Interview by Yunus Tuncel for Stefan Lorenz Sorgner and Jaime del Val
On the Metahumanist Manifesto[1]

July-October 2011

Q: There are many manifestos out there; why did you feel the need to write another one? What urged you to come up with this manifesto?

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: In a time without meta-narratives which are being widely shared, there is the need for some people to be embedded in a poem. I am such a person. Every poem ages, and the words that used to be full of meaning at one time might not have the same impact at some other time or in a different part of the world. Hence there is the need to work on older poems or to create new ones. The Metahumanist Manifesto is such a poem. There was the need for it to get put forward because the style and the words of the other contemporary poems and short stories did not talk to me sufficiently. Yet, I needed a poem in which I felt at home. Even though the home is just a small one, it enables me a temporary rest. I do not know how many people can find rest in our manifesto. However, I am aware that it is not a poem that is made to occupy all human beings and I do not want it to be such a home.

Jaime del Val: I felt that more than 20 years after the first Posthuman Manifesto, Donna Haraway's Cyborg and Sandy Stone's Post-transexual Manifesto, there was a need to renew the horizon of practices and discourses with a strong statement, which is aesthetical, philosophical and political. I also think that both Stefan and I felt a need to move beyond existing paradigms and create a new provisional field, a movement rather than a territory. This may seem contradictory with the idea of doing a manifesto, which may appear rather territorializing, however I think it is not.

Stefan and I had met and become friends around fifteen years ago, during our studies in London, and since our first conversations I have had the feeling that we shared something very vague, a spirit of challenge and inquiry, a movement of thought, and the passion for thinking and

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[1] This manifesto was presented by Stefan Sorgner and Jaime del Val for the first time in September 2010 at the Audiovisual Posthumanism Conference in Mytilini, Lesbos, Greece.

discussing that only philosophers have. We had been caressing the idea of exploring these resonances for some time I guess and so we came up with the Metahumanist Manifesto, which became a common ground that embodied the shared movement of thought. But for each of us it has probably different resonances and potentials. It is not a unifying score, but an open field of relations. The performative act of writing a manifesto was the moment where our vague resonances coalesced into a common yet open field.

This Manifesto I see in the tradition of Donna Haraway's and Sandy Stone's Manifestos, where there is room for both irony and blasphemy, both taken in the most serious terms: irony and blasphemy with regard to our own traditions.

As far as I am concerned this Manifesto is partly a response to decades of feminist, post-feminist, queer, and posthumanist critical theory that has been anchored in theories of representation and language, and with other movements happening that interested me in continental and Anglo-american philosophy. It was time to introduce a new movement of thought (as Erin Manning says), new hybrid fields of relations in motion. So, writing a manifesto positions our statement within a certain tradition, while not ignoring the irony and blasphemy with regard to that tradition.

Q: Many thinkers and movements since the 19th century have taken a critical stance towards humanism. You are both involved with transhumanism and posthumanism. Can you elaborate on how metahumanism differs from these movements?

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: You are right. I take it that humanism is characterized by the judgement that human beings have a special status in the world, which implies that they are categorically different from natural beings. In particular due to the ideas of Darwin and Nietzsche as well as many technological developments and scientific discoveries, several movements away from humanism have taken place. Posthumanism and transhumanism are currently some widely received ones, and I think that both managed to establish some timely insights, e.g. affirmation of a non-dual, this-worldly understanding of human beings and of the norm of negative freedom. However, the duality of posthumanism with a background in

continental philosophy and transhumanism with an Anglo-American bioethical grounding also needs to be transcended. Metahumanism integrates central elements from both movements and can be seen as a connection between them. By establishing such a connection elements of both movements get criticized, too.

