. In these fields of action the indifference of genius, evident in the arbitrary play of its imagination, makes it possible to topple or found states (renverser ou [...] fonder les états).¹⁴ Here the ambivalence of genius can either destroy man's fate or make him happy. What appears to the genius in his blindness to be creative, might ultimately be a destructive act. The "torrent of ideas", which sweeps along the genius in a passionately heightened state of imagination, for example in enthusiasm, remains for him a fascinating spectacle which promises the observer an intensification of his own passions and imaginations.

Intensified sensation and heightened imagination are impulses for the enthusiastic overcoming of inhibiting barriers, components of self-creation inherent in the evolution of the European sense of self-awareness. The second half of the eighteenth century fuses the concept of heightened self-perception with the view that man is more than the sum of his notions, if these be only of a theological or scientific origin.

This is well documented in the historio-philosophic and aesthetic concepts introduced into discourse by numerous German writers at the end of the eighteenth century.

13) *Encyclopédie* op. cit., 583. Cf. also Diderot's letter addressed to S. Volland, dated 31.7.1762.

14) *Encyclopédie* ibid.

Genius, however, remained for this epoch a symbol of humanity coming into its own, and of the artistic spirit which overcame temporal as well as spatial boundaries. The work of genius represents the exceeding of that which is, and its boundless creative imagination privileges the secular prophet who anticipates that which does not yet exist. In the genius' works which — according to a quotation by Schiller — abolish the difference between signs and referents, there exist the energies which strive to overcome current deficiencies.¹⁵⁾ In the aesthetic abolition of the unabolishable difference between language signs and the signified, the artistic work apparently anticipates reconciliation which is denied to the normal consciousness. At the same time, the artwork closes itself to the demands of this consciousness, whose world with its own system of laws reproaches this for betraying the idea of creativity.

As early as the genius-crazed 1760's and 1770's, a greater differentiation in the concept of creativity develops which not only characterizes an irrational or mystical cult of genius.¹⁶⁾ On the level of figurative speech, the most unusual expressions make themselves the centre of attention. Many admirers of genius, above all within the German-speaking area, lapse into an enthusiastic tone for the energetic and electrifying effects of genius. They write large numbers of interjections and bold metaphors in elliptical sentences. This accorded not only approval, but also ridicule.¹⁷⁾ That which is granted to the genius, the conscious infringement of grammatical rules and of the precept of clarity, is practiced not least of all by its admirers: Rousseau in his eulogy of the musical genius, Herder and Goethe in their essays on Shakespeare. For Lavater it is "propior deus", God's relative which he also calls "Zentralgeist", pointing through that towards an anthropocentric world-vision.¹⁸⁾

The features of a cult-like appearance are obvious, because genius can no longer be compared with methodically proceeding explorers. His way — Lavater adds — "is always the way of lightning, or of the tempest, or of the eagle".¹⁹⁾ These formulations evoke the unleashed energies of nature, including, significantly, its destructive powers: the genius is allowed to make deals with all powers. The figure of Faust emerges when Lavater notes that whatever is supposedly assigned to the genius does not come from man, but rather from God or Satan.²⁰⁾

The image of the eagle also belongs to the many topoi of grandeur appropriate for the genius. Diderot, Herder, Goethe, Lavater, Schiller, Stolberg, the list could go on, all make use of it. The eagle is an image which symbolizes not only ascent but also mediation be-

15) Friedrich Schiller: "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung" [1795]. In: F.S.: Sämtliche Werke, ed. G. Fricke/H.G. Göpfert, V, München 1959, 706.

16) Jochen Schmidt: *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens 1750–1945, I: Von der Aufklärung bis zum Idealismus*, Darmstadt 1985.

17) To quote Georg Christoph Lichtenberg: *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. W. Promies, I, München 1980, 449: "Eine deutliche kalte Definition von Genie verhält sich zu einem Feuerstrom, wie eine nützliche Lehre zu einer Ohrfeige."

18) Johann Caspar Lavater: *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, IV, Leipzig/Winterthur 1778 (Repr. Zürich 1969), 81.

19) Lavater op. cit., 81 seqq.

