

Birth

Will parenthood also determine our lives in the future? • What »value« do children have in the knowledge society? Will we clone? •

The deepest and most passionate drive, not only of humanity but of matter in general, is the will to be separate, to move out from the collective and become an individual.

Franz Werfel

One of the most obvious effects of the presence of children is that they turn their parents into complete idiots, while *without* them their parents would have remained stupid mental defectives.

Georges Courteline

Alya, David – 2000

It's a warm summer day in 2000, full of freshness and breezes. As the gusts grow stronger the couple drives to a private maternity hospital in their leased Sport-Cabrio. It's a small art deco villa in a wealthy part of the city. White yachts are sailing on the lake that divides the city through the middle; flags are fluttering; joggers are running in their hundreds. There are fleecy clouds in the sky, and the couple imagines dreamily that some of them are teddy-bears.

The couple has prepared well. Breathing exercises and pelvic diaphragm training, conversations about the future, the ideal way to raise a child and school education. An established partnership formed by the gentle forces of hormones and increasing wealth on the basis of a good decade of educational development and relationship experience are the foundations for the decision to disperse with contraceptives for a while. The room that is waiting for little David has been painted in bright colours, and his cradle, designed in wenge wood by a friend who is a professional joiner stands expectantly in front of the window,

which is framed by a flowering chestnut tree. Over it dangles a little mobile of »dream clouds«. On each cloud a wish has been written by friends and family: »I want to be an astronaut!« »I can fly!« »I am a wild crocodile!«

David's life begins on a bed that looks nothing like a hospital bed. It is an antique Spanish four-poster with lathed columns and a mattress discreetly covered with plastic. Only an oxygen flask concealed behind a screen suggests that even in the feverish transition to the 21st century birth is still a dramatic physical event. (The rest of the emergency apparatus is hidden somewhere discreetly in the basement). The doctor, an ironic intellectual, asks for a quick delivery because he wants to go to a David Bowie concert that same evening. First of all he sends the couple out to the famous café with the best cherry cake in the city: »Run a lap to make it go quicker afterwards!« And then the contractions start to come every five minutes. But the couple laughs through the false labour pains. David finally needs three hours for his passage through the obstetric canal, and David Bowie does not have to wait. That same evening the couple drives home with the rosy newcomer wrapped in natural cotton wool in the Cabrio.

In many ways David is a typical child of the millennium – this time overflowing with euphoria. He is demanding, taxing and sensitive. He is self-confident, and yet fearful (he is dreadfully afraid of »robbers« and sharks, which, as a two-year old, he suspects inhabit the bathtub). He terrorises and charms his grandparents, neighbours, kindergarten teachers and visitors. What makes him so strong and vulnerable at the same time? The forces of this contradiction, this dichotomy of egoism and sensitivity, will be the theme of the present chapter.

And of course there is also a very different world, where nobody shows any interest in whether children come to the world gently, considerately and with paternal empathy.

On roughly the same day, at the turn of the millennium, Alya is born some thousands of kilometres to the south: on the slopes of the Ethiopian highland in South-Eastern Ethiopia, not far from the border with Somalia.

Alya is a child of the Surma. The Surma are tall herdsmen, at present numbering 40,000 people, related to the Masai in Kenya. The Surma are also called platter-lip people, because the women have a hole drilled in their lower lips once they are sexually mature. At first, something like a piercing, a thin block of wood is pushed into this hole and is then continually replaced by larger ones. This results in those gigantic platter lips, up to 25 centimetres in size. Earlier

the Surma disfigured their young women in this way to stop them from falling into the hands of Belgian slave traders. In the course of time, strangely enough, they were thought to be sexy.

We don't know a great deal about Alya's birth. No digital camera was whipped out, no entry was made in a registry of births. Alya's place of birth is a dusty attic in a hut of a hospital, which is normal in this part of Ethiopia. The ward is run by the Sisters of Mercy, a Catholic sect, which has been trying since the sixties to lower the very high infant mortality rate in this region.

Alya's mother vanishes, shortly after the birth, with a little case that holds all her worldly goods, heading towards Addis Abeba; she is never seen again (for a while she works in a Coca Cola factory there and then all traces are lost). Alya's father, a hungry, suffering person with confused socialist ideas, brings Alya and her two sisters to a kind of soldier's camp in a rattley jeep in 2001. There child soldiers are trained, and Alya's eight and eleven-year-old sisters also learn how to use weapons. On the side they take care of their sister, who is hardly two years old.

The guerrilla troops, for whose senseless war games Alya's sisters are trained, have long lost their enemies since the end of the Eritrea-Ethiopian war. The soldiers belong to a gang of warlords, who operate along the border to Somalia, earning a living by trading with rubber tyres for trucks and a bit of cocaine. They pass the time with robberies and games of aggression and by terrorising nearby villages.

The only existing document from her infancy is a photo showing little Alya sitting on the floor of a hut. There is a kind of dreamy astonishment in her weary eyes. She is lifting some kind of porridge out of a bowl with her fingers. Next to her sits a boy of barely ten years, who is stroking her cheek – in his other hand he is holding his Kalashnikov ...

Two beginnings to life that could not be more different. In two worlds that represent the whole bandwidth, the abyss between human cultures. In the one case birth as a casual event, a »coming down« as people used to say. In the other case the »experience of birth« performed on a small stage. In one case the noisy little Cabrio and in the other the rattling jeep and the dusty road going endlessly on to the horizon.

But the story does not stop here. It has breaks, unexpectedness, and hopes. Alya is abducted from the country of her birth at the age of two years and two months – abducted in the best sense of the word. Carried off to the north, to

a big European city, where she is adopted by R., an art historian, and S., his warm-hearted wife.

Meanwhile Alya had become a lively child, full of defiance and an unlimited will to live. It took a long time for her to overcome the results of her malnourishment. In her first months in Europe she had to fight for her life – a stubborn inflammation in the joints, hardly treatable with antibiotics, brought her to the edge of death. But today it looks as if she will become a beauty. And one senses the enormous energy that drives a human life on. The arrow of her life is set on a bowstring pulled powerfully taut. And this bowstring binds the old, archaic time, when human beings were at the margins of existence, constantly under threat from the forces of nature and their own atavistic heritage, with the future.