Posthumanism is characterized by the attempt to transcend dualisms and to analyze the interaction between human beings and technologies from a materialist anthropological point of view. Metahumanism is definitely an outgrowth of this understanding of posthumanism. However, instead of a materialist outlook, it takes a relational one. In addition, it integrates transhumanist aspects as well. Transhumanism primarily affirms the immense variety of enhancement technologies and attempts to bring about the trans- and the posthuman. Metahumanism agrees that there is nothing necessarily morally dubious concerning enhancement technologies and that it is highly likely that trans- and posthumans will come about eventually. However, in contrast to transhumanism, trans- and posthumans are not seen as a primary goal. There is nothing *a priori* morally dubious, if people see the trans- and the posthuman as their personal goal, but metahumanism doubts and disagrees that this goal is one which ought to get aspired to by all human beings, because it accepts that there is a radical plurality of concepts of the good, which is a central premise of metahumanist thinking.

The last point can be referred to as an affirmation of ethical nihilism. Hereby, metahumanism clearly goes beyond Nietzsche's nihilism and also beyond Vattimos's *pensiero debole*. In addition, metahumanism affirms aletheic nihilism which regards perspectivism as most plausible epistemic position. This issue, on the other hand, was taken over from Nietzsche's and Vattimo's philosophy.

Having in mind Vattimo's approach, there is one further topic, which seems to me as most relevant to stress. It is also the reason which made it necessary for me to put forward the metahumanist manifesto, because it is the reason for metahumanism to be something special and unique and also why it cannot be reduced to a different contemporary movement. Metahumanism brings together Adorno's negative dialectics and Vattimo's radical hermeneutics such that it is a particular procedure or a method which can get applied to various discourses. The metahumanist

attitude or metahumanist advertisement occurs when I enter into a given, established, and relatively static discourse and undermine and develop further this discourse by means of reflections, which presuppose metahumanist positions and the use of metahumanist practices. What does this mean in practice? When I enter into a discourse, for instance, of analytical utilitarian bioethicists, use their language and take into consideration their methods, but argue in a dialectical manner by engaging in hermeneutical practices, such that it is possible for me to undermine basic paradigms of their discourses and positions that are being taken for granted within their linguistic communities, then the relevance of metahumanism and the uniqueness of this procedure of thinking comes out best. Hence, a central element of metahumanism is its procedural attitude. In this respect, metahumanism is radically different from posthumanism. I can apply the metahumanist method to all discourses. If you talk to Utilitarians and initially adapt yourself to their manners of speaking and their basic beliefs, but at the same time you start to introduce dialectical thinking and hermeneutic movements, then you can gradually undermine and develop further their paradigms and thereby put metahumanism into practice. The same can be done to discourses within any school from a Jesuit discourse world to the one taken for granted by members of the Frankfurt school. It is this adaptability and this openness to all kinds of discourses, which makes metahumanism unique and which clearly distinguishes it from posthumanism. However, and this might be an even more important point, by combining Adorno's negative dialects and Vattimo's radical hermeneutics it embeds itself clearly in the philosophical tradition as it draws upon and develops further complex philosophical procedures. Thereby it also distinguishes itself clearly from posthumanism which is more firmly rooted in the traditions of literary or cultural studies. If I was asked what readers ought to remember concerning metahumanism, I would, most probably, stress its procedural attitude. It is thinking put into practice. Metahumanism occurs, if you embed yourself in a static and established discourse and apply aspects of negative dialectics and radical hermeneutics to undermine it and to develop it further such that it gets altered towards a more fluid and multiperspectival setting. Examples of me applying metahumanist practices can be found in my monograph *Menchenwürde nach Nietzsche* (WBG 2011) or my article "Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans- and Posthumanism" (In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology* Vol. 21 Issue 2 – October 2010 - pgs 1-19). http://jetpress.org/v21/sorgner.htm

In my monograph, I enter the German discourses concerning human dignity to show that an essential element that is presupposed within the discourse is highly implausible, namely the presupposition that human beings are categorically different from other, solely natural beings such as animals. In part 1.1.1 of my article "Beyond Humanism" I concentrated on Habermas' judgment concerning liberal eugenics to hint at hidden, implausible assumptions in his article such as the radical duality between culture and nature against which I put forward some reasons in the above mentioned section. Both texts can be seen as metahumanism in practice.

