Editorial Introduction: Commemorating EPTC's First Ten Years An Extended Open Issue

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Published in May of 2012, *PhaenEx* 7.1. coincides with the tenth annual conference of the journal's association home, The Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (EPTC)/*Théorie et culture existentialistes et phénoménologiques* (TCEP). To commemorate EPTC/TCEP's decade of fresh and exciting intellectual activity, *PhaenEx* 7.1. is an extended open issue, containing eleven articles and five Book Encounters, including work by both notable and new scholars as is our custom.

Both continuity and change are intertwined throughout the decade now behind us. The journey began with the first annual EPTC/TCEP conference in Halifax, May 28-30, 2003. The society became viable the very week it was born, immediately gathering into its folds a wave of wonderful scholars—many of them writing dissertations at that time, now teaching the next generation of scholars. It was clear that this society created a needed place for scholars, working both within and outside the discipline of philosophy (as well as some working outside of academia altogether), to bring the theoretical insights of continental thinkers to bear on issues as diverse as architecture, sexuality, poetry, and politics. Both EPTC/TCEP and this journal began as resolutely interdisciplinary endeavours, and have become venues not only for rigorous work, but for stylistic and methodological innovation as well. *PhaenEx* itself was launched in the

summer of 2006, making 7.1. our lucky 13th issue! We hope you will note in these pages the continuation—and deepening—of these original commitments.

Many invaluable hands have contributed over the years to building and maintaining the intellectual association and academic journal that are EPTC and *PhaenEx*. May our second decade be as exciting as our first.

I. Six Articles on Ethics and Politics

Fittingly, we begin with an article written by a presenter at the first EPTC conference in Halifax ten years ago, Dorota Glowacka. Glowacka, who published a new book this spring, *Disappearing Traces: Holocaust Testimonials, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (University of Washington Press), offers us an article entitled “The Trace of the Untranslatable: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethics of Translation,” in which she investigates Levinas’ curious silence regarding the problem of translation. Glowacka argues that Levinas’ oeuvre is nevertheless underwritten by a “testimonial impetus” that bears witness to the traumatic loss of his mother tongue. She uses Levinas as the starting point for developing an ethics of translation (also calling on Walter Benjamin), and notes that this ethics could be particularly effective when it comes to bearing witness to Holocaust testimonials, making her essay an important contribution to Holocaust Studies as well as Levinas Studies.

Levinas continues to be the focus of attention in “Six Problems in Levinas’ Philosophy,” a pithy and provocative article by the renowned philosopher, scholar, and translator Alphonso Lingis. Lingis, whose lyrical descriptions of embodiment, interanimality, and carnal becomings have convinced a generation of phenomenologists that philosophy should be as poetic as it is conceptual, demonstrates here that stripped-down prose going straight to the heart of

philosophical claims can be equally thrilling. His proposals in “Six Problems”—that Levinas’ overall philosophy includes a number of unresolved problems pertaining to the recognition of wants and needs in the other, God as the wholly Other, the origin of ethics, and the relation between ethical absoluteness and political responsibility—are sure to kindle debates among our readers. *PhaenEx* is delighted to be able to provide a forum for this discussion, and we welcome lively engagement with this text.

The next article in our celebratory extended Open Issue comes to us from Dorothea Olkowski, who—again fittingly—was a contributor to the inaugural issue of *PhaenEx* back in 2006. Olkowski is known for her cutting-edge approach to philosophical questions that push at the borders of the discipline; her latest book *Postmodern Philosophy and the Scientific Turn*, just published by Indiana University Press, and her edited collection (with Christina Schuëß and Helen Fielding) on *Time in Feminist Philosophy* (2011), both demonstrate this finger-on-the-pulse quality of her work. And certainly, the search for ethics, sociality, and politics in other-than-human animals has been a topic of great interest amongst scholars particularly during the last decade. In this same spirit, Olkowski, in her contribution here entitled “Politics: The Highest Form of Philosophy?” reads Kant, Lingis, Bergson, and especially Arendt to ask whether politics is a pursuit only for humans. But after guiding us through some of the most recent scholarship on animal intelligence and sociality, her conclusion to the question—namely, that political genius, requiring both spectators and a truth-telling genius, is an explicitly human achievement—is both surprising and compelling.