The immature being

In December 2000 the Californian UCLA-Institute for Child Development conducted an intelligence test with 3,500 babies. The babies were tested for extremely fundamental skills. Were they, for example, intelligent enough to get out of a room filled with cyanide gas? Or reach the shore from the middle of a lake? Or seek protection in a metropolis and find something to eat for themselves? All test persons performed terribly poorly in these tests, unlike worms, dogs, cats, and chickens, which were also put into these situations by the scientists. The conclusion to be drawn from the tests? Human babies, long described by psychologists as very adaptable and »intelligent« are in fact extraordinarily stupid.¹

Of course this test was a »fake«, published in the satirical magazine, *The Onion* – a sarcastic response to the numerous »genius baby tests« that are once again in fashion at this time. And yet these results are *true* for all that. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French natural philosopher, expressed his judgement on our species in a state of »babyhood« like this:

»We are born with the capacity to know *nothing*, to understand *nothing*, and to learn *nothing*. Imagine a baby born with the physical attributes of an adult, like Pallas from the head of Jupiter. Such a being would be a perfect idiot, an au-

tomaton, a statue without coordinated movements and almost without feeling. He would see nothing and hear little, and recognise no-one; he would not even be able to focus his eyes on any particular thing!²

Fathers and mothers with a clear-headed attitude to their offspring know how precisely this description fits the bill. The development of little *Sapiens sapiens* goes painfully slowly. If anything disproves theories of natural grace and elementary autonomous abilities, babies do so. They can neither sing nor dance, and you can't have a conversation with them yet. Instead of that, they lie in bed like cakes, and it takes years before they can more or less control their excretions. For at least two years, or rather three, they are in need of high-quality care. But even after that the risks decline only slowly. Falling into a swimming pool and drowning is an option for quite a long time. Drug addiction, the wrong friends and other stupidities even make the calamity-curve rise again strongly later on. In a certain way little *Sapiens sapiens* are eternally needy cases that make high demands.

That most adults still put up with all these unreasonable demands is, of course, due to the devilish little genes that have programmed all 10 billion of our cells to reproduce ourselves in some way or another, not matter what may follow.

A gazelle, a cat or a gnu survives in most cases if the mother dies when it is born. A giraffe, a dog or a small filly stands on its own legs within a few minutes. But the tiny baby of *Sapiens sapiens*, because of its over-large skull, has to force its way through the birth canal in a complicated turning movement; a demanding procedure requiring large amounts of energy, producing pain and posing a considerable risk to the life of mother *and* child.

And so it is, in fact, our intelligence that makes the beginning of human life such a dramatic event for all concerned. Because of the large brain of *Sapiens* the human being has to pass through the birth canal in a state of immaturity, long before it reaches the autonomous stage of its development.

The price that evolution demands for intelligence (a large brain) also has another »side effect«, however: this is the hour of birth for social qualities.

In the animal kingdom there is an incredible variety of ways to deal with offspring. Male lions bite the offspring of their competitors dead. Meerkats bring up their offspring in communes, without caring about individual descent and with changing foster parents. In the case of emperor penguins the males brood over the egg for months in the Antarctic cold and care for the helpless, half starving infant until the mother returns from a long fishing expedition. Many animals »forget« their offspring once it has reached a certain degree of mobility or sexual maturity. Horses can identify their children by smell up to a considerable age. Female elephants often remain in the herd until they die. But when elephant clans are torn apart they forget their family bonds within a few weeks. If they meet each other again, they trumpet, look joyful – and run away.

With humans, however, the social network of cooperation grows into an iron bond between individuals, which usually holds for a lifetime. Certainly there are many exceptions – ostracism, even infanticide and »rejection«. But, as people say, »blood is thicker than water«. Only a very few individuals manage to throw off or negate family bonds entirely. And if this happens it is usually a sign of some drama, with terrible causes and results!

The reason for this elasticity in relationships is to be sought in the difficult circumstances of our beginnings. To help their »immature« infants to survive humans always had to develop a much more complex pattern of the division of labour than animals. It starts with the division of labour between men and women, according to which the man brings calorific meat home and the woman gathers protein-rich nourishment. But the human complexity of the relationship between the generations also needs to be explained against the background of the drama of human birth.

The American anthropologist Kristin Hawkes discovered the so-called »Grandmother Effect« in our primal history in this respect.³

Why, asks Hawkes, does the duration of life in *Sapiens sapiens* tend to be unrelated to the duration of fertility? Since the transition from *Australopithecines* to *Homo erectus* more than a million years ago, humans are no longer limited to a lifetime of 40 or, at most, 50 years. Shouldn't the life expectancy of humans – like that of other mammals

– end at the latest after about 50 years, when the individual tends to become a burden on the community? Once an individual has served its purpose in the reproductive cycle it is – normally – simply disposed of. And how is the still existing difference in life expectancy between men and women to be explained? (Bearing in mind that women have now partly »caught up« in terms of mortality due to smoking and stress.)

Hawkes the anthropologist found the possible socio-evolutionary reasons for this among the Hazda in Northern Tanzania: women develop a new phase of activity after their fertile phase, when they support the next generation of mothers in collecting food and supplying calorific nutrition. In creating this »Grandmother Syndrome«, evolution defined a term of life after the childbearing phase. It unlocked genes for longevity – not out of kindness and not by chance but as an additional adaptation factor for the better survival of the species.

Children were expensive, therefore, long before the age of Nike and mobile phones. The first songs were probably cradle songs. The first words ever spoken were perhaps the calming words of older women to younger ones giving birth.⁴ In this way the interdependence of human communities grew closer, but so too did their cooperation and complexity. In the course of time everything we are today developed in that way: division of labour, empathy, culture and technology – and probably envy, anger, aggression and war as well. Our humanity – in both its good and its bad aspects – is due to the helplessness of our offspring.

A brief (future) history of reproductive culture

When, about a hundred thousand years ago, our ancestors emerged from Africa's savannas – from the very region where Alya was born – we humans were already as we are today. Apart from a few deviations in DNA sequences, which embodied the climatic adaptations in our inheritance, our genetic code precisely resembled that of today's human beings. For this reason Alya, in defiance all race theorists, could be-

come a quantum physicist, a fashion designer, or, if other people let her, President. Like other children, at the age of eight she will be able to use mobile telephones and at eighteen drive a car. And she will probably manage these things better than the spoiled middle-class children in her school!

In the primeval days of humanity, from the time of hunter and gatherer communities until well into the early stone age, children were rarer than many believe. People of nomadic times travelled sometimes for days or weeks across difficult terrain, under extremely unfavourable climatic conditions, threatened by animals or other groups of humans. If nomadic mothers had had to carry huge hoards of children around with them, humanity would have died out long ago. In the nomadic cultures of early times women averaged three to four children at intervals of about four or five years (in the case of the Kung, for example, a nomadic people in Namibia, this is still the case). Women had their first periods at eighteen and the menopause at about 35. Children were breast-fed for four or five years, because this was the best and simplest nutritional method for long journeys on foot. After about four fertility phases, the reproductive clock had run down.

In the first settled farming societies, which slowly replaced the nomadic way of life with alluvial high cultures 9,000 to 7,000 years ago, reproductive behaviour changed to match new conditions of life. The number of children increased because the economy of reserves and surpluses replaced the scarcity economies of the hunters and gatherers. At the same time, large numbers of labourers were needed for numerous major projects (pyramids, temples, irrigation systems). It was soon no longer unusual for a family to consist of ten or fifteen head. In this way, in many regions of the earth, the family structure evolved which we now see as part of a new world of social conflict: large patriarchal families, where the main purpose of reproduction was to create the largest possible number of male heirs.

