

Thinking anew

LUCE IRIGARAY AND MICHAEL MARDER ON
THE POSSIBILITY OF A HUMAN RE-BIRTH

The pretext of pragmatism today is decisive for personal, social, and political affairs. However, what is generally called “pragmatism” is already viewed through a technical lens, which causes pragmatic decisions to lose touch with the real. Our ways of eating, of choosing a course of studies, or a future job, of considering a plant or animal species, and so forth are decided based on statistics, medical or psychological valuations, scientific processes and investigations that put us “on the rails” without any decision on our part. We only try to calculate what would be best for us, without seeing that this “us” no longer exists. What we consider to be a pragmatic choice already amounts to making ourselves conform to that which has been dictated to us by the latest technical discoveries covered in the media.

Not only living beings and human activities but also our very ways of thinking are forced to fit the presumed pragmatic mould. It is assumed,

without further ado, that thinking amounts to being able to use some computing mechanisms that separate us from the experience and spare us the confrontation with the real, on which philosophers must base their thought.

Curiously enough, even many among those scientists and philosophers who are willing to concede that non-human living beings can also think fall into the trap of an exclusive calculative reason. They believe that animals think, to the extent that they are able to compute the difference between their interests and disadvantages and that plants, too, are capable of cognition by calculating differences in the time of daylight, so as to come up with decisions regarding the best time for blossoming. As though it were not enough that human beings have become ensnared in mechanical thought – which is nothing other than computation and, therefore, not a thought – the rest of our natural environment had to be dragged down the same dangerous and erroneous

path, as well. To give ourselves a reminder about other possible, though largely repressed, modes of thinking, it will be advisable to question the way of approaching the non-human embodiments of life and how life has been subjugated and neutralised in us through the non-cultivation of sexual difference.

In his book *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger comments on what he calls “one-way thought”, the use of which is widespread in our times. He explains how this disquieting phenomenon results from the nature of technology,

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which, henceforth, dominates our era and shapes our attitudes and our mind.

Obviously, the question is not merely one of utilising some technologies, but of being separated from our original belonging by a technical device – a *Gestell* – which transforms every natural energy into an artificial one, ruining any living particularity and difference (see, likewise, Heidegger’s text “The Question Concerning Technology”). The technological equipment, which divides us from our environment, from the other(s), and from ourselves, removes us from any personal rooting and resources, and makes us into a piece of a world mechanism that no-one is still able to govern. We are all integrated into it, whatever our claims of remaining free and extraneous to the course of this world. Even our national or cultural differences are becoming more and more secondary in comparison with the universal process moulding the whole, according

to technical methods and mechanical energy, which some presumed democratic leaders and advocates give a hand today by striving to abolish the difference between sexual identities, the ultimate difference that represents a possible way of resisting.

Now, we do not have many ways to extricate ourselves from this nasty situation, to which we are captive without our knowing it. We must try to recover a minimum of breathing and of natural energy in order not to remain totally dependent on the general economy, holding us prisoners. It is a difficult undertaking because, to regain personal energy, whatever the background, is not an easy task, which, moreover, forces us to have and keep trust in our decision. Asking for assistance from vegetal environment is crucial because, beyond the fact that it helps us to recover our breath, it teaches us to perceive what being alive means and how much it requires both autonomy and faithfulness to our natural rooting. The vegetal world also invites us to keep silent and to cultivate silence not as a lack but as a place where we can free ourselves from the weaving of discourses and habits, in which we are involved, and gather ourselves together anew.

The proponents of technological rationality and traditional philosophers alike will likely retort that they have nothing to learn from plants. In doing so, they will repeat the words Socrates utters in *Phaedrus*: “You see, I am fond of learning. Now, the country places and the trees won’t teach me anything, and the people in the city do”. But our situation is the inverse: computational thinking no longer has anything to teach us, while the life and the way of surviving of trees do. Take, for example, the so-called “modal development” of plants that grow by branching



Plant Life (By Joe Parks from Berkeley, CA (Maui Plant Life) via Wikimedia Commons)

out in every conceivable direction. Such open-ended growth reveals that plants are neither machines nor organisms, subordinated to the demands of the whole external to them or to a pre-existing plan. Our human growth could perhaps take them as a model in order not to merge into a whole, in which each might vanish (almost) without a remainder.

We must also return to our sexuate identity and learn how to inhabit it as a framework, starting from which we can relate to the environment, to the other(s), and, first of all, to ourselves. Instead of resorting to the external equipment – or the *Gestell* – of technology, we can approach the whole from the morphologic place, which corresponds to our sexuate identity without letting ourselves be reduced to a neutralised “whatever” individual. We can, in this way, keep

and cultivate our natural energy. What is more, being sexuate provides us with additional energy, which allows us to resist our subjection to the undifferentiated technical energy and to build a human relational world, capable of ensuring the coexistence between us without any domination or exclusion of other living beings.

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