Like Olkowski, Mark Kingwell, who has authored or co-authored sixteen books of political, cultural, and aesthetic theory, both contributed an article to the inaugural issue of *PhaenEx*, and takes up questions of genius and politics in *PhaenEx* 7.1. In “Throwing Dice:

Luck of the Draw and the Democratic Ideal,” Kingwell marshals style and insight to argue that politics—in this case the politics of democracy—is and ought to be more than the merely social mechanism of economic transaction. More specifically, Kingwell investigates success, merit, and reward, first to question how “title” functions in politics, and second to argue, in light of Rancière’s insights, that “the drawing of lots” is what makes democracy a gift that exceeds mere transactional exchange.

Devin Zane Shaw also looks at Rancière, among others, in his “Cartesian Egalitarianism: From Poullain de la Barre to Rancière.” Shaw retraces a largely unremarked thread linking Descartes to contemporary French political philosophy by way of a commitment to what he calls “Cartesian Egalitarianism.” Shaw follows this thread specifically in the works of the seventeenth-century Cartesian feminist Poullain de la Barre, the inimitable Simone de Beauvoir, and the more unlikely contemporary figure of Jacques Rancière. Shaw demonstrates how a somewhat disavowed impetus in Descartes transforms through history to emerge as the cornerstone of a politics of emancipation founded on an egalitarian valuation of the political subject.

Although the themes traced through Levinas, Arendt, and Rancière by these contributors are diverse, including concerns about the other, plurality, democracy, and equality, they may be said to hang together in contrast to Nietzsche’s transvaluation of ethics. In our sixth article, the argument begins not from egalitarianism but from the anti-egalitarian ethic of the “strong type,” as it were. In “Nobility and Decadence: The Vulnerabilities of Nietzsche’s Strong Type,” Vinod Acharya argues that as probing as Deleuze’s influential reading of Nietzsche may be, it is ultimately mistaken where it traces the origin of the decadence of the strong type back to a

struggle between reactive forces. Acharya sketches four traits of Nietzsche's strong type to substantiate the view that its decadence is a consequence of its very creative activity.

II. Five Articles on Opera, Literature, Art, and Laughter

Making a turn from the ethics and politics of the first six articles to the aesthetics (including opera, literature, and art) and science of the last five articles, we also continue the turn back to early nineteenth century German thought and culture begun by Acharya's reading of Nietzsche. The young Nietzsche was greatly impressed by Wagner, and in our seventh article we move from engagement with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche to Heidegger's reading of Wagner. In "Heidegger, Wagner, and the History of Aesthetics" Jonathan Salem-Wiseman asks a provocative question: why did Heidegger believe that Wagner's operas could not attain the status of "great art"? This lively and engaging piece then advances the innovative view that Heidegger's exclusive focus on Wagner's writings resulted in his inattention to what the music itself can reveal—that is, ontological concerns that cannot be easily assimilated into Heidegger's history of aesthetics. Salem-Wiseman concludes by proposing that there may be more affinity between Heidegger and Wagner than the former ever admitted.

The theme of Heidegger and aesthetics is continued with Darren Hutchinson's "I Bury the Dead: Poe, Heidegger, and Morbid Literature." Hutchinson sets Poe's richly phenomenological prose encounters with dead things against Heidegger's conceptual and poetic musings about death to open our eyes to a "wincing elision" of real death in Heidegger. In an unsettling and persuasive account, Hutchinson excavates and reveals what dead things Heidegger buried in his reading of Trakl and what he might have buried in his interpretation of Van Gogh's peasant shoes, leaving for us significant questions about Heidegger's limitations.

Leaving behind Heidegger, Poe, and death, we shift to Camus, McCarthy, and apocalypse with Michael Keren's "Absurdity and Revolt in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." Keren draws upon Camusian themes of transience, existentialism, the preference for reality over storytelling, and trans-generational commitment to generate a four-fold perspective that illuminates Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*. For Keren, the Canada Research Chair in Communication, Culture and Civil Society at the University of Calgary, a Camusian reading of *The Road* indicates deep ideological and alienating problems with twenty-first century new media.

In this issue's penultimate article, we see a turn from reading philosophy through music and then fiction (and back again!), to reading it through art. In "Merleau-Ponty's Artist of Depth: Exploring 'Eye and Mind' and the Works of Art Chosen by Merleau-Ponty as Preface," the prolific phenomenologist Glen Mazis embarks on a journey through Merleau-Ponty's art selections that preface the Gallimard edition of "Eye and Mind"—referring to them as a "silent essay." Mazis's work is renowned for its rich descriptions of phenomena-in-the-world that evoke the undeniable haecceity of things. This article on depth is no exception. With carefully crafted detail, Mazis draws us into the artworks themselves to reveal the sense of depth that Merleau-Ponty argued is much more than a "third dimension" (next to height and width)—depth is, rather, the very reversibility of dimensions and thus a key pivot for understanding Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