In the European peasant culture of the Middle Ages, with its powerful climatic contrasts, the number of children still remained relatively limited. Around 1700 the classical peasant family still had about four to six children, two of whom, on average, died of illnesses such as childbed fever, so that usually no more than three children lived in

a peasant household. The historian Michael Mitterauer shows, in his book *Warum Europa*, how the specific climatic and harvesting model of Central Europe called for a specific development.⁵ The topographical particularity of agriculture (which economically undermined feudal structures and encouraged smallholdings) and the specialisation of European monogamous marriage (which gave the »patriarch« or Elder, only limited rights) led to a certain economising of the birth pattern. Long before the pill and the condom, peasant women knew how to look after themselves when too many »pests« were threatening. Numerous offspring were more of a reality among the nobility. On the other hand it remained true that »many hands make light work« in peasant life. There was always a tension between *numbers* of children and the *ideal* of childhood, so that a certain balance was maintained.

In Europe it was not until the industrial revolution in the late 18th century that the birth-rate rose dramatically. We are all familiar with the sepia photographs from the early times of proletarian culture: thin, drawn faces, children like organ pipes. It was a time when, as my grandmother sometimes said, »children were numbered«, in an heroic hope for a better life, education and prosperity, which industrialisation was to bring.

After the publication of the essay by Thomas Malthus, »On the Principle of Population« in 1798, the idea of a »population explosion« had found a place in our collective consciousness. Malthus, a statistician with a religious bent, developed his theory of the »inevitable, catastrophic growth of population« in a time of rapid modernisation, a context where it seemed all too credible. Urbanisation led to a rapid growth of population and to »improved hygienic conditions for the masses«. In the end, according to Malthus, this would have to lead to a catastrophic famine, with many millions of deaths. Since then the Malthus theory has been »improved« with all sorts of projections and hysterical fears. That the people of the »Third World« are multiplying »like rabbits« flows merrily out of the mouths of schoolteachers, whether green or reactionary. The idea that »the masses« will come over us like a flood, has now become one of the hysterical motifs in the fixed repertoire of media exaggerations.

Here are the real trends:

- About half of all humans, just under three billion people, live today in countries with a birth rate of less than 2.1 children per childbearing woman! In Iran, Thailand, China, Sri Lanka, many Caribbean island states and most South American countries, such as Brazil, the rate is less than two (in other words under the so-called maintenance rate). In 33 of the 196 countries of the world it is less than 1.5 children, including in such high-population countries as Russia, Spain, Germany, Japan and Canada.⁶
- Even in the »super-fertile« poor countries, the number of children is sinking rapidly due to the rising educational levels of women and improved access to contraceptives. In Bangladesh today it is about 3.3 (as compared with 6 twenty-five years ago), and in India 2.6. On the Philippines the number of children has sunk from seven to three (from 1960 until today) and is still going down, and in Vietnam from 7.3 in the seventies to 2.3 today. Afghanistan is currently in free fall (currently four children, three years ago seven children per woman).
- The only countries where the birth rate is still very high are the poverty-stricken and miserable countries of the African civil wars. There the women are still having between six and seven children, but 40 per cent of these children fail to become adults.
- Low birth rates may rise again. The key to that is whether women are released from the need to decide between career and child, for example due to help from their men, all-day school systems and a child-friendly infrastructure. In such cases a society that had started to shrink may become more fertile again. In Sweden, Iceland, France, and also in southern Europe in recent years the fertility rate has shown a definite upward tendency again (on the average from 1.4 to 1.7).

Since family behaviour reflects very long-term trends, it is possible to make a realistic prognosis from all these developments that sends the Malthus spook back to the rumpus room of history for good: the population of the world will reach its numerical zenith in 2060 – plus or minus a decade. At around nine billion individuals! It looks at present

as if this will be the highest number of people who will ever walk on this planet! In 2150, which is three or four generations according to new time measurements, we will be a mere *five* billions.

So here is the first safe news from the future realm of reproduction: *We will become rare!*⁷

The Reproduction Restaurant

Robin Baker, a sociobiologist from the USA, has written perhaps the cleverest and most radical work on the perspectives of reproduction. *The Future of Sex*⁸ discusses everything this century has to offer in terms of gene-technological opportunities. According to Baker, the future will belong to the »reproduction restaurant«, where we can select the kind of reproduction we want »à la carte« from a menu. IVF and ICSI – in-vitro-fertilisation and intracytoplasmic sperm injection – are only the beginning. Of our free choice, in future we will »make« children with homosexual or heterosexual partners and at any age between ten and eighty. We will have our optimal IVF baby carried by surrogate mothers or our own daughters. Children of dead people, homosexuals, hermaphrodites...

How realistic is Baker's scenario? Let us consider the state of the news for a moment:

- 1997: Jean and Howard Garber, an American married couple of about 50 have an egg cell from their daughter, who had died of cancer, carried by a surrogate mother.
- 2002: the IVF child of Candy McCullough and Sharon Duchesneau, two deaf American women turns out to be deaf as well. The lesbian couple deliberately looked for a deaf sperm donor because they believe that deafness is a privilege.
- 2002: a French sibling couple give birth to two children with the help of an American egg-donor. The father is 62, blind and disfigured; his sister bears the children. The children and male and female cousins and siblings as well. 9

- 2003: a woman in England fights for the right to have a child from her deceased husband. She is at first denied such a right by the courts, but does not give up.
- 2004: the Indian doctor Sadavisam helps a 64-year-old woman to give birth to a baby whose father is her infertile husband.
- 2004: the US firm Extended Fertility offers to freeze the egg-cells of any woman for a down payment of US\$ 13,000 and an annual »bank fee« of US\$ 500. This means that it is becoming possible to extend the fertility term of a woman indefinitely.¹⁰
- 2004: the motivation trainer and therapist Aleta St. James has twins at the age of 57 in the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. The male gene code of the twins is from a lover she is no longer living with. The mother speaks confidently in public about her late pregnancy: »He didn't want any children. His sperm donation was a kind of farewell gift for me... All my life I had thought: I must still do this or that. I'll still be able to have children. I know a lot of people say I'm too old. But I don't see myself as someone who will be 60 in a few years. I see myself simply as a mother, who will then be taking her children to school.«¹¹
- 2004: Adriana Iliescu, a retired teacher, is 66 years old when she gives birth to her daughter Elsa Maria in Bucharest

To this point, therefore, Baker's scenario seems plausible. But the question remains: how *far* will this development go? And does it actually contradict the old reproductive contracts from the time when we did »it« in the old, pleasurable yet risky way?

