

Aesthetics East and West
Ed. by H.-C. Günther

East and West.
Philosophy, ethics, politics
and human rights

Band 5

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Anwar Alam, Ram Adhar Mall, Sebastian Scheerer

Aesthetics East and West
Philosophy, Music and Art

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Preface

This volume contains the proceedings of a conference held at the Accademia di studi italo-tedeschi in Meran from 30.-31.10.2015. In addition it contains a paper by Thilo Hilpert, given at an AvH conference in Changsha in spring 2015, a second paper by Ram Adhar Mall (‘Hermeneutik...‘), by myself (‘Ferruccio Busoni...‘) and a Laudatio of two film makers on the occasion of the Immanuel-Kant-Weltbürger-Preis being conferred on them by Udo Steinbach. The Meran conference was financed commonly by the Meran academy and the ‘Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie’ (GIP) and I am grateful to both institutions for their financial support.

Müllheim, April 2017

Hans-Christian Günther

List of Contributors

Hans-Christian Günther, Prof. Dr., is professor for Classics at the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg. He has published widely on Greek and Latin literature and philosophy, Byzantine and modern Greek studies. His interests include also modern philosophy, ethics, politics, music and art.

Thilo Hilpert, Prof. Dr. habil. Dipl.-Ing., is a historian and urban planner. He has taught in Berlin, Damascus and Philadelphia, and is professor em. of the Wiesbaden University of Applied Sciences. He has published books on Le Corbusier (1978, 1984, 1987), Bruno Taut (1980), Mies van der Rohe (2002) and the Bauhaus (1999). Most recently his collected essays have been published under the title ‘Century of Modernity’ (Springer 2015)

Gabriele Kiesewetter, Dr., art historian; lecturer at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz; guest professor at Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu (VR). She is specialized in the arts of the 19th century; classical moderns; contemporary art, photography and architecture. Since 2006 she regularly stays in

China and focuses her studies mainly on contemporary Chinese art.

Yoon Young Serena Kim, has studied violin in Seoul (Southkorea) and worked in orchestras before she came to the university of Freiburg in order to study musicology. She is interested in the interactions between European and East Asian music.

Ram Adhar Mall, Prof. Dr., has been professor for philosophy and religion in Trier, Wuppertal, Bremen, Heidelberg and the LMU Munich. His wide reaching work has been of ground-breaking importance for the understanding of Indian philosophy, he is the founding father of intercultural philosophy in Germany and the founder of the 'Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie'.

Harro von Senger, Dr. iur. Dr. phil., Prof. em. Of sinology in the University of Freiburg is the author of the first western book on the 36 Strategems (*Strategeme*, Scherz 1988, now Fischer TB 2011), the first western book on *Moulüe* (*Supraplanung*, Hanser 2008), the first Swiss translation of *Meister Suns Kriegskanon* (Reclam 2011) and he is a co-editor of the first western volume on

Sinomarxism (*Maoismus oder Sinomarxismus?*, Franz Steiner 2016). His books are translated in 15 languages.

S. www.36strategeme.ch and www.Supraplanung.eu

Udo Steinbach, Prof. Dr., is one of the leading international authorities for the Islamic world. He held various high ranking positions as director of the 'Deutsches Orient-Institut', Hamburg, the 'GIGA-Institut für Nahoststudien', the 'Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien', Marburg, the 'Governance Center Middle East/ North Africa', Humboldt-Viadrina School of Governance, Berlin.

Giusi Strummiello, Professor for Theoretical Philosophy at the Università di Bari «Aldo Moro». Her main research interests are the thought of Martin Heidegger; she has published among other numerous contributions the volume *L'altro inizio del pensiero. I «Beiträge zur Philosophie» di Martin Heidegger; il rapporto tra filosofia e violenza (Il logos violato. La violenza nella filosofia)*; German Idealism, in particular the development of the thought of Schelling. In this field she has translated *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* of F.W.J. Schelling and published the volume *L'idea rovesciata. Schelling e l'ontoteologia*. She studies also French philosophy of the 20th century, in particular Henri Bergson and Eric Weil.

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Recently she has been interested in the philosophical implications of the debate on Human Rights.

Introduction

by Hans-Christian Günther

Never has it been more obvious than today that the dialogue of cultures is ever more immediately important to our society and our intertwined political and social problems. Not only is it so that philosophy or more generally speaking thinking cannot but remain sterile if it does not open up to the changed world of today where to assume that one particular culture can claim superiority or the leading role in our world is simply unrealistic and, in addition, intellectually insincere. If philosophy pretends to say something relevant to our lives today it cannot but be intercultural, because our world is a multicultural one, and today it is such in its actual or at least developing power structures as well.