20) Lavater op. cit., 83.

tween Olympus and the earthly world. This allusion can be compared with the prevalent figure of the angel, although it is unclear whether it is a good or a fallen angel.²¹⁾

To sum up: as his literary iconography shows, creative man grows taller than his own limits of reason into that eerie zone of grandeur which Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) studied in taking up the classical treatise of Pseudo-Longinus' *De Sublimitate*. The meaning is obvious: genius, creative man in his highest form, is incommensurable, eluding ordinary judgement. Genius cannot be identified simply by definition — it is not a case for logical thinking but for sensitive experience: "Il est mieux senti que connu par l'homme qui veut le définir", we read in the now commonplace entry in *Encyclopédie*.

If it can only be "felt", then it presupposes a sensibility in the feeling subject which is equal to that of the sensed. "A genius can only be ignited by another genius", writes Lessing in his well-known seventeenth "Literaturbrief" (1759). In the language of the time, the third binding agent is nature. Of course, there actually is no third agent between nature and genius itself, as Diderot remarks: "Il n'y a point d'intermédiaire entre la nature et le génie".²²⁾ Translated into our language: that which is genius or creative can only be experienced, not measured or described with the help of an intermediary concept. Even more, that which genius shows, that it can not understand itself and can not be defined, but only experienced, is also true for its works. Therefore, Schiller's thesis of the identity of signs with their referents is also another argument in favour of the incomparability and indefinability of the work genius brought forth. From this follows a new form of critique in which the difference between the experiencing subject and the object being experienced disappears. Because genius is, together with the true artistic work it creates, as Lavater proclaims long before Adorno's identically worded remark: "Apparition". Mere scholarly critical discourse is not a match for this premonition of romantic art criticism.²³⁾

But back to the start! God, nature, man — the thinking of the eighteenth century which tended towards the unification of concepts pushes these symbols closer and closer together. In the image of genius they approach each other to the point of being almost indistinguishable. Herder's tableau which he himself represents as a "monstrous image", is an easily remembered example: "Sitting high upon a rocky cliff, thunderstorms and the roaring of the sea at his feet, but his head in the rays of the heavens!"²⁴⁾ Herder likes to add the attribute "creative" to the concept of genius to distinguish it from productivity in non-artistic domains. In the tableau quoted above, the features of the Old Testament God of creation and lawmaking coincide with the characteristics of the human double-nature. This shares in the material, chaotic process of creation and at the same time in the clarifying ordering spirit.

21) Cf. Günter Peters: *Der zerrissene Engel. Genieästhetik und literarische Selbstdarstellung im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, München 1982.

22) Cf. Dieckmann op. cit., 14.

23) Lavater op. cit., 81. Theodor W. Adorno: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt/M. 1972, 125.

24) "Hoch auf einem Felsengipfel sitzend, zu seinen Füßen Sturm, Ungewitter und Brausen des Meers, aber sein Haupt in Strahlen des Himmels." Johann Gottfried Herder: "Schakespear". In: *Herders Werke*, II, Berlin/Weimar 1969, 237.

Using the image of the “human statue”, that stark anthropos-model from Condillac’s workshop, Herder developed and verbally propagated the self-creation of man with a greater expenditure of thought and energy than practically anyone else. However, this self-creation presupposes the profaning of a metaphysical heaven.

Herder’s comparison of Shakespeare with the “giant God of Spinoza” offers us a crucial hint. Because Spinoza’s system of metaphysical criticism, which became the standard for so many philosophers of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras, shows that the symbol “God” is no more and no less than an epitomized symbol for that mathematically provable law immanent to nature, which sums up all the individual components of the universe into a relatively well-functioning whole. If the transcendency of a de-personalized God were transposed to the earthly world, then it would only be consistent also to give man an all-powerful position, at least in the realm of recognition.²⁵⁾

Whoever agreed with the metaphysical criticism of Spinoza was well equipped with sound arguments to defend the autonomy of creative man. At the same time, he had the license to read the sacred texts as imaginative works and to exploit their imagery for the purpose of poetically describing the figure of genius.²⁶⁾

However, nothing human is without a dark side. It is just a difference in nuance whether Herder’s genius sits on a cliff or is chained to it like Prometheus. Creative man is solitary. Genius cannot be measured in ordinary terms and is practically outlawed because he does not fall into line with any order or subjugate himself to any rule: “without any order or regularity”, as Addison said, or “regular disorder”, as Hamann wrote.²⁷⁾ That is the paradoxical being called genius.