The New Paternity

For our grandfathers' generation the idea of being present in a delivery room during a birth was a rather ridiculous image. In 1960 a mere five per cent of all men in the European industrial nations held their wives' hands during the birth process. In the seventies male attendance was still forbidden in most clinics. In 1980 about 15 per cent male pi-

oneers had the courage to be there. And then, in the second half of the eighties, the breakthrough took place and the figure rose to 60 to 80 per cent.¹²

And here we are: about 90 per cent of all fathers today take part in the event that is still one of the most frightening and bloodiest that nature has to offer. Men hold hands, give massage, groan with their partners, quarrel with authoritarian doctors and faint away for fear and/or happiness. Prospective fathers sit obediently at birth preparation courses with Tantra music, dusty dinkel biscuits and herbal tea. In fact the trend has already passed its zenith (in the USA men are increasingly being replaced by so-called »doualas«¹³), but now, suddenly, other ethnic groups join the game, who one would barely think likely – even Turkish men in Germany have taken over this »custom«.¹⁴ And in Asia birth preparation courses are a real hit.

What is the reason for this drastic change in male sympathy? The first answer is to be sought in the strengthened position of women. In the demand for participation in birth, the women subtly manifest a new role contract, with the subtext: »I'm not the only one responsible for the children.« But men, too, are willingly entering into this contract. What makes them do so?¹⁵

Until roughly the day before yesterday the game of reproduction was a bit more easy-going for men than for women. Men could also make use of the variables that are simply associated with human biology: it is not immediately obvious who the father is (not all babies are so »obvious« as the red-haired child of Mrs Ermakova, Boris Becker's broom-cupboard passion).

This lack of clarity first gives men a certain pleasure benefit. In sexual adventures they can count on having to pay a lower price than women. 9,000 years of cultural history plus contraceptives have never quite been able to disguise this fact. Despite all the law books and moral standards, it was never possible to eject from the world entirely the atavistic fact we know from our forefathers, the chimpanzees: *alpha males obviously father more children!*

Artists, millionaires and Mormons could always deal with this state of affairs. Modern civil society blunted the tragedy of women, who in former times had to »drown themselves« (in the Islamic Sharia law this

matter was regulated until recently by stoning to death – in Afghanistan, for example, and in Saudi Arabia even today). But now, what happens when paternity can be proven – or disproved – beyond a shadow of doubt within 24 hours by submitting a fresh hair follicle (and this *despite* all efforts to prevent it with legal constraints)? Now the 10 to 15 per cent of »cuckoo children«, who exist in *every* culture, are revealed overnight. One result, to be sure, is that heart-rending conflicts arise between genealogical and social bonds – children who were loved socially are suddenly »rejected genetically«. But it is also true that matters gain in clarity. Men can't simply get away with it any longer. And women can't wriggle their way through. They will all have to make sure that their reproductive behaviour is above board.

The participation of men at birth, therefore, tells the tale of increased *reproductive accuracy*. It is a prophylactic, adaptative measure, a kind of instinctive preview of clearer genetic situations

Modern genetic technologies have a paradoxical effect. They do not, as fearful rumour suggests, totally detach reproduction from the human relationship, but rather they *intensify* genealogical bonds, and in that way even make loving relationships less ambiguous. However, at the same time they also raise the threshold, which is always a source of fear for both men *and* women, much higher. Anyone who reproduces himself or herself now does so without excuses, fully conscious of all the resulting investments that will have to be made.

Could this, in fact, be a hidden reason for the sinking birth rate? How many children, in earlier times, were begotten, loved and raised due to the vagueness of human encounters? How much clarity we need to have now! But how much clarity can the game of reproduction tolerate?

One of the latest applications in the miraculous wastes of the Internet is a »children's looks machine«. You enter a photo of yourself and your potential gene partner. The program calculates what your common child will look like – boy or girl – at two, four, ten or twenty years. The program is used, we are told as a screen-saver, by people seeking partners at Internet agencies...

But the question is: do we *really* want to know that?

The *Gattaca* world: will we optimise people?

At the beginning of the gene-technology, science-fiction film *Gattaca* directed by Andrew Niccol, (with Uma Thurman in the main female role), Ethan Hawke is born into the world in the late 21st century as an »uncleanly« fathered baby. The midwife takes a drop of blood from the new-born child and announces in a tone of crushing indifference: »Probability of dying of a premature heart attack: 60 per cent; probability of mental instability: 80 per cent; probability of alcoholism: 90 per cent!«

Of course, as always in the system-breaking romanticism of film art, the victor is the »unclean« force (= vagueness) of love, defeating the normative force of genetics. Our romantic »memes« are still triumphant: our cultural moulds – images, rituals, symbols – where we grant chance a dominant genetic role, still triumph over the cold reason of genetics (even though we behave more »genetically« than we think in our real love lives, as we will see in a moment). But *Gattaca* is in fact not a film but a stage play. Unlike other well-made science-fiction films, where future life seems vivid and realistic, this film is always strangely lifeless. It is a retro-designer drama, where everything is presented with lovely aesthetics but where the characters are not real people but puppets.

The film shares this lack of plausibility with all genetic reproduction utopias made till now. We can't imagine the genetic selection country, where our DNA is »matched« according to rational criteria. Not really. And that is not a coincidence.

For we are approaching the second crunch question of the genetic age: to what extent do we really long to perfect children? Will we take it for granted in a few years that we can place an order »from the catalogue« and »hitch« this or that quality to our children?

Why not take Daddy's hair colour and the genes of some sportsman? And we don't want to be bothered with Mum's rather plump figure – so let's take the gene sequence of a fashion model with a wasp waste ...¹⁶

The business with human DNA is estimated today at an annual vol-

hier bitte eine zeile mehr kreieren (zusätzlicher absatz?),

ume of 10 to 20 million euros. More than one percent of babies in the USA were fathered in a test tube – and the tendency is rising strongly.¹⁷ At Cryos in Scandinavia more than 10,000 genetic codes are preserved in liquid nitrogen at minus 196 degrees. A delivery of »blue-eyed sportsman« – or »brown-eyed academic« can reach any mail box within 24 hours. And the specifications are becoming more and more detailed. In the USA specific vocations can be ordered, from Nobel prize winner to rock star, with the precise height in centimetres. The egg cells of fashion models have also been auctioned on eBay for six-figure sums (allegedly »just as a joke«).

When we look closer, however, there is an interesting disparity between what is *offered* and what is *consumed*. Up to now most purchasers of human DNA have not been film stars. By far the largest number of in vitro babies have the genetic codes of married couples.

One reason for this is quite banal: the demand for »first-class DNA« can be satisfied in various ways. If a man is really rich he has excellent chances of getting a lovely model on the marriage market, even, or especially, if he is 60. Beautiful women, too, can get a body-builder for themselves without depending on a test tube. Poor people, on the other hand, may well be pleased to have no children – because even educating a child is extremely expensive.

The demand in the new DNA market is formed, therefore, mainly by wealthy infertile couples. These may be between 5 and 20 per cent of the population as a whole. The number of »completely normal couples« who use IVF because their fertility is not up to scratch is rising quite sharply, simply because more and more couples are delaying having children – and the fertility curve turns down from the age of about 32.