The various constituents of a metahumanist approach can be found in other philosophical theories or attitudes. However, the way they are integrated and combined here is a particular one and one which presupposes the current cultural embeddedness.

Jaime del Val: Metahumanism draws on posthumanism and its critique of the humanistic tradition, by putting emphasis in the relational aspect of reality. It can be described as a *radical relationalism* as it not merely describes existing relations between existing entities, but, by focusing a priori on the relationality (understood as movement) proposes that whatever we see as discrete is an effect of contingent relations and that by transforming the relations the seemingly discrete may also be transformed. This may apply to human-social spheres of relationality as well to other larger and smaller scales or dimensions.

Thus metahumanism goes beyond the materialist critique of posthumanism and introduces both new critical paradigms and new modalities of becoming through radically focusing on affects and relationalities. This seemed to me necessary in the context of contemporary *capitalism of affects*, where the *panchoreographic* operates at the level of affective production through new technologies of control. New strategies of resistance are necessary to oppose these mechanisms that do not strictly operate *inside* the realms of representation and language, but that we may approach in terms of movement. The amorphous becomings proposed by metahumanism are an important shift, which states that representation and language are inescapable only insofar as we assume them: they are but a very contingent paradigm, we move all the time outside of it, it is not a condition for a livable life. Subjecting life to patterns and forms is itself a specific technology of control, but not a necessary condition of life, we may articulate other kinds of

ecologies of relations that rely on immanence more than on exteriority, on amorphous becomings more than on identity and form, thus defying the morphogenesis of power understood as process of materialization, as Judith Butler suggests in her reading of Aristotle.

Metahumanism combines the perspectivism of posthumanist critique, with a new kind of immanentism in which every perspective is part of immanent relations and never absolutely external to any other of the fields of forces that constitute reality.

Metahumanism differs from transhumanism as it is non-utopian, it does not see the metahuman as a future, but as a strategy in the present, and it is critical with the humanistic assumptions about the Good and the individualism and rationalism that transhumanism takes on from the humanistic tradition and from capitalism as a continuation of both.

Metahumanism coincides with posthumanist critique in saying that we already are posthuman, as Katherine Hayles suggests, or even that humans have never quite been such in the way humanism pretends (superior, autonomous, homogeneous beings with a free will).

Metahumanism redefines the approach to the notion of Species: through radical relationalism it proposes that the boundaries of the species are themselves loose. Metahumanism may coincide thus with posthumanist critique in saying that we have never been human in the way that humanism proposes. What a species is and how it can transform is no longer a matter of establishing fixed boundaries for the sake of the superiority of humans, nor positivistic accounts of evolution. On the contrary it is about a permanent redefinition of the limits of the species that does not attempt to refix those limits and which starts a journey of transformation outside any principle of evolution, understood as improvement.

At the same time Metahumanism opens new fields of possible intervention in terms of transformation, or amorphogenesis that may at some instance link to some transhumanist techniques while remaining critical to others and distant from its utopian claims of universality. The amorphogenesis proposed by metahumanism doesn't imply an enhancement that we may

quantify as becoming better in any positivistic sense, in fact it is a differential transformation that is non quantifiable in terms of any universal account of the Good.

Q: Your manifesto has many Nietzschean and Deleuzian traces. You speak of relational forces, affects, pluralism, and perspectivism. Let's start with Nietzsche. What in Nietzsche inspired you to write this manifesto?

Jaime del Val: The Nietzschean account of the world as field of forces is a strong inspiration for Metahumanism, whereby we avoid a dualistic vision of how the forces interact in terms of weaker and stronger forces, and propose a pluralistic and differential field of qualitatively different forces that are non quantifiable.

