Editorial

> "And Abraham said: God will provide *himself* a lamb for a burnt offering."
>
> *Genesis* 22:8

In the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Jacques Lacan noted that for signification to work – as opposed to mere labelling – it is necessary to identify signification's *third*. What Lacan pointed out was that to man, the signifying animal, meaning starts to generate itself at the moment when at least two senses or words impose themselves at once. It is this contemporaneity (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) that we then negotiate by attributing different senses to the possible significations. This concurrence lies at the core of the signifying system, in that it reveals what Lacan referred to, borrowing from Freud, as the *Wahrnehmnungszeichen* of the system, i.e. its original organisation. When we encounter the discourse of the psychotic it is this intervening, meaning-generating third that is denied. In its stead, the subject searches in vain for a missing relational dimension, and the absence of signification is a derivative of the resulting impasse.

In Abraham's speech to his son Isaac – responding, as he were, to the young man's question of what it is the two of them will offer to Abraham's God – it is clear that only a non-pathological langauge user could make sense of the answer: it is *God himself* who is the lamb, *and* God will *bring forth* a lamb for offering. This duality of meaning maintains the signifying distance that is necessary in order not to revert to the psychotic dimension of refusal. The question that follows is: what is it that *upholds* this ambiguity? Here Lacan's answer was quite clear. At the core of this original synchrony lies "the first signifying signification," what we refer to alternately as the No / Name and the No / Name of the Father.

What we have here is an oblique and omnipotent indeterminacy: is it God or one of his attributes that will give flesh to the offering? The key to understand Abraham lies in adopting – overidenfitying with – his radical undecidability. We simply don't know, as little as Abraham himself, we assume, knows what it is that will be provided as offering. The riddle of Abraham's God is as much a riddle to him as it is to us and to Isaac.

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This issue of *Inscriptions* is centrally concerned with the decision made by Abraham, and his unconditial commitment to the voice of his God. Abraham's story, and the Danish 19th Century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's interpretation of it, serves as the example *par excellence* of a leap of faith: here we see in miniature all the characteristics of such a decisive act of passage: its departure from the realm of the pleasing and socially acceptable; its movement from a contemplation of the divine and into faith as a living act; its key element of love, both to the instance that made the command, but also to the one who is violated as a consequence; and, not in the least, its involvement with the humorous. How can we not recognise the absurd impossibility of Abraham's situation?

To Jørgen Veisland, Søren Kierkegaard's leap of faith is essentially a departure from irony and negation into a serious confrontation with existence itself. After the stalemate of pure negation, a new subjectivity can be emancipated, characterised by the kind of erotic and religious longing we find when there is an immanent – relational and indeterminate – difference between self and other.

Siobhan Doyle shows how Kierkegaard rejected Immanual Kant's notion of the religious, by reducing it to merely a "movement towards the divine." True faith, Kierkegaard held, embraces a God that is both immanent and

transcendent: it is a notion of the divine that cannot fully accept the ethical as the endpoint of human existence. To grasp – or leap into – this lifeworld is to pass through the boundary zone of humour, the absurd.

Kresten Lundsgaard-Leth's commentary on *Fear and Trembling* shows how Kierkegaard's key concern was to reframe the self-sacrifice of Christ. In distinction to the view that in order to understand atonement it is necessary to experience the "guilt of mythical crimes," Lundsgaard-Leth points out that it was rather Kierkegaard's view that we should reappraise the story of Abraham and Isak, and realise how a *suspension* of the ethical can prepare the ground for a loving God and deeds that are at their core self-sacrificial and concerned for the other.

Alexander Velichkov draws attention to the aesthetic experience involved in a leap of faith, and shows how it can be connected to the notion of sublime in the works of Longinus, the literary critic of Ancient Greece, and Edmund Burke. Taking up again Veisland's point that the subject's coming-into-itself is an encounter with an *authentic* self, Velichkov suggests that a leap of faith can have an *intrinsic* ethical value.

In this issue of *Inscriptions* we also feature the first of Tidhar Nir's two-part essay on an aesthetic of the *uncanny*. While a frequently reference in approaches to modern art and experiences of the technological world, this concept from Sigmund Freud's psycho-analysis has yet been made to form the basis of a theoretical understanding of art *as such*. Nir's essay is an attempt (*essayer*) to alleviate this lacunae; in this first installment he considers Adorno's relation to the Freudian uncanny, and Benjamin's application of this relation to what Nir calls the technological and artistic uncanny.

In our literary section we are pleased to present poetry that enter into a profound relation to the thought and texts of Søren Kierkegaard. In Daniel Fraser's "Two blackout poems," passages from the English translation of Kierkegaard's *Repetition* is reworked, and the effect is to render new, surprising meanings, emerging from somewhere between Fraser's reading and Kierkegaard's own pen.

Christopher Norris contributes with a prose poem that embarks from Kierkegaard's view of his own authorship. Norris' text opens with a quote from one of Kierkegaard's retrospective texts, written in 1848, where he held up for scrutiny his use of pseudonymic authors. As one of our contemporary icons of deconstruction, Norris teases the reader with the following autobiographical acknowledgement:

> To wean us deconstructors off our left-
> Field strategies, our *n'y a pas d'hors-texte* view,
> And do God's work by taking us in hand,
> Straight talk at last. I say: just get me right
> On my own edifying terms, just read
> Those boring works of mine, and then decide

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Happy reading!