Most of these people, however, will be yearning for children with the partners they love. And so, here again, the genetic technologies merely reinforce social relationships rather than dissolving them into some imaginary genetic »production space«.

And, finally in the debate about optimal reproduction the ancient question about *nature* or *nurture* is also playing its role. Humans are much more complicated creatures than sheep and cats, and even in the case of cloning experiments with four-legged creatures the dependence of the genetic code on the environment has been revealed. The colour

patterns on the fur of cows or dogs are never the same, because they develop in the growth process, involving a complex sequence of »environmental switches« and »genetic switches«.

The quality most sought after in children is precisely one that will probably *never* be achieved with purely genetic methods: intelligence. In his book *Designer Babies*, Roger Gosden establishes that on a scale from 0 to 1 (0 standing for »completely environmentally determined« and 1 for »completely inherited«) intelligence is somewhere around 0.3. »Every gene,« says Gosden, »that is believed to have some relationship with the intelligence quotient was never more than 5 per cent responsible for it – and there are *hundreds* of them!«¹⁸

A sportsman's body comes about mainly through: training.

An intelligent person comes about mainly through: experience, learning, practice and love.

Cancer comes about partly through a genetic disposition, to be sure, but mainly through a number of negative accidents and harmful environmental influences.

Lovely blue eyes can be bought in fact. But haven't we ourselves got pretty brown or grey-blue eyes that we would gladly share with our beloved reproductive partner?

The vision of cloning: lots of identical people?

The history of cloning begins, like all important horror stories, early in cultural history: the Golem, according to Jewish mythology, is a clay guardian who protected Jews during the night; Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster, was a homunculus sewn together from mechanical parts. After that, biotechnology went on rapidly: Huxley's beta-humans are already produced industrially in artificial wombs and used as workers soon after birth. In Fritz Lang's film fragment *Metropolis* the mad scientist Rotwang works like crazy at cloning Maria, who embodies all the obsessional fantasies about women held by men of the twenties: mother, deceitful vamp, homunculus, mechanical human, the goddess Aphrodite. In the end SHE hovers over the mechanical city and brings destruction.

Clones are always an instrument, the vehicle of some evil concealed behind them. In James Bond films they obey the villains without a will of their own. That already suggests the motif that makes the clone so fascinating even today: they are descendents without descendents of their own. They are obedient to their powerful fathers until the bitter end (a classical fear of the middle classes, processed into thousands of novels), and for that very reason they ultimately have to destroy their fathers. This drama pursues us far out into space. In the last great Star-Trek film *Nemesis* Captain Jean-Luc Picard meets his younger clone and fights a murderous battle to the death. The killer in *Blade Runner*, the little boy in Spielberg's *A. I.* (a film that the genius Kubrick always wanted to make, really), Darth Maul and his army of clones in *Star Wars – Episode 2* – the incestuous drama is played out again and again in epic dimensions. In every case the *son* (never a daughter) turns out to be a weakling – and therefore a danger to the universe with all the multi-civilisations it contains.

From what deep layers of the human archaic figure does this image come? In nature clones exist everywhere without breaking the universe apart (I know identical twins who play all sorts of sophisticated games with their cloned existence). On the other hand there is always something ridiculous about the clone as well. »If one generation were to create clones of Einstein, it could only end in chaos,« Ernst Mayr, the great evolutionary biologist, once remarked drily.¹⁹ 100 Hitlers would not have led to Nazi domination of the world but would have been a planetary joke. Why are we so frightened? Why don't we just do what we do with other innovations: legislate for cloning once or twice as a right in the law books and give the clones all the rights of citizens? Why did the Pope issue a »Verdict« in the nineties, denying clones all human rights?

In *Descartes' Baby* Paul Bloom shows how many of our civilised feelings of disgust are associated with our basic evolutionary constitution. It is not just chance that we are afraid of »homunculi« and soulless bodies. This fear involves a defence reflex grounded in genetics and culture, which has something to do with our dealings with dead bodies in our pre-history – dead bodies have to be removed from human proximity to avoid infectious diseases.

Clones are »Cassandra's babies« because they touch the evolutionary core of our existence. No parental conflict, no social evolution. If children are no longer *different* – this is the supposition, which is not obviously incorrect – the whole process of becoming will be blocked. This means the process of mutation, adaptation to the new – the future. Through its very (at first virtual) existence the clone attacks the very law of evolution, which is fundamentally expressed in sexuality: *life comes from variation and recombination*.

Our distaste for cloning is, therefore, a kind of »strangling reflex«, a profound disgust at the idea that evolution might end. If, in an office, nothing were to run but the copier, nothing new could come about – the whole firm would go broke. If, in nature, sex were to be abolished and replaced with monoclonal reproduction, the resulting organisms would have to be subject to mutations, diseases, stupidities and so on. The »variation machine« of life would then have no more error messages and would create no survival variants – it would be the end of history.

»Welcome, Borgs« or the key to individuality

Anyone whose space ship has every come within fighting distance of a Borg Cube knows how much respect one has to have for this non-terrestrial civilisation. The Borg are one of the really brilliant, bad-tempered inventions from the Star Trek universe, one of the great trivial myths of our time. They are horribly disfigured types, outsized blondes, connected with each other in huge »collectives«. North Korea, *Blade Runner* and a splatter-movie mixed together and well stirred. The Borg are especially keen to advance their infrastructure with people they ruthlessly »assimilate«. They screw machine parts into flesh and attach the skin thus formed to »the great Mother«. We are the Borg. Resistance is futile!

Even for Picard, the charismatic commander of the Enterprise, »the collective« is fascinating (he was himself once »assimilated«). In it one can give up one's little fleshly ego in favour of an eternal mechanical organism. Is that too high a price to pay for being undead?

Borg do not have sex (even though the »Borg-Queen« looks dangerously sexy). They are a further twist of the spiral of the clone fantasy: a *cloned collective*. The Borg universe connects seamlessly with the collectivist nightmares that profoundly shape the cultural history of the twentieth century. Orwell's key novel *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* – these international bestsellers have formed our sensors for the future. The prophets of doom who have formulated our visions of the future could and had to relate to the bitter experiences of Communism and Fascism, the murderous industrial formations of the twentieth century. They associated our visions of the future with the constantly repeated fear that we will be »assimilated«.

And isn't this fear still rather plausible, even today? Doesn't the world of mass media work like a big equalising machine? Doesn't globalisation destroy every point of cultural difference? Doesn't the renewed strength of *formed cultures* – such as radical Islam – show how poorly the young plant of individuality has been cultivated?