Today we see the world in a way as never before in an unprecedented, violent conflict between various more or less strong power centres, and this is precisely so because we live in a phase of transition where the one culture which dominated the world in the past desperately tries to cling to its old privileges and still tries to defend them even by brutal violence, even though it is obvious that this violence is bound to fail and is, in fact, autodestructive – not to speak of the fact that that violence contradicts all values loudly proclaimed as the superior values of

our culture, which are claimed to justify its eminent place even in today's changing world.

What we experience today is indeed a clash of cultures, even though in a sense quite different from that of the talk of the incompatibility of cultural or religious attitudes, the cheap and hypocritical nonsense we hear everywhere. The ultimate reasons for the more or less violent clashes are mere power interests, as was almost always the case in human history. The wars of today are driven by pure economic greed and political power interest, international terrorism is the immediate outcome of these wars combined with social discrimination and bad governance; the immigration we experienced even before the present refugee crisis, and are in any case bound to shall experience in the future, is the direct outcome of the brutal exploitation of the whole world by a small fraction of its population for centuries, which left the largest part of the world undeveloped, chopped up in a bunch of piecemeal states without traditional unity and in lack of any efficient political elite. However if social injustice, how so ever motivated violence and murder runs - as today - along cultural and religious lines, then the counterparts define themselves culturally, religiously, and if only pseudoculturally and pseudoreligiously. Thus, culture and religion become a tool in the hands of those who sponsor violence and discrimination. They not only define themselves and the other

as enemies in cultural or religious terms, they even incite their eventually heterogeneous enemies to define themselves as such in a mutually hostile way.

And here exactly begins the task of promoting intercultural understanding, a desperate uphill struggle as it may be. It exposes the pseudoculture of those who misuse cultural differences as a tool for powerdriven violence and tries to open people's eyes for the creative potential of cultural differences. In fact, there has probably never existed any great culture in world history which had not been created by cross fertilization.

The so called West, and Europe in particular - the declining power centre of the world -, is in the very middle of the present crisis: the fall of the Soviet Union made all the silly talk about lasting peace in Europe because of our Marvellous humanistic and democratic values crumble immediately in the crisis in Yugoslavia where Europe returned to the slaughter of the jungle, and at a closer look western Europe played and plays the most shameful role. No wonder that in the meantime all dreams of a united peaceful Europe are buried under the rise of a new nationalist egoism and shameless chauvinism, a new fascism everywhere. This Europe, which is unable to master even the most petty internal crisis, e.g. to bail out an economy as big as a tiny region of Germany like Hessen, was all too prone to be pushed into a new

division in what was to become the new EC between eastern and western European states with their different attitudes and backgrounds again, and in its disintegrated form the EC was pushed - as we know now against its will - into a more than crazy confrontation with Russia, which, beside damaging our already problem ridden economy, meanwhile brought us at the brink of nuclear war. Thus, after having aided the US in the criminal wars with which they have shamelessly littered a good part of the world, we Europeans are even offering ourselves to aid them in weakening and destroying ourselves in a dangerous proxy war directly before our own door.

Surely those wars appal the European public by their all too obvious injustice and unbearable violence and it becomes ever more difficult to keep the public quiet. However, this game works still better than one should think because the problem of world wide streams of migration strikes Europe ever harder, and with the present refugee crisis, the unprecedented rise of terrorism, caused precisely by western wars and failed policies, it becomes at the same time ever more easy to instigate people to mutual hatred, intolerance and crazy violence. And this instigation to racism and intolerance has been prepared by a devious antiislamic racist campaign over decades by western media, which created prejudice on our side and the natural reaction to that on the other, and which

now exacerbates in the midst of a complete lack of confidence in the utterly unsocial, hypocrite and chaotic politics of a worn out political class which in its unbelievable arrogance thinks it can fool ordinary people around by the most obvious lies and subterfuges. And indeed, if to a large extent it succeeds in fooling them, it does not succeed in satisfying them, and thus favors the rise of populist right wing movements.

At present our most immediate problem in Europe is that of immigration, and this means of a peaceful coexistence in our own European society. And here the absurdity of present politics and the need for more intercultural understanding is most obvious.

It is clear to every serious economist today that immigration is the obvious and only solution to our economic and demographic problems, and that opening our doors to immigration is far from impoverishing us or taking away jobs and economic wellbeing from European people, but would just create the rejuvenation of our overaged population and create a rise in internal demand Europe and its master Germany so desperately need in order to create further economic growth. However, to open our doors unreservedly, yes, even to be generous enough to accept the inevitable is socially impossible, because European people hide their old racist attitudes under absurd talk of cultural and national identity, as if a German could not continue to uphold German

culture by reading Goethe and Kant even if he lives beside a fellow citizen from Africa, if cultural identity in a true sense were our problem. What we call cultural identity, however, is just the convenient living style we call enlightened and rational, i.e. we are rational and free enough to choose by the free will of every individual with how many partners we want to have sex, or how often we get drunk, whereas the unenlightened muslims are banned from these benefits of Kantian philosophy by a stupid book one perhaps rather should ban altogether. If we lived our culture we would indeed win the respect of others and even interest them in this culture, provided we encounter them with respect too, whereas by hiding our vices and silly arrogance under well sounding phrases we duly earn their disrespect.