Ever since the Renaissance had enhanced the status of classical humoural pathology, it has commonly been thought that creative man possessed — at least in the figure of the artist — a melancholy temperament: “*Melancolia significa ingegno.*” According to this theory, the melancholy genius lived on the edge of madness. Thus, a pathological deviation is attributed to artistic genius and reaffirms its special status when compared to ordinary reason.²⁸⁾

The eighteenth century did not deny this enhanced status “approval”. Diderot calls genius “fou”, Hamann admires its *docta ignorantia* and Kant outrightly considers it to be mentally disturbed.²⁹⁾ Kant’s opinion is in no way meant to be disparaging: it rather marks the boundlessness of genius’ nonconformity along with the limits of its definability. Genius simply does not fit into society. Indeed, it became society’s critical countercharge and thus, the figure of the modern artist emerges from the iconography of creative man: something

25) Cf. Panajotis Kondylis: *Die neuzeitliche Metaphysikkritik*, Stuttgart 1990, 222 seqq.

26) Spinoza: *Tractatus-theologico-politicus*, Opera I, ed. K. Blumenstock, Darmstadt 1979, 62 et pass.

27) Addison: *The Spectator*, No. 160 [1711], Reprint: London 1954, 300. As to Hamann cf. J. Schmidt op. cit., 113 seq.

28) Cf. Erwin Panofsky: *Das Leben und die Kunst Albrecht Dürers*, München 1977, 221. See also R. Klibansky/E. Panofsky/F. Saxl: *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Nendeln/Liechtenstein 1979.

29) With regard to Diderot and Hamann cf. Dieckmann op. cit., 19, and J. Schmidt op. cit., 101 seqq. Kant: “Das Genie ist ein Gestörter, den ein anderer erstlich auslegen muß.” quoted by R. Eisler: *Kant-Lexikon*, Berlin 1930, 184.

between a quick-tempered Don Quijote and a reluctant individual whose new, sometimes negative ideas are either ahead of or against those of his time. The comparison of genius with God and the scientific explorers is terminated simultaneously: genius is God. His truth does not agree with theological or scientific models, but rather reveals itself in the fulfillment of aesthetic experience.

The sharp difference which Kant draws between productive work and creative Poesis justifies this view. As early as the end of the 1770's he noted: "A production without genius is labour."³⁰ In other words creative man can only be found in the arts, above all in poetry. Everything else is either technical production on the basis of physical labour, or epistemological and moral legislation in civil service. The philosopher does not doubt that mankind can be the "creator of its happiness", but this, so he argues, can only be achieved if man does not simply follow his nature. This is a clear rejection of the identification of genius with a wild and unrestrained natural force.

Kant's distinction gives the history of creative man a new direction. This change becomes most interesting when one reads it in the light of the expanding anthropological research of that time. From that research emerged a newly recast image of man which then overthrew the traditional interchange between the symbols of God, nature and man.³¹ But some traits are survived not only as the popular imitation in the genius-is-crazy equation, but rather in the figure of the *wanderer* who roams through the great classical texts. This is a figure of movement, but unlike its older brother, the explorer, the wanderer roams freely in the land of aesthetic appearance, a symbolic embodiment of a truly limitless imagination.

The wanderer is the aestheticized figure of creative man which appears again and again in the poetic texts of Goethe, Schiller and Hölderlin.³² The wanderer is different from travelers and the giant God in that he is constantly on the go. He is someone who moves, as his German name suggests, in turns, a literal Tropus. The path which he searchingly traverses may lead to error, a cause for both suffering and joy in creative invention. However, the crucial question remains: what is the wanderer searching for? The fact that he is searching at all is a sign that he is missing something.