Since the bourgeois Enlightenment, uniformity has been a constantly recurring fear for the future. In truth, the opposite impulse has always carried the day: *individualisation*.²⁰ In *all* cultures on earth, sooner or later, we find the same symptoms of individualisation processes, no matter what religious or other patterns have been responsible for the mind-set in each case. The Japanese, who are said to be so collectivistic, have for years been developing a youth culture that could hardly be noisier about its individualism – in Tokyo today 60 per cent of all women aged between 25 and 40 live alone. In the night life of Teheran the same phenomena are growing – drugs, pop, SMS, obstinate opposition – as in large European and American cities. And in South Korea and Vietnam, too, the divorce rates are rising.

The vision of the individual, as we know it today, arose for the first time in the Renaissance, the urban world of trade and patronage in the 14th and 15th centuries that began in Northern Italy. Suddenly people stepped out of the pictures in three dimensions, left the two-dimensional religious curiosity cabinet behind them and became – *themselves*. Francesco Petrarca, the lonely mountain climber and philosopher, in his *Familiars* of 650 years ago found words for the first individualistic canon: »Go in to yourself, wake up with yourself;

Speak with yourself, be silent with yourself: don't hesitate to be alone with yourself. For if you are by yourself then you will also be alone among people.«²¹

In the first wave of individual culture this desire still seems to have a religious colouring. The book is what functions as a symbol of education and self-discovery. A reader creates *his own time*, his own individual space in opposition to the socialised environment. The middle-class novel of the 19th century continues along this path. It illuminates the *inner life* of the characters as if in a burning glass. The elegies of inner differentiation, described by Balzac, Dostojevski and Thomas Mann, were no less than a development anatomy of the self.

Without the conflict between the individual and society, art, especially narrative art, would be barely thinkable after the middle of the twentieth century. The road movie became the narrative form of cinema from 1950, from Godard to the great American directors. Departure into danger – that was the credo of the times, from *Easy Rider* to Kubrick's *2001 – a Space Odyssey* (whose psychedelic rebirth fantasy is really a story of self-discovery) and in a broad parabola to the likes of *Rain Man* and *Erin Brockowitch* in our own days. Unforgotten is the scene in *The Graduate* of 1967, where the young Benjamin, played by Dustin Hoffman, turns up in church at the wedding of the woman he loves so passionately, just as she is getting married by arrangement to an upper-class upstart. He screams like a wounded animal, raging with romantic rebellion. She obeys him, runs with him from the church, and the couple uses a crucifix to defend themselves against the pursuing band of relatives.

At the beginning of the bourgeois age there is a first wave of self-discovery literature, concerned with patricide, »youth's own path« and the (still tentative) discovery of female identity. In the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, the time of widespread prosperity, the pill and the moon landing, self-discovery became a universal social movement. Sons decided never to become what their fathers wanted. Women broke out of the moulds of marriage. Contracts between generations were terminated with a bang *and* a whimper. People left: they left boring jobs, narrow circumstances, authoritarian demands. People said *no*. And they gobbled up books, ideas, dreams... And so the soci-

ety of discipline and duty turned into the hedonistic culture of the eighties and nineties, when Joe Bloggs from next door suddenly valued »new experience«. The rebellion of many egos led to a different social structure, which has long found its expression in legal formulations. Homosexual marriages, divorce law, family law and minority protection law reflect a new consensus, where all that belongs to the ego has aspired to the status of constitutional law.

If the age we are considering is an age of the *developed individual*, this must reflect back on the reproductive sphere. What would I have felt if my children had been born as clones? First of all, I would certainly not have been present at the birth. For who could I have shared the joy with? As a man, I would either have used a woman as a »vessel« for payment or else used some technical device that is not yet available.

A birth is such a noble experience largely because it is a two-person throw of the dice with a *unique* result. Gene matching produces a new genetic universe each time, a unique hope, a mystery. The whole thing is so exciting because we *don't really know* what the result will be. (That is even the case with identical twins, who may be seen as clones of each other, but *together* reflect the principle of uniqueness). That is the real image of birth. *That* is why we take on the burden of all those birth courses, epidurals and fainting fits, plus the threat of overweight, plus the certainty that we will have to spend ruinous amounts of money in the next twenty years. We are bringing something new, something *unique* into the world.

When our children are born, our first question is: »who does it look like?« In the case of a clone the question would be absurd and already answered. Making clones is production, not reproduction. And if we are to answer the question about the future of reproduction, we must ultimately answer a fundamental cultural question: will individuality *remain* as a basic cultural principle, or will it decay? If we see the future of civilisation as an ego-culture, genetic snobbery is the ultimate goal: »What, you only have a optimised clone? How miserable! We have our unique little Martin! Of course he squints and is not very talented. But he is *ours!*«

Future Briefing: reproduction in the 21st century

By 2050 about 15 per cent of all children will be produced in vitro; in other words, fertilisation will take place in the laboratory, either as IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) or ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection – the injection of male DNA into the egg-cell outside the womb).

A third of the in-vitro children will be made in this way to correct genetic damage, the other third because of the parents' infertility.

Early embryonic gender determination will lead to social conflicts by 2010 at the latest. While the number of girls is continuing to fall in traditional societies (even though gender determination is forbidden in many places), in Europe and the USA the number of female babies is rising.

In 2050, thirty per cent of homosexual couples will have their own children.

Surrogate mother is a proper, tightly regulated job. Even though there is a worldwide black market, the global society takes the fair treatment and payment of surrogate mothers very seriously. A delivery costs a minimum fee of at least 50,000 TD (terrardollar, comparable to today's euro). Surrogate mothers have a clearly described legal »part-parent's right«.

In future the reproductive years will range from 13 to 70. They will reach their first »peak« at 26 – at this age an above-average number of children will be born, during female »first fertility«. Another high point will be reached at the average age of 48, between the first and the second careers. This will make the temporal course of female fertility similar to that of the male.

»Soft eugenics« will be established. »Hard« gene damage and risks will be selectively removed from human DNA at an early stage of embryonic development. The number of disabled people will be reduced, but this will not lead to them being discriminated against and excluded, but rather the opposite.

The reproduction restaurant, in 2000

On 3 February 2000, when the century was still fresh and unworn, the title page of the American magazine *Rolling Stone* carried an unusual family story. The cover photo with the headline »The New American Family« showed an unfamiliar configuration. There were Melissa

Etheridge, a folk-rock singer, her partner Julie Cypher, a film director, with their two children, Bailey (3) and Beckett (1). In addition there was a country-rock star, David Crosby (54), a grey-haired, cheerfully obese man, the legendary frontman of the group »Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young«, and his wife Jan, the great love of his life. After many rumours (was Bruce Springsteen the father? Brad Pitt?) Melissa and Julie informed the public media that the real biological father of their children was in fact: the same David Crosby.

Reporter: What do your children call you?

Melissa: I am Mama, Julie is Mamo.

Reporter: How did the fertilisation take place?

Julie: It was artificial insemination, in a private space.

Melissa: (laughing) No kitchen utensils were used.

Reporter: Why did Julie carry the children?

