

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art, philosophy and psycho-analysis –
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Editorial

Technology and the task of philosophy: In *Der Streit der Fakultäten* Immanuel Kant famously writes that philosophy's autonomy is grounded in its ability to pursue reason and reason alone (section 1, I, 2). In this respect philosophy's destiny differs from that of the "higher" faculties: law, medicine and theology; whereas these are studies that should be submitted to the will of the government philosophy has no other master than reason itself.

Today this quest for autonomy is given a variety of inflections. The formal-legalistic thrust of mainstream scholarship after Kant raises the banner for the continued existence of an academic philosophy that is increasingly threatened by institutional extinction. A second variant, more oriented toward social power, has sought to include relations of social class within the domain from which philosophy should strive for autonomy. One articulation of this second view holds that the forces of an unhinged market are no better a master to philosophy than a despotic sovereign.

However, should we not consider a third possible view? After the crystallisation of the geopolitical domain from 1945, pitting the East against the West and the Left against the Right, new sensibilities emerged that enowded the political field with more autonomy from geopolitics and the orthodoxy of economism. Incipient social movements converging on issues such as climate change, standardisation and the potentially devastating effects of modern technology could not easily be fitted onto the traditional dualisms, and important philosophers were greatly influenced by this shifting political environment. To some science itself became the suspicious sovereign against which philosophy sought protection. A philosopher who typifies this new critical stance on techno-

scientific reasoning is Wolfgang Schirmacher, who emigrated from state socialist DDR to Western Germany in his youth and then refused to make a simplified choice between East and West, or Left and Right. Instead, growing up under the weight of the Shoah, and with an increasing awareness of our ability to alter natural events, Schirmacher founded his philosophy on a distinction between "death technologies" and life techniques. This distinction targeted both modern technology's inclination to erase distinctions – to standardise and eliminate complexity – and its inherent drift towards a mechanical inferno of natural devastation.

In the current issue of *Inscriptions* we present another philosopher who, impressed by similar experiences, formulated a response to his life-world that rejected the standardisation and homogenisation of post-war Europe. To Michel Henry our immersion in modern technology has engrossed us in an doctrine of intentionality and, as a consequence, removed us from a non-intentional mode of appearing. In "Philosophy in the age of modern technology" Pedro José Grande Sánchez argues that for Henry the objectifying gaze of science has given us a homogenising conception of the world, thus removing us from a pre-intentional mode that Henry referred to as "life itself". In a move not dissimilar to Schirmacher Henry goes on to distinguish his own "life philosophy" from a contemporary disease of life, a condition of objectification and homogenising ushered into by modern technology and science. Against this, the task of philosophy is to highlight the activities that science has rejected. What remains are the age-old philosophical questions: What is life? What is the role of religion, aesthetics and ethics in our lives? Grande Sánchez shows how Michel Henry exposed and sought

to counter what he referred to as the ideologies of barbarism produced by technology and science.

Creative criticism: One way to counter the homogenising effects of technological domination, or, to be more precise, the thrust of instrumental reason embedded in craft-oriented approaches to technology, is to seek alternative forms in which to articulate knowledge and truth. In this issue we present two contributions under the banner of Creative criticism. First, Gray Kochhar-Lindgren returns us to the insight from Jacques Derrida, that reading and writing are interconnected events, so that every reading constitutes another writing. This incommensurability is what Kochhar-Lindgren refers to as a “volatility of events,” organised by chance, free-flowing sociability, and the almost imperceptible. In “Pintxos: small delicacies & chance encounters” Kochhar-Lindgren revisits drunken philosophers, poets, and painters, talking parrots and puppets, marauding pirates and the red hand-prints on the walls of caves. These texts are presented with specific instructions for reading, thereby preempting the oft-heard chorus of Derrida’s critics, that they simply don’t know how to read these texts!

Further, David Ritchie presents his fourth essay in a series that challenges our notions of change over time. This time Ritchie introduces the nineteenth century philosopher and *flâneur* Søren Kierkegaard: the challenge for Kierkegaard was to find a way by which a rural youngster could make a life for himself as an urban idler, without wealth. Ritchie invites us to consider whether it was possible for such a man to grasp that there would “in a hundred years or so, be a whole posse of folk sitting in cafés writing short stories or thinking existentialism into existence”. For Ritchie, this is a question that cannot be wholly separated from the differences in urban and rural life-worlds, and, specifically, their various senses of humour.

Kierkegaard: Ritchie’s essay connects with

a series of texts on the topic of Kierkegaard presented in this issue. Gorica Orsholits seeks to further elucidate humour in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, recognising that in his thought humour was an aid to maintaining a true self. Connecting Kierkegaard with Hegel, Freud and Shakespeare Orsholits explores how humour contributes to the existence of being and asks whether an initial ontological meaning of the word humour has managed to transport itself into our state of mind, and into our life philosophy. The question of faith and religiousness is further brought to the fore in Yufeng Huang’s essay, where he argues that Schleiermacher’s presupposition with regard to what it means to be religious, was reconsidered in the thought of Kierkegaard who regarded the work to become a Christian as departing from any such presuppositions. This distinction is critical to Huang’s reformatting of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics to an existential mode of understanding.

The existential leap is further revisited in Jytte Holmqvist’s essay “Feel the fear and do it anyway”, where she reads Kierkegaard with Louise Glück’s poetry in order to query what it means to be human and alive at a time of interrupted pandemic realities. Themes such as courage, solace, and divinity are foregrounded in Holmqvist’s analysis. Jørgen Veisland’s “What’s in a name?” explores literary pseudonyms in Kierkegaard and novels by Herman Melville, Paul Auster and Albert Camus. Veisland interrogates questions of reason, truth and the demonic in a wide-reaching and profound analysis that brings Kierkegaard’s perspective into relevance for contemporary literary art.

In this issue we’re also delighted to present a commentary on the place of the artist in politics by Adam Staley Groves, as well as a review of Alain Badiou’s most recent volume, *A new dawn for politics*, by Gorica Orsholits.

Inscriptions’ editorial team

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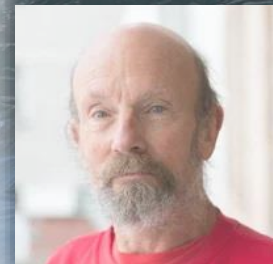
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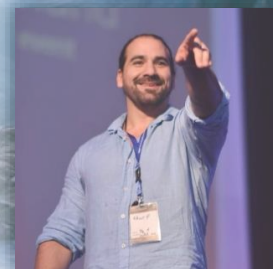
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