In Hölderlin's and Schiller's great poems we find the answer. The creative movement of the wanderer is directed at the loss of nature and its mythological incarnation. More than any other poem, Schiller's *Elegie* of 1795 (later entitled "Der Spaziergang") portrays the path of the wanderer who sees the arbitrarily accomplished evolution of culture sink into catastrophe: "in the ashes of the city, [he who represents humanity] searches for the nature that was lost."³³ The *Elegie* shows what use the scientific and discovering genius brings to

30) "Eine Produktion ohne Genie ist Arbeit", in: *Materialien zu Kants "Kritik der Urteilskraft"*, ed. Jens Kulenkampff, Frankfurt/M. 1974, 99.

31) Cf. S. Moravia: *La scienza dell'Uomo nel Settecento*, Bari 1970; M. Duchet: *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*, Paris 1971; G. Gusdorf: *Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale, V: Dieu, la nature et l'homme au siècle des lumières*, Paris 1972.

32) E.g. Goethe: "Wandrer's Sturmlied"; Schiller: "Der Spaziergang"; Hölderlin: "Der Wanderer". As to the modern significance of this symbolic pattern cf. Roger Gilbert: *Walks in the World. Representation and Experience in Modern American Poetry*, Princeton NJ 1991.

humanity by juxtaposing the successful circumnavigation of the “Orbis Intellectualis” with the image of shipwreck: “High on the mountain of floods sways the demasted ship,/Behind clouds die out the persistent stars of the Plough,/Nothing is lasting any more, errant is even God in his bosom.”³⁴⁾

Schiller’s visionary wandering genius who surveys cultural history does not turn back from catastrophe to the raw nature whose creativity is just beginning to bud. Instead he returns to its allegoric image. Here it appears as it does in Hölderlin’s wanderer fantasies: This return to the symbolic form of nature is concurrently the re-remembrance of the classical creation of art in which the ragged consciousness of the century once again evokes the unity of the great symbols. In Schiller’s words: “Unter demselben Blau, Über dem nämlichen Grün/Wandeln die nahen und wandeln vereint die fernen Geschlechter,/Und die Sonne Homers, siehe! sie lächelt auch uns.”³⁵⁾ Genius is, therefore, no longer an agent of the New, but is rather a representation of the deficiencies of the Modern. In this situation, it turns back in order to recall, anamnatically, in an obstinate, practically useless manner, that which was lost through the advancing amnesia which formed part of both the productive and destructive powers of modernization.

This re-remembrance is not comparable to the preservation of memory in the service of education and museums. The anamnatic movement follows arbitrary creative urges, like the aimless movement of the wanderer contemplating nature.³⁶⁾ This “nature” represents not only that which the eye of the wanderer symbolically perceives, but it also indicates what is in danger: the unity of creator and creation. Nature is the “other” in which, if it were still possible, the unrest of the seeker could come to rest. Creative arbitrariness expresses, therefore, the freedom to tie together the near with the far, the apparently out-dated with the recently imagined. In this way it preserves, in the light of the imaginary, that which was lost in the accelerated push for modernization: God-nature-man preserved as a unified symbol. That poetry alone can fulfill this task, as Schiller writes, is a thought fitting with its time, but nonetheless disquieting. While science, economics and politics objectifyingly dissect the old triad in small incoherent particles which are more easily digested, only poetry and the arts may still dream the timeless dream of a comprehensive and uninflected totality. This dream remains disturbing because it declares itself free from the day’s labour with a pathetic gesture of rejection.

University of Heidelberg

33) “In der Asche der Stadt sucht [er, der die Menschheit vertritt] die verlorne Natur.” Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Fricke/Göpfert, I, 1973, 233.

34) Schiller op. cit., 232: “Hoch auf der Fluten Gebirg wiegt sich entmastet der Kahn, / Hinter Wolken erlöschen des Wagens beharrliche Sterne, / Bleibend ist nichts mehr, es irrt selbst in dem Busen der Gott.”

35) Schiller op. cit., 234.

36) In 20th century postmodern poetry this tendency fosters a particular type of combinatory and artistic writing; cf. D. Harth: “Vision pessimiste de la civilisation - Fondement et limite de la production esthétique”. In: Jean-Marie Paul (Ed.): *Le pessimisme, idée féconde, idée dangereuse*, Nancy 1992, 207–225.