Julie: I was more of a »homebody«, because Melissa had so many gigs. And I am fantastically healthy, so I'm just right for making babies!

Reporter: How did you get to know David Crosby and his wife Jan?

Melissa: On vacation in Hawaii. While chatting, we mentioned, more or less in passing, how difficult it is for us – we have egg cells, but sperm is another matter ... Jan, his wife, said spontaneously: »And what about David?« It was her idea, and that was the best thing that could happen! A few weeks later we rang them up ...

Reporter: Are the Crosbys the grandparents?

Julie: No, the Crosbys are our best friends.

Reporter: What do your families and friends think about this unusual family model?

Julie: They are grandchildren. It really doesn't matter how we came to have them.

The main thing is we wanted them. And now they're welcome.

Reporter: Does David Crosby have any paternal duties?

Melissa: He is more the Bio-Papa. He and Jan fully understand that we are the two parents.

Reporter: What about when the children want to know who their father is?

Melissa: About four months ago Bailey asked: »Have I got a Daddy?« I answered: »Oh yes, you have!« – »Who is it?«, asked Bailey. – »You know our friend David, the one with the funny moustache?« – »Hmm« said Bailey, and changed the subject.

So here it is happening with general agreement, the famous separation of biological and social fatherhood. At least at first sight. In 2004 Melissa Etheridge and Julie Cypher separated. Not much is known about the modalities of this separation, not even who the children live with, but it was probably neither less nor more painful and difficult than other separations. What does all that tell us about the future of reproduction?

Reproduction restaurant revisited

It was a big kitchen. Big enough for two big wooden tables of old pinewood. The two couples sat at the bigger table, the four children at the smaller one.

»Who wants coffee?«, asked Jill. Like Claire, who was sitting next to her, she was in the seventh month of pregnancy.

»I'll get it«, said Paul

»I'm quicker«, said Gary and stood up. »But what about you children?«

There were two seven-year-olds, a boy and a girl, and two three-year-olds, also of mixed genders.

»Coke«, said the older boys,

»Me too Coke«, echoed the three-year old boy.

»No more Coke«, Jill intervened, the mother of the two boys. »You can have water. You didn't eat your meal again – because of all that Coke!«

»And what about please?«, added Gary, the father of the younger boy.

After the meal the adults relaxed a while, and then the evening procedure of going to bed began. The two half-sisters, who shared a bedroom, had something read to them by the women. The two half-brothers were taken to bed by the men. The adults chatted a while and watched TV. When the children were sound asleep, Gary and Paul went to bed and carried on there with each other, so loudly that Jill banged on the wall and asked for a bit of quiet.

Finally, Jill and Claire went to their bedroom as well. They lay side by side, naked. They felt too pregnant for sex and were satisfied with holding hands. After she had complained for a while about Gary's and Jill's passion for sex, Claire lay her hand on Jill's round, tight belly.

»How's *our* baby in there?«

»Super«, Jill smiled. »She's just started a round of hockey training.« Then she laid her hand on Jill's swollen body.

»And how's *their* baby in there?«

Robin Baker used this fictitious scene from the future to illustrate the climax of his thoughts about the »Reproductive Restaurant«. Jill, Claire, Gary und Paul are a former student commune who have produced two children in the course of time with different parent couples. Later, both the men and the women became homosexual. Now each of the two homosexual couples is »affording« a joint child »put together« with gene technology and the two are being carried by both women at the same time...

The scene breaks through borderlines and taboos with elegant lightness. It sounds plausible because some of the elements have already become social realities today (men who become homosexual and want to have children can be found in every second soap opera these days and communes with »crossed« children already existed in my youth). But what it notably does *not* contradict is the sense of family, the trust and community of people, the love that children come from. It does not detach reproduction from couple-bonding nor begetting children from sex. Rather, it reconstructs the »vessel« – a multisexual, multifertile household where all are *multiply* related to each other in a variety of ways.

And this is the point where Baker neglects something important. Baker's multi-repro commune is so over-complex that all its participants would very soon go crazy – because they could never balance the various roles they have to play. Brother, lover, partner, housemate – compared with that the commune-hells of our youth would be real sanatoria!

Baker's ensemble is like a perverse totality fantasy in the name of reproduction. No matter how many new options are opened up for us by new genetic technologies, they can never disprove the laws of complexity that govern our world of relationships. The history of evolution has also fitted us out with a solid need for family status stability and role security. People confronted with a high degree of ambivalence and multi-dimensionality tend to withdraw or to become aggressive. The results of social cooperation can then be neither predicted nor controlled. Social investments become incalculable; the vulnerability threshold sinks – end of the community.

All the reproductive techniques described by Baker will exist one day. But they will be used much more *selectively* and *separately* than is assumed in many total utopias. They will be used as accepted options for minorities, as tools in emergencies. The reason that »Humanbreed-erland« will never exist (and that we cannot even imagine it – see *Gattaca*), is also due to the laws of evolution. For they have built *genetic chance* into our species as a fundamental principle.

As long as there is no real shortage of human genetic material (and announcements of the great sperm death are, to say the least, a bit premature), it would be perfectly senseless in terms of evolutionary biology, as well as those of social culture, to dispose of sex as a means of reproduction. Let us recall: sexuality was invented by nature just under 900 million years ago to increase genetic diversity. In contrast to sexless reproduction, it ensures that the members of a species are not all the same, genetically – so that variants can always survive in the struggle for existence.

It is not backwardness or pure anachronism that makes us insist obstinately on the over-large nose and imperfect IQ of our partner (the romantic principle of partner choice). Our liking for individuality, which we stubbornly insist on in spite of all reproductive rationalism, is on a higher plain: that of the diversification of our genetic code, nothing less than profound evolutionary reason. With our »romantic« coupling behaviour we constantly increase the rate of mutation in the human gene code. And in the global world we can now add new dimensions to the variety of our genome – and therefore increase our chances of survival as a species.

Genetic retro: back to fertility sex

I am a child of a time when sex was learned mainly as a social practice and an act of pleasure. But nothing can be compared with the explosions that a loving pair can produce on the path towards reproduction. Bruce Sterling, a science-fiction author and my spiritual brother puts it this way:

Because conception is sexual, we can understand it best, probably, if we describe it as »erotic«. Conception may be hidden deep within our bodies and veiled from our immediate perceptions: but today we can see it; it is no longer a medical abstraction. It is extremely human. Like the sexual act, at first sight it seems somehow dirty, obscene. But it has profound erotic elements. The begetting of a new human being is perhaps the most erotic act that can be imagined. It means that a fresh burst of energy is on its way. As humans we simply have to celebrate that!²²

Just imagine: one day it might be perfectly normal to celebrate one's fertile days, one's fruitfulness and potency, not just pack them away discreetly but show them openly: »Look, I'm fertile. Today, now! That's dangerous!«

Since contraception is still in the power, but also the responsibility, of women, they might someday have the idea that they could make rather more professional use of this small comparative advantage. That would open the door to what might be called »femigineering« – female career planning with biological methods. In the new, globally reproductive world, nothing could be more lucrative for women than having a child from Boris Becker, David Beckham, Eminem or some other Alpha-Male. No financial problems for at least 18 years; get into the media: the *broom-cupboard principle* (Frau Ermakova looks in again).

