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Editorial

"Effort Structure" and Superhumanism

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For several years, from 1987 to 1994, I worked as a sculptor for the artist Helmut Lutz, who primarily created sculptures and installations for churches and public spaces. His detailed, figurative, and almost Baroque-style works did not necessarily align with the zeitgeist. Helmut Lutz drew inspiration from figurative sculpture and the symbolism of High Gothic art. He called one of his concepts, which he frequently sought to convey to his students, "effort structure" ["Mühestruktur"]. He did not place primary emphasis on the sudden flash of inspiration – the conceptual idea – where the actual physical realization and shaping of the object were viewed as secondary. At least as significant was the effort, in the sense of the labor involved, that flows into the craftsmanship of the art object. The time spent on the object during its creation should be palpable in the design; it should constitute part of its impact, its aura. This is certainly an idealistic approach, a form of devotion to the work that seeks not immediate, rapid success, but rather a sustained engagement with form and material.

After all these years, Lutz' neologism "effort structure" resurfaced in my memory quite unexpectedly as I was finalizing this issue of the *Journal of Anomalistics*. The process leading up to the final compilation of the contributions was marked by several last-minute decisions that resulted in an unplanned thematic focus for the issue: the presentation and discussion of the work conducted by the research group led by Markus Maier, a professor for psychology at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

The approach adopted by Markus Maier, Moritz Dechamps, Anastasia Vogel, and Johannes Storch takes Generalized Quantum Theory and its implications as the research-guiding theoretical paradigm. In this respect, it breaks new ground in parapsychology, as the anomalies hypothesized and documented do (presumably) not constitute classical psi phenomena. For this reason, terms that often act as buzzwords – such as extrasensory perception (ESP) or psychokinesis (PK) – do not appear in their texts. Perhaps this will result – or at least, one would hope so – in a less reflexive defensive reaction from the scientific mainstream.

Maier and colleagues submitted the first paper well in advance of publication deadlines, and the dedicated reviewers worked quickly as well. The depth and substantive quality of the reviews led to the decision to initiate an open commentary process on the article. In the meantime, Maier et al. had completed another paper for submission – a study that built directly on the first. Since the upcoming December issue of journal is scheduled to become a special issue on "Parapsychology under Socialism," the editorial board decided to take the unconventional step of including the second paper in this issue as well. The decision to bundle two articles and permit a discussion without word-count limits for the comments and the authors' response runs counter to the standardized format of many academic journals and poses a challenge for the shortened attention spans of our time. For readers, this may require a considerable effort and some diligence to work through the texts, but it is well worth the effort for those interested in new developments in experimental parapsychology.

When viewing all the texts – the two main articles, the three commentaries, and the authors' response, comprising over 130 printed pages in total – as a whole, an "effort structure" becomes apparent. I observed this throughout the entire process among all those involved, in their constructive debates and in their dedication to research work, that does not seek easy shortcuts yet proves to be extremely effective.

In the studies by Wahbeh et al. and Laythe & Houran presented in this issue, too, one can sense that no effort was spared to advance their research. For those familiar with these research groups, this is evident anyway.

It would be a mistake to equate the incorporation of an "effort structure" into one's work with a rejection of technical aids. As we all know, artificial intelligence (AI) has become part of our everyday lives; accordingly, it is also part of the everyday routine and toolkit of scientists. However, it would be an error to believe that AI allows one to arrive at substantial scientific insights conveniently and effortlessly. The decisive factor is the time invested by the human researcher. A thorough analysis of problems and research questions, comprehensive research into the current state of the field, careful definition of research variables, reflection on the results

and their limitations, and constructive exchange with colleagues – all of these are fundamental elements of sound scientific work that should be delegated to artificial assistants only to a limited extent. That is why one should not really speak of the "implementation of an effort structure," as I did above, because such effort is an intrinsic part of scientific activity.

Just as the term "Mühestruktur" recently surfaced from the depths of my memory, I happened to come across a thought-provoking and, it seems to me, thematically relevant article in the web magazine *The Point*. The text, written by scholar of religion Nicholas Low, is titled "Superhuman Fantasies: Nietzsche versus Techno-Optimists" (Low, 2026). The author describes the visions of optimistic transhumanists, according to whom humanity will transcend its present nature through a variety of future technologies.[1] This goal is to be pursued at an accelerated pace via unbridled techno-capitalism, in line with the ideology known as accelerationism. In Marc Andreessen's *Techno-Optimist Manifesto*, the section titled "Enemies" states: "Our enemy is Friedrich Nietzsche's Last Man" (Andreessen, 2023). The "Last Man" from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is meant to be superseded by the Übermensch (superhuman). Nicholas Low points out the misinterpretation of Nietzsche by such tech optimists, who reverse the meaning of the term "Übermensch" as Nietzsche understood it.

While the "tech CEOs" of Silicon Valley state the abolition of human suffering through the creation of the superhuman as their goal,

> Nietzsche dreamed of a superhuman for whom hardship, including the hardship of finitude, would be no objection to life. The Übermensch would overcome the fear and hatred of suffering, not seek to leave suffering behind. What we see in Silicon Valley superhumanism is not the way out of nihilism but its most dangerous instantiation.

And further:

> If Nietzsche was correct that we need the superhuman to overcome nihilism, then these technological superhumanists are effectively prescribing for the disease of nihilism the amplification of nihilistic values. Andreessen's "technological supermen" would not be Übermensch but the "last men" par excellence. (Low, 2026)

To return to the mundane sphere of everyday practical activities of human beings: using an airport shuttle service when one could easily walk the distance, having groceries and ready-made meals delivered to one's door, or letting a smart home and 24-hour delivery services handle the need for planning and organization – all this sounds like luxury, a comfortable and enviable

1 I do not wish to address the many problematic ethical implications associated with this agenda here.

situation in a postmodern world. Yet, the resulting lack of physical exertion produces unpleasant side effects that are all too often ignored. A lack of physical activity, to cite a well-known example, quite rapidly leads to muscle atrophy. Archaeological findings show that in premodern times, children from privileged classes exhibited skeletal damage indicative of vitamin deficiency despite a plentiful diet (Snoddy et al., 2024). Exposing oneself to sunlight was something for the lower classes; eating white bread was better and more befitting one's station than eating brown bread and groats, and cake was even better …

In a recent interview, computer scientist Cal Newport had this to say about the dangers of a poor "cognitive diet" or complacency that implies avoiding effort structures:

> Academic institutions need to demonstrate that the life of the mind is hard and worth it. We need to think about cognitive fitness the way we think about physical fitness. There should be a simple rule for being a thinker in an age of AI: Don't let AI write anything for you. Writing is to cognitive health what steps are to physical health. Write that email from scratch. Write that memo with the bullet points from scratch. Don't flee that strain. You need it as much as you need those 10,000 steps a day. (Goldstein, 2026)

Against the backdrop of these cultural-critical reflections, the concept of the "effort structure" can be viewed in a slightly different light – as an antidote to an overheated academic system dominated by the "publish-or-perish" principle and the highly problematic developments resulting from it. This by no means precludes effectiveness, as the studies presented in this issue of the *Journal of Anomalistics* demonstrate.

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