Metahumanism is also aware of the notion of genealogy (more specifically in its development through Foucault) since each metabody, even in its diffuse nature, has a specificity, and the relational ecologies that have to be developed in each occasion have to deal with the particular forms of violence or unequal force relations that are established in specific and contingent relational fields.

Metahumanism could also be said to propose a *radically Dionysian aesthetics*, since it focuses on the amorphous as both political and aesthetic paradigm that doesn't require form, although it may operate on the boundaries of form to redefine it.

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: Nietzsche's perspectivism according to which every perspective is an interpretation is definitely one of the most influential of his thoughts. With this concept, he brought about the birth of postmodernity, which was particularly powerful in twentieth century French philosophical thinking, which also (at least partly) explains the relevance of Deleuzian traces in metahumanism. Posthumanism and metahumanism are definitely an outgrowth of postmodern thinking which was primarily based upon perspectivism. Metahumanism combines perspectivism with an immanent version of relationalism. This relational thinking can be seen as a further development of a Darwinian naturalism which represented one of the most influential moves away from a dualistic ontology and which still remain one of the most widespread

foundations of contemporary thinking. Still, it must not be disrespected that Nietzsche also had a quasi-naturalist perspective of this-worldly processes. His will to power ontology with all the power quanta interacting and constituting power constellations also provided a significant inspiration for the relationalist position which metahumanism is putting forward. However, the Nietzschean traces of metahumanism become even clearer, if one considers my two monographs on Nietzsche.

Q: And the Deleuzian traces?

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: Deleuze together with Foucault edited the French version of the complete works of Nietzsche. Hence, it is not much of a surprise that there is a strong connection between metahumanism and Deleuzian thinking. In particular concerning Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's ontology, the notions of affects and relational forces became central. By integrating some transhumanist concepts of forces, metahumanism develops Deleuze's ontology further, became more integrative and even more doubtful concerning essentialisms. The most influential of all essentialist positions has been Plato's. Plato remained a life long enemy of both Nietzsche and Deleuze. Metahumanism continues in this tradition, but tries to move beyond the hidden dualist traces which remain in any antagonistic duality, i.e. Plato versus Nietzsche or Plato versus Deleuze. Metahumanism also integrates aspects of Plato's playful thinking while rejecting Plato's explanation of the phenomena in question. It is a permanent dialectic of affirmation and critique which is characteristic of metahumanist thinking.

Jaime del Val: The links of metahumanism to Deleuzian thinking are many. By thinking reality in terms of relational movement, therefore as becoming, rather than being, the particular account of relationalism that metahumanism provides strengthens the possibility of forms of becoming that do not imply representation, identity and form, thus linking to the notion of Deterritorialisation and radicalising it, or setting it to motion in specific manners.

Metasex also links to the notion of n-sexes proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus*, while the post-anatomical body has some potential resonances with the Body without Organs, while not being the same thing.

Metabodies could be said to be rhizomatic in their open and diffuse diagramme of forces, though we do away with any materialistic or representational metaphor and use only the idea of forces in interaction as they constitute provisional gravitational points that account for the genealogies of power, and of everything we may see as discrete.

Affects are also a crucial trace of Metahumanism where we establish, through Deleuze and other philosophers, a connection to Spinoza.

Guattari, Deleuze's collaborator in several books, is also closely connected to the Manifesto especially in his concern to articulate ecologies of relations.

The links I make both to Nietzsche and Deleuze are strongly informed by the reading of Foucault, and all of them in turn by the reading of Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Katherine Hayles, Sandy Stone, Rosi Braidotti, Elisabeth Grosz, Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, Luciana Parisi and other contemporary scholars who relate either to Foucault or Deleuze, and in either cases to Nietzsche, while in some cases deriving from Spinoza.

Yet the manifesto also draws on fields as diverse as biology (Symbiogenesis Theories of Lynn Margulis), Neurosciences (Enactive Cognition theories of Francisco Varela and Umberto Maturana), Chaos and Complexity theories, Quantum Physics, Phenomenology, Eastern Philosophy, dance and body practices such as Contact Improvisation or Bodyweather techniques, queer politics and ecology.