In the present climate it seems almost impossible to get anyone of the wider public, let alone our establishment, interested in intercultural understanding. And we can be glad that one non-European country, China, has in the meantime gained so much weight as the emerging leading world power that here at least we have to confront ourselves also peacefully with another culture, simply because the attitude we habitually assume towards others, namely that of just bullying and bombing them into the ground if necessary, is not viable, although our journalists and the politicians who pay them revel at least in trying to play the little bully in

regard to China as well: and this is the special place China holds in intercultural studies today.

Now I suppose that for some time already many of my readers may be feeling they have dropped into the introduction to another conference. This conference is supposed to be about aesthetics. So this talk about contemporary politics seems utterly out of place. Yet, this is far from true.

That art *prima facie* is about something quite different from politics, political or social problems, is a typically western view. We have, in western art, a very clearly defined concept of art as something to which its autonomy is essential, a concept which I have tried to trace back to specific circumstances in classical antiquity. In this form I doubt we can find it in other cultures. Yet, quite apart from this, and quite apart from the fact that even in western classical antiquity art originally was conceived as something eminently political and social, even art in the modern western sense has at least a political dimension too. Art is more than an expression of an artist's life and its cultural and social surroundings, however, it cannot but be also an expression, even a most eminent expression of life. And the political in the widest sense is an intrinsic part of human life; even or in particular the act to refuse to participate in political life is a political act, even a political act in the most immediate sense: thus to some degree art

ist always political, not only if it is explicitly so, that is, if it explicitly refers to political events, and thus is, as we say, political art.

How art, which on the surface shows no sign of being political, can nevertheless have a political significance in the highest sense, and one which touches exactly on the political problems I sketched as showing the need for intercultural understanding, I shall demonstrate with a concrete example about which I have already briefly written in the last volume of contributions to a Meran conference!

It was in 2001 that just by chance I came across a few poems in Yiddish in the appendix of a journal for translations that was sent to me by a friend. When I read these poems (they were printed in the original with transcription and translation) I was struck as I had hardly been before by any poetry of a contemporary poet. In the introduction I read that the woman poet, Mrs. Rivka Basman Ben-Haim, was a survivor of a German concentration camp in Lithuania and presently lived in Israel. I immediately contacted the editor of the journal, and he told me that he knew the poet and had also already invited her to Germany to read her poems. Unfortunately he fell gravely ill and died soon after so that I lost touch. But in ca. 2007 an Israeli student asked me per email about one of my books, so I took the chance to ask whether he

knew the poet and could find out an address for me. A few days later I received a mail that he had found Mrs. Basman in the telephone book, had phoned her and she was glad to hear of my interest and suggested I write to her. I sent her some of my translations, she answered very kindly, sent me some of her books, but apologized that she was too old to travel and thus could not come to Germany any longer.

Some time later I planned to compile a book of the memories of eminent artists and scholars who lived the Nazi period in Germany: thus I asked Mrs. Basman whether she would be willing to write about her experience with the holocaust. I got a very striking answer. Mrs. Basman wrote me: I cannot write any essay on the holocaust because all I have to say about my experience with the holocaust I said in my poetry. And with it she sent me the poem you have on your handout.

All her poems I know are like this: they never are explicit about anything of this experience: they are short poems, speaking of the simple things of everyday life: buying bread, seeing a tree before the window, walking at the sea: they describe the most simple and elementary things of everyday life in a few lines with an inimitable mixture of calm and tension, so that every act seems to be an act of healing and consolation. And now I understood why these poems so intensely appealed to me: they carried under their

serene surface the emotional intensity of a person who lived a situation where all the little, most trivial things which we take for granted in our lives had once been absent. These poems fill us with a new awareness of the healing wholeness of life, bestowed upon us by someone who had to learn to live again and to feel again the grace of every little moment of our everyday experience. Mrs. Basman has begun to write poems as a young girl in the concentration camp, she did so in order to read these poems to her fellow inmates to soften their suffering. Another survivor of Auschwitz who newly made headlines for her engagement against xenophobia and islamophobia, for which she had been attacked by our new nazis, played accordeon while the inmates who were chosen for work entered the door; a great composer, Viktor Ulman, composed and performed music in Theresienstadt before he was murdered in Auschwitz.

One has often protested the uselessness of a culture which did not prevent us to commit the crimes of the last century, however, one forgets that even in the concentration camps this culture, poetry and music has given comfort to at least some, if not to many victims: this does not take away the horror but it is far from being nothing. And the poetry, the music which will have consoled the prisoners of the Nazi camps, was the same music, poetry, or music of the same German musical tradition which the