

## PRELIMINARY NOTES

If one tried answer the traditional Arendtian question about ‘human condition’ today, from the point of view of our present times, one should undoubtedly say that the very proper feature of contemporary human beings is their *inter-connectivity* – their connectedness to the world as well to ways of sharing it and inhabiting it. We don’t use this term lightly: ‘inter-connectivity’ means not only ‘interconnection’, which of course refers to the social, cultural, and political bonds that make possible our living-together. These relationships have always been part of human societies and represent a traditional topic of (political-)philosophical thought. More precisely (and maybe even more radically), ‘inter-connectivity’ also refers to the sphere of relations *mediated* by technics and its applications: relations that define – more extensively and pervasively than in both ancient and modern times – not only our current *living* together in social and cultural systems, but also our *being* human.

With the development and very recent improvement of an impressive amount of technical ‘supports’ in all the main branches of life (artificial limbs, organ transplantations, cell reproduction; techniques and practices of self-manipulation and body modification through chemical and synthetic compounds or special diets; transformations of the forms of living by implementing new architectural solutions to manage common and private spaces, as well as through new forms of interactive communication due to social networks and information overload etc.), there has arisen a profound modification of human *being*, namely of the human being’s perceptive abilities and aesthetic regimes. This modification coincides with a new concept of politics – to be more precise, with new forms of *governance* of these ‘modified’ human beings.

The main feature of this new governance is that politics has started to produce normativity not only through positive laws and political verifiable pro-

cedures but through direct manipulation of the human body and life. The problems arising from what we could call the ‘aesthetic governance’ of human life, which are supposed to belong to the sphere of so called ‘biopolitics’, are placed *at the limits* of our normative power, where every ethical dilemma begins. The reflection upon limits is also a traditional topic of philosophical thought, but we should now ask about the meaning of the situation (a situation that is beyond the common limit) and its transforming power on the aesthetic human regime.

If we look for an answer to this question, we immediately think of the theories coming from biopolitical thought. However, we should consider that the *bios* in question here is not ‘mere’ *bios* – ‘mere life’, referring to Agamben’s vocabulary – but already a mixture of artificial and natural life. We don’t need to think about the forms of recently developed ‘Artificial Intelligence’ to understand this phenomenon: when Locke wondered about the hypothesis of a ‘thinking matter’, he was already asking about the *possible* (not *effective*) limits of what we consider to be *human* being (even if, for him, this was just a mental exercise). Thus, the relationship between aesthetics and politics seems to involve a special ‘metaphysics’, since we talk about ‘*being*’, ‘*human being*’, ‘*possibility*’ and its relation to ‘*effectivity*’. However, this second issue of *Azimuth* does not deal with this term and the resulting meta-philosophical implications; it rather focuses on a specific range of problems arising from the new aesthetico-political arrangement (or governance) of the ‘human condition’.

We can follow the structuring of this relation from different point of views, such as the general theory of aesthetics, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, the history of culture, musicology, moral theory, theory of architecture, and so on. We can also refer to different kinds of philosophical vocabularies: to that of traditional political thought, for instance to the living philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, who first outlined, in the last century, the special relation of aesthetics and politics. But we can also refer to Foucauldian and Lacanian vocabularies, or to the ‘structuralist’ approach as such, or to those living philosophers – from Frank Ankersmit to Peter Sloterdijk, from Giorgio Agamben to Roberto Esposito – who are now drawing new lines for *aesthetico-political* theory.

One could say that the apparently insignificant symbol ‘-’ unifying and at the same time separating both terms ‘aesthetics and politics’ represents in an immediate, visual way the problem of the limits we have to establish between them. *We* have to establish them: the imbalance between our *positive, political* power to modify our *passive, aesthetic* ability to be modified and adapted to new, highly technically conditioned ways of living surely should have a limit.

The aim of this issue is not to indicate *where* to set it: it shows rather, as the common thread of all contributions, that it is – so to speak – phenomenologically set *together with* the problem itself. Even if one were to place it always beyond, it should first be recognized.

That's why the glance through different fields of research, as it is offered in this second issue of *Azimuth*, finally flows into an authentic, reinforced request for *philosophy*: whatever tradition or point of view we might assume, we have to think – as always, one could say, but in a completely different horizon – about the *human condition*, and the possible and effective meaning of these terms – human, condition – today.

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We would like to thank sincerely all authors who agreed to contribute to this issue and the translators who has made their work available for it. Hoping you enjoy the read, we invite you to look forward to the next issue of *Azimuth*, due in March 2014, dealing with *Utopias. The Un-placed in Language and Politics*.

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