Q: In your view, does the *metahuman* exist? Or, is the *metahuman* out there in the future? A goal to be attained?

Jaime del Val: The metahuman is not a utopia for the future, nor is it something that exists as a stable entity, it is a becoming and a movement, not an identity, it is a strategy of resistance and movement of emergence, that entails setting to motion specific technologies in the present.

The metahuman indeed defies linear time, which depends on Euclidean spaces and Cartesian perspectives; it denies the idea of future and past, and of present as an instant in between these. The metahuman proposes a multidimensional and expanded present which itself generates multidimensional space.

This is not speculative: as soon as we move as bodies outside the Cartesian perspective space-time ceases to exist in its linearity and extension. This can be explored in many ways, through a reappropriation and redefinition of our sensory anatomies, of movement and sensation, of relationality at all levels. Movement and sensation do not happen "in" quantifiable space-time, rather they produce unquantifiable space-time. The metahuman is thus an open set of techniques that radically redefine the human in the present, not through materialistic and positivistic interventions, but *through subtly changing the modes of relation*. The new species that emerges all the time in the present when using these techniques is never defined, it's a potential that never actualizes: an *amorphogenesis.*

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: "The metahuman is neither a stable reality, essence or identity, nor a utopia", and hence, it is clear that the metahuman exists. Yet, existence must not be taken as something stable and unchanging. The metahuman is an open set of forces which is in permanent interaction with other metahumans without always being able to separate one metahuman from another one. Hence, in contrast to the trans- and the posthuman from transhumanist discourses, the metahuman represents a new description of the anthropos as one who is permanently embedded in several layers, forces and relations which excludes the possibility of him having, possessing or being a Leibnizian identity.

The metahuman can be a transhuman, too, whereby the transitional human is one who is still an anthropos but is already on the way of transcending the boundaries of anthropoi. In contrast to most transhumanists who regard it as necessarily meaningful to bring about the posthuman, metahumanism does not regard this goal as a necessarily meaningful one, but does not necessarily object to metahumans who regard the posthuman as meaningful for themselves either. The posthuman does not yet exist. He might still belong to the human species but must have at least one quality which goes beyond what is regarded as possible for human beings.

According to some Futurists like FM 2030, the posthuman does not belong to the human species anymore.

Q: Who did you have in your mind as the audience when you were composing the Manifesto?

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: As the Latin word "manifestus" implies, a manifesto gives you some judgments in the hand so that you have something to deal with. The underlying reflections are complex and have been put forward by Jaime and myself in various manners. I presented most of the ideas present in the manifesto in my previous articles and books. In particular, my most recent monograph *Menschenwürde nach Nietzsche* contains central metahumanist reflections. Jaime has also dealt with the contents of the manifesto in various publications but also in his art works and metaformances. The manifesto can be seen as a brief poem which summarizes the work both of us have undertaken so far.

The final words of the manifesto have been composed on a ship in-between Greece and Turkey and hence in between Christian, Muslim, naturalist and skeptical cultures whereby traces of the various traditions can be found in it.

As metahumanism can also be seen as a *Verwindung* of posthumanist and transhumanist thinking, it goes beyond culturally strong movements of both the Anglo-American and the continental world. Still, it also integrates Eastern ways of thinking. Even though it incorporates many traditions, it does not aim for dominance or wide-spread acceptance. It simply hopes to be present whenever its presence is needed which is the case when nodes become too strong. Then, these nodes need to get challenged. Metahumanism accepts the importance of nodes, but also stresses the permanent need to move beyond them which particularly is the case when nodes strive for universal acceptance and domination.

Given the aforementioned reflections it should be clear that metahumanism does not strive for cultural domination but hopes to be taken into consideration when such domination occurs.

Hence, I hope that its relevance gets accepted by metahumans who feel and grasp the importance of the reflections mentioned in the manifesto.