How will men behave in this new, erotobiologically dangerous world? They will have two interests in particular, if they want to nurture their sexual passions again (and we should hope they will, in the interests of the future of humanity). They will want to know *when* the woman has her fruitful days. And, sooner or later, they will develop their own methods of controlling their fertility without »anyone« noticing.

The individualised child

If we ask parents of our acquaintance whether they are happy to have children, the reactions are always much the same: beaming, nodding, »Without the children I wouldn't know who I am.«

This reason is quite different from the genealogical logic of our forefathers. In the urban multicultural children are now an expression of *self-discovery*. Certainly, the reasons for each child may be different and fully subject to retro-trends (one hypermodern couple of my acquaintance said recently that they now at last wanted to »make a male heir«; they already had two daughters and that was quite enough feminisation). In most cases, however, self-discovery and a child are no longer alternatives but are seen *as one*: children are *part* of the demand for individualisation.

Children are, therefore, also governors of our *memes*, our social imprints, colourings and patterns of behaviour. The educational ideal is no longer »adaptation« but »pertinacity and autonomy«. Children are mirrors, reflectors, life companions and carriers of our unresolved desires. Not only wicked tongues assert that children have now become our real partners, our *projects*, to some extent the sculptors of our unfinished lives.

Even our children's names provide evidence of the will to be individual. In earlier times they were named after grandfathers and fathers. Then after emperors and dictators. These days the field of name-giving has expanded far into the realms of the poetic. Sometimes names suggest rebellious striving for strength and pertinacity (»Leo«, »Maximilian«, »Jeanne«). Or, even vocally, of sophisticated aesthetic sensitivity (»Sophia«, »Elisabeth«, »Antoine«).

Half a century ago, the family completely dominated the individual; today the individual dominates the family. The individual was once and integral part of the family system, where he grew up. Private life was secondary, subordinate, often something marginal or secret. Today this relationship has been reversed...²³

So wrote, quite recently, the family researcher Antoine Prost. 150 years ago that sounded quite different, in fact like a moral rebuke. In 1855 Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, a pioneer of empirical social research wrote in his study *Die Familie* of »totally erroneous claims to emancipation«, and continued: »This leads to an outrageous individualisation and false independence of female nature. In the end, the result is the destruction of the family, and it leads to an abyss of mental rotteness.«²⁴

Ever since the family came into existence its decay, decline and perversion have been evoked; parents have been accused of selfishness and genetic treachery and every few years the cry has been: the family is in crisis! But do our rates of divorce today really say anything about the state of »the family«? Surveys and studies show an apparent paradox: more and more children describe their families as models; more and more children feel comfortable with their parents (even if the parents are divorced). Fewer and fewer families are marked by violence – in all prosperous countries a considerable reduction in corporal punishment and violence between married couples is reported. The quality of family life is rising, even while its *institutional* forms are becoming more fragile (though not in every country: in Denmark the divorce rate is in decline and marriages are becoming more frequent).

Family in the selfness culture

Children are born in this century – and in the next – not for *other* reasons but for the *old reasons intensified!* Because we love them, because we hope for them, because we see ourselves in them and fulfil ourselves in them, but also because we relativise ourselves in them. And the family? That's easy: the family adapts itself to suit. It's a system that learns and that goes with us reliably into the future. The family »morphs«, primarily into the following variants:

- *The new high-care family*: we all know that loving well-meaning parent couple, who radiate an almost incredible degree of sharing. The fathers are always bending over the pram, murmuring in sonorous voices. The women beam and laugh in a quite particular way that rings with apple tart and extra lessons. The children – at least two, but very likely three – obey every word; they speak respectfully and always have tidy clothes on. In the future this family model will be characterised by an egalitarian relationship between the partner, putting the existence of the family at the centre of things and defending it successfully against excessive demands from the

world of work. It is a mission and a »great commitment« at the same time: »new men«, who are able to hold back on their career needs, associate with »new women«, who often have a career behind them and see family as a management task with emotions added. This type is dominant in Scandinavia and develops a wonderful solidarity of a bourgeois civil character.

- *The neo-aristocratic family*: this is the type of family that preserves its integrity with *distance*. Man, wife and children live in separate spheres that make free space possible. Both parents work at satisfying vocations, their autonomy maintains love as a respectful tension and avoids feelings of inferiority. A shortage of time and attentiveness is combated with services in the household – it is no longer the women who do the housework but servants. The manner of bringing up the children is strict but loving and professionalized with institutions (nannies, nursery staff, good educational institutions). In this model, which is the majority in Great Britain and France, individuality is admired but is still organised into a community.
- *The fractal network family*: and finally those family cultures are winners in the sociocultural game who give themselves up, sighing and cheerful, to the chaos of reality. Farmer families beamed up into the modern world. Whether one lives together with or without a marital agreement, with a linear or branching genealogy is of no account. One is embedded in a widespread network of »exes«, long-term friends, grandmas, life companions and so on, who in times of crisis (and when is there no crisis?) help and relieve one of child-raising burdens. The main thing is to have fun, even when there is stress. The »kids« are, no, not brought up but »allowed to grow up« in a spirit of »benign neglect« (Miriam Lau). For this purpose one likes to make use of friendly taxi drivers for the endless circles of friends and social networks. This vital type of family has long been the norm in America, where divorce is not a disaster but a status symbol. In Italy and other southern countries it was always like this. In Central Europe and Japan the type is slowly growing more common but is limited by our lack of talent for the creativity of untidy conditions.

The history of the family is, at the same time, the history of its disburdenment and supplementation, its enormous flexibility. In the global knowledge society this development has entered a co-evolution with the *general* social structures. The American journalist Ethan Watters described this socio-structure as a culture of »urban tribes«:

All these people were in relationships with me, but they also had different relationships *with each other*. A network of love affairs, friendships, rivalries, working partnerships and separate apartments surrounded me. Whenever one brought two of these people together a whole new story emerged; long conversations, dramas, shared secrets, gossip, common points of view ... I was surrounded by an invisible network of relationships that was much more than a sum of friendships ...²⁵

What does that remind you of more than the old large family (better: the *illusion* of such a family)? Now let's imagine what fertility is like in this extended, neotribal network. Let's imagine that founding a family was no longer a *break*, a rupture in the net of our adult relationships. No change of roles but a gentle transition, a supplementation through which our children are *also* mothers and fathers some day. But no longer *only* that. I am quite sure that the new reproduction technologies will help us along this evolutionary path, rather than letting us tumble into a dark world full of clones and homunculi.