In our final article, "As If: Connecting Phenomenology, Mirror Neurons, Empathy, and Laughter," Chris Kramer, like Mazis, uses phenomenological description, but engages with an altogether different sort of discourse. Kramer breathes new life into the Husserlian concept of passive synthesis by reading it in light of recent research from neurophysiology on mirror neurons. Kramer uses the phenomenon of laughter to demonstrate how and why "empathy

neurons” can help broaden the Husserlian life-world. What is funny often tears at the expected and interrupts the individual’s sphere of ownness, generating important reverberations for phenomenology and neurophysiology, but also for ethics. Thus our final article returns to the deep ethical issues of intersubjectivity with which *PhaenEx* 7.1. began.

III. Five Author and Book Encounters

This special extended Open Issue concludes with our Book Encounters section—thus named as we offer more than traditional book reviews in these pages. The standard review format is time-tested and invaluable for keeping abreast of recent publications, but the encounters *PhaenEx* offers are longer than typical reviews, amounting to more probing engagements with each book. Thus we present here two “textual encounters,” as we have done in past issues and will continue to do in issues to come. But this anniversary issue also offers something a bit different in the form of two “author encounters,” which give readers an opportunity to read what authors are saying about their writing in a conversational voice, providing an intimate window into the intellectual and creative processes underwriting the authors’ works. These interviews will become a regular and distinguishing feature of *PhaenEx* Book Encounters as the journal moves forward.

The first author encounter features Rebecca Comay in conversation with Joshua Nichols about her recent publication, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (2011). This discussion puts Comay’s book in context, figuring the extent to which the Revolutionary Terror shaped Hegel’s thought and his legacy—often invoking the language of psychoanalysis to consider Hegel’s project in a new light. Comay and Nichols’ fantastic dialogue touches on diverse themes including violence, forgiveness, witnessing, politics, philosophy, indigestion, and

owls! Their conversation ends with a striking gesture toward the political, which underscores the need to keep reading Hegel today.

In our second author encounter, Gabriel Rockhill and Summer Renault-Steele discuss Rockhill's recent interview compilation *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique: Dialogues* (2011, Ed. with Alfredo Gomez Muller). Their dialogue questions the meaning and relevance of critical theory in our current socio-political and cultural conjuncture, raising issues including globalization, multiculturalism, the "repeated crises of neoliberalism," and the rise of new social movements. They question the "retreat of radicalism" and how this is shaping critical theory, as well as Critical Theory's contemporary turn from aesthetics and psychoanalysis, ultimately taking on the important question of what remains relevant about critical theory and how it must evolve in the future.

Chloë Taylor's encounter with Joseph Tanke's book, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art* (2009), begins with the provocative question: Does Foucault have a philosophy of art? Taylor argues that Tanke's book is very useful in demonstrating the extent to which visual art had an impact on Foucault's thought, while endorsing his decision to resist committing Foucault to any specific philosophy of art. Taylor credits Tanke with arguing convincingly that Foucault's writing on art supplements our understanding of Foucauldian scholarship on subjectivity and modernity, yet, she also draws our attention to various tensions with respect to how Foucault thinks and writes about artistic projects and endeavours. In her final analysis, Taylor suggests these might also reveal a *new* side of Foucault.

For our fourth book encounter, in his discussion of Andrew Biro's anthology *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises* (2011) Steven Logan asks about the suitability of Frankfurt School critical theory for addressing the "paradoxes" of

escalating environmental crises. Logan identifies the key questions motivating the anthology, noting how environmentalists must address not only the need for immediate action in response to environmental crises, but also the question of how to cultivate far deeper attitudinal changes with respect to nature, as well as our relationship and collective responsibilities to the environment. Logan brings the problem of mastery to the fore, ultimately opening up questions about the role of the sublime in mediating our relationship with “nature.”

Finally, Ève Lamoureux’s encounter with the collection of essays, edited by Lucille Beaudry, Carolina Ferrer, and Jean-Christian Pleau, *Art et politique. La représentation en jeu*, takes up not only this special extended issue’s interest in both aesthetics and politics, but specifically examines their connection. As Lamoureux notes, the customary categories for thinking about art as a political tool no longer hold—and that in response to this destabilization, all of the essays gathered in this collection share a concern with rethinking the definition of “political art.” Through her examination of this diverse collection of essays on literature, theatre, film, visual arts, and performance art, Lamoureux offers a nuanced analysis of the evolution, limits, and new challenges facing the complex experience of political art today.

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