

PRELIMINARY NOTES

In the present moment of history, the destiny of nation-states, as well as of international geopolitical systems, is being increasingly influenced by the economy. The crucial correlation between economic change and socio-historical transformation has never escaped well-informed philosophers, historians, anthropologists and obviously economists (particularly those operating during or just after the years in which Marxism tangibly pointed the humanities in the direction of a kind of research which would no longer overlook the ‘structural’ aspect of the economy, but would rather establish it as a cornerstone for history). Nowadays, possibly for the first time, this economic dimension has explicitly become the only real trigger for change – be it historical, political, or anthropological.

In the face of the coercive power exerted by economic transactions at an individual and collective level, on the domestic as much as international scale, even the classic ‘tool’ through which major geopolitical and social changes were accomplished in the past, namely war, would appear to have been pushed into the background.

The humanities – especially philosophy and anthropology, but also sociology and cultural studies – have grasped the nature of this change, albeit in different ways and at different moments. Thus over the past decade a wide range of publications have explored economic topics in relation to the many transformations (what Pier Paolo Pasolini, who passed away exactly 40 years ago, would have described as ‘anthropological’ transformations) of the body and of bodies – be they individual or social bodies, physical or virtual ones (to take only a few among the best-known examples from different geographical and scientific areas, let us think of *Il regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell’economia e del governo* by Giorgio Agamben; *La fabrique dell’homme endetté* by Maurizio Lazzarato; *Debt:*

The First 5000 Years by David Graeber; and *Das Gespenst des Kapitals* by Joseph Vogl).

In selecting the theme of the present issue of *Azimuth*, the editors have sought to grasp and develop – as far as this is possible – this particular aspect of our *Zeitgeist*. At the same time, a different need emerged, with two sides to it: a distinctly methodological side on the one hand and, on the other, a strictly scientific one.

As the editors, but also as scholars of economic phenomena chiefly concerned with their historical and media implications, we realised that a reflection on the latest developments in our specific fields of reference would elicit much interest.

At the same time, however, we also felt compelled to take due account of the other fields of the humanities – from anthropology to theoretical philosophy, down to psychoanalysis and cultural studies, in American as well as German academia – which, from within the *hortus conclusus* of our own disciplines, we have seen constantly engaging with economic topics.

Consequently, the methodological approach underlying our choice of contributions and authors – to whom our heartfelt appreciation goes for participating in the project – has been to take as much account as possible of the range of perspectives from which the relation between economics and the social sciences is currently being explored. We did so by ensuring the involvement of authors from a wide range of different fields (anthropology, political science, philosophy, gender studies, cultural studies, media studies and psychoanalysis), as well as geographical areas: Europe (Italy, France, Germany), the United States, and Australia.

What has proven more complex has been to identify a thematic focus that would help bring together and articulate the questions we sought to investigate: the correlation between the theoretical and anthropological side of the phenomenon of the economy, as well as between the evolution of the social body and psyche and that of the individual.

In the months leading up to the issue, and more generally in the two previous years, scholars had markedly focused their attention – with different degrees of intensity, from different perspectives and with different qualitative results – on the topic of ‘debt’: a necessary focus, given the burning topicality of the issue, its considerable philosophical and social history as a concept, and its sociological and anthropological implications.

On our part, precisely because we were well aware of the number and quality of the contributions on the topic of debt which have appeared in recent years, we were keen not to approach the economic field from this

perspective alone, so as to avoid providing a reiteration or – at best – an overview of the many different opinions to be found on such a widely debated topic. As the keyword of the present issue we have therefore chosen the term (and concept) of ‘exchange’. This has been envisaged as the theoretical linchpin enabling us to keep a sharp focus on the relations between economics and the social sciences, while moving beyond the all too current discourses on the issue of debt.

We have thus set our sights on contributions that would approach the topic from a range of different angles, while centring the analysis on the two original macro-topics: economics and the humanities. We have thus brought together studies of exchange as a form of logical-philosophical determination (as illustrated by Antonio Lucci in his analysis of Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy); as a communication category (through Federica Buongiorno’s contribution, the first ever critical essay on the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, and that of Hartmut Winckler, an essay on exchange in the German *Medienwissenschaften*); as a key anthropological concept in some of the most interesting socio-economic theories of the 20th-century (from Bronislaw Malinowski to Jean Baudrillard, through Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim – the focus of the essays by Rosa Parisi, Steve Redhead, Iris Därmann and Marcel Hénaff); as an expression of psychological dynamics (as argued by Francesco Saverio Trincia in his Freudian essay); and finally as an anthropological factor in modern theory (analysed by Adelino Zanini in his essay on Adam Smith), in the contemporary art market (as reported by Thomas Skowronek) and in the field of gender theories (as outlined by John Scanzoni).

To round off the overview of the notion of exchange which we have (re) envisaged and (re)proposed, we have been given the honour to publish the first Italian edition and translation of Josias Ludwig Gosch’s text *Von den Vortheilen der Zirkulation der Ideen Überhaupt*, the fourth chapter of his *Fragmente über den Ideenumlauf* (1789): a valuable historico-philosophical addition to the fifth issue of *Azimuth*, which brings our investigation of the origins of the debate on exchange yet one step further. Our thanks goes to Prof. Hartmuth Winckler and the publisher Suhrkamp for having brought the text to our attention and having granted us the right to translate and publish it.

Hoping you enjoy the read, we invite you to look forward to the next issue of *Azimuth*, due in October 2015, dealing with *Performing Obscenity. Bodies, Power and Desire in the Contemporary Debates*.