Jaime del Val: Apart from the audience of philosophers that we expected to have in the presentation in Lesbos I tried to think of all the different fields with which I usually interact: from media arts and performance to music, from queer activism to ecology. The key concepts and neologisms proposed in the manifesto have indeed emerged over the past ten years as an effect of my moving in-between all these territories: metabody, metasex, metaformance (this one originally stemming from Claudia Giannetti), metamedia, metahuman, amorphogenesis, post-anatomical body, affective capitalism, panchoreographic... are all noeologisms that I have been using and putting into circulation in writings since around 2002, related to my own transdisciplinary art practices but also standing as philosophical claims on their own. It is the feedback between theory and practice, and between different fields of practice and theory that has given way to the key concepts proposed in the Manifesto, which although they may stand on its own, would not have become thinkable without this particular processes of relational movement accross disciplines, or without specific embodied and aesthetic practices from which they stem.

Whereas my use of the neologisms that the manifesto proposes was linked to specific aesthetic practices as well as to certain traditions of French philosophy, and Anglo-American critical theory and politics, Stefan connected to them from a different background. The Manifesto thus turns out to be from its very inception denying and defying universalist readings by being open to multiplicity. I believe that this at least double background that the Manifesto has from its inception is important in making it not self-referential and closed within a single tradition of thinking, but more like a movement of opening up across traditions and disciplinary grids.

The Manifesto relates to my own practice not only as philosopher outside the academy, but also as metamedia artist and performer, as environmental, post-queer and sex activist. It was the need to reframe and rethink my own practice beyond given frameworks that gave rise to my own development of metahumanistic thinking, so I was thinking of all these fields as I was writing it,

while being aware of the unkown: on the one hand Stefan's fields of relations, his own potential audience, on the other hand, the always-yet-unthinkable.

I guess some of the common work of rethinking together the text had to do with the processes of adaptation and translation that our different imaginary audiences required. But I think we never thought about a general mass-audience, since this is a product of the homogeneous humanistic world we criticize, it is not a text for a general and universal "everybody" but for a number of minority audiences that is yet to be explored. In this sense it is again Deleuze-Guattarian: micro-political and molecular, though aware of possible connections to the macro or molar strata.

Q: How has the Manifesto been received so far?

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner: So far the Manifesto has been translated into about ten languages. There have also been scholars who dealt directly with the Manifesto and analyzed traces of the Manifesto in historical philosophical positions, e.g. Heidegger's, or in the French aesthetic traditions. However, the Manifesto has only been publicly available for about one year. Specific aspects of the Manifesto have already had quite a strong impact. Jaime was invited by the MIT media lab and Yale University to present specific topics of the Manifesto. I was invited to talk about aspects of the Manifesto in many countries from the USA via the UK to Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Serbia, Germany, South Korea, Romania, France, and Greece. My most recent monograph stresses a metahumanist position concerning the concept of human dignity, and in 2011 it was reviewed in the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, which is a highly intellectual daily Swiss newspaper with a daily print run of about 160000 copies.

Jaime del Val: I have presented the Manifesto or aspects and concepts from it in various circumstances, from conferences on Dance and Technology, to activist gatherings in the 15M "Spanish Revolution 2011" movement. According to the circumstance, it requires different types of explanations and relates to each environment in an always different and productive way. I am interested in the dialogue that the Manifesto can establish with all these different fields beyond philosophy and the academy and discover every day new connections and possibilities that make the Manifesto evolve into an unknown future.

The ideas contained in the Manifesto seem to me to connect in a very lively way with a diversity of contexts, from art to activism and other, which is I think a preoccupation we share, and how this proposal far from being speculative, not only comes from certain practices but also goes back into the world of which it is part and starts interacting with new fields and potentially changing the forms of relation. The Manifesto itself is not a fixed entity but a relational body, a metabody in transformation from which yet unthinkable relations will emerge.

YT: On behalf of *The Agonist*, I thank you for your thoughts and the relational time you spent for this interview.