



SPT newsletter

Volume 22, Number 2 (Winter 1997)

Message from the President

I'd like to make some brief comments about the SPT/97 meeting in Dusseldorf, SPT/99 in San Jose/Silicon Valley and potential sites for future international meetings.

The timing of the Dusseldorf meeting conflicted with both a major German philosophy conference and many colleagues' academic calendars. This resulted in a smaller and less representative showing than we had hoped for. Nonetheless, there were close to 20 North Americans, including some of our best-known philosophers of technology and also some young and promising ones too. Germany, represented well by our host, Alois Huning, was also represented by such stalwarts as Fritz Rapp and Hans Lenk (though overall the German representation was limited because of the schedule conflict). Britain, Russia, Hungary, Greece, and Spain were each represented by at least one speaker. The Netherlands, with 10 speakers, was the largest contingent other than Americans (the Dutch constituting numbers we might well hope for from other countries in future conferences). The quality of the contributions was generally excellent, and a good time was had by all.

The 1999 meeting is planned to be in Silicon Valley, California in the summer of 1999. It will be held at San Jose State University. It seems a good idea to start early on planning this one, so that we can make this the super conference that SPT now needs and wants to have, particularly given the growing international and interdisciplinary interest in issues relating to philosophy and technology. The Silicon Valley location and topic of "Technological Spaces" (along with our traditional open call for papers) should draw a great deal of interest. California may seem a bit far for Europeans, but it has so many attractions that they will come anyway. And we will be making special outreach to colleagues and institutions in the Pacific Rim. The summertime date should accommodate most university calendars. Local host Noam Cook (cook@parc.xerox.com) and vice president/conference coordinator Deborah Johnson (johnsd@rpi.edu) will surely welcome input from all quarters. Local arrangement and program committees are being set up, and volunteers are welcome for those as well.

By the time of our December 28 board meeting at APA in Philadelphia, we were entertaining 2 European proposals for 2001 - Budapest and Edinburgh. If either of those are chosen, SPT/2001 should be an excellent meeting as well.

Paul Durbin

Message from the Editor

I am not sure exactly how it happened, but here I am, your new *Techne* editor. As I see it, *Techne* plays a crucial role in the life of this Society. Although we meet at all three APA annual meetings and hold our own biennial international conference, we, the membership (and potential members), are scattered around the world. Thus, the newsletter of the Society (along with our new website) ought to be the cement which holds us together and keeps us up to date as an on-going community. That is what I would like to see happen. To accomplish

this goal I need your help. Only by finding out what each of us is doing in research and in teaching will we provide the basis for the continuing dialogue which has been characteristic of SPT. Only by fostering an exchange of ideas can we find out what we are thinking.

With these factors in mind, please send me or Andrew Garnar, the Assistant Editor, (more on Andrew below) news about your publications and your research and teaching projects. We are starting a special section that will feature research by members of the Society. It also would be useful to introduce new scholars in our field to the society by publishing their names and dissertation and theses titles. So, please send your students's names and the titles of their work to us. But that is not all we need. We need your thoughts, your ideas on philosophy and technology. These can take the form of editorials, or letters to the editor - whichever. Let's talk to each other!

The newsletter appears with the assistance of Publisher S. Noam Cook and Assistant Editor Andrew Garnar. Noam has served the Society in many capacities, including as interim editor of *Technè*. We are pleased to report that Professor Cook continues as our Publisher. The Society is in his debt. Andrew Garnar is a graduate student in the Graduate Program in Science and Technology Studies at Virginia Tech. Andrew's MS thesis is on Technologies of the Self and is he busy writing. We are grateful that he is devoting some of his precious spare time to our Society.

Please write to us. Comments and suggestions are welcome. Our addresses are at the bottom of the last page.

Joe Pitt

Announcements

Eastern APA - 27-30 December 1997

SPT Session: 28 December

Time: 11:15-1:15

Topic: "Nature and Technology: Foundational Approaches"

Speakers: Fred Ferre and Eric Katz

(A meeting of the SPT Board also took place.)

Central APA

SPT Session Saturday 9 May

Time: 12:00 - 1:45

Topic: Analytic Critiques of Philosophy of Technology

Chair: Eric Katz, New Jersey Institute of Technology

Speaker: Andrew Light and David Roberts, The University of Montana

"Descriptivism and the Philosophy of Technology: A Wittgensteinian Approach"

Commentator: Scott Noam Cook, San Jose State University and Xerox PARC

Pacific APA 25-28 March 1998

SPT Session: Thursday 26 March

Time: 8:00pm

Topic: Author Meets Critics, Raphael Sassower's "Technoscientific Angst: Ethics and Responsibility"

Commentator: Martin Krieger

SPT Coordinator for Central Division APA

The SPT is looking for someone to coordinate its meetings at the Central Division APA. Duties include organization of one or two sessions on any themes related to the interest of the Society. Opportunities exist to publish proceedings of the meetings in the Society's journal. Those interested should contact Paul Durbin (18512@brahms.udel.edu).

Book Review

This book review was originally printed in the French Society for Philosophy and Technology's newsletter. It is reprinted here with kind permission from Daniel Cerezuelle, forwarded by Carl Mitcham.

Between Symbols and Technosciences: A Philosophical Itinerary

by Gilbert Hottois

(Collection milieux), Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 1996, 267 pp.

reviewed by Yves Goffi

In this book, Gilbert Hottois offers us a series of texts (conference papers and articles), some previously unpublished, that were written between 1978 and 1994. They total fifteen chapters divided into three sections whose headings demonstrate that we are in fact dealing with a philosophical itinerary, one not yet complete and probably interminable: Departure, Symbols vs. Technoscience, and Towards Accompaniment.

A first, undoubtedly superficial, reading of the collection might be guided by curiosity rather than philosophical engagement (in this it would be superficial): "How does Gilbert Hottois situate himself in regard to those other thinkers on technology who are most frequently mentioned in the French-speaking world?" But it is precisely this question which opens chapter 12 (the text of a 1993 lecture given in Nice during a conference organized by Dominique Janicaud in association with la Société de la Technique) and it is worth seeing how Hottois himself answers it.

Hottois gives Heidegger credit for not having a view that "banalizes technology" (p.195), for having perceived "modern science as technological" (p.196), and for having understood that the universal operationalism installed by technoscience would not spare man himself. In a word, the thinker of Todtnauberg has an "acute perception of the radicality of the challenge technology poses to philosophy" (p.195). Despite this, Heidegger refuses to do anything other than practice a "most original retreat towards a sort of symbolic thought that is to be the most primordial" (p.196). This means that there is no possible interaction with technology (and, in concrete terms, that we are at best capable of arousing a readiness to await the god who alone can save us now).

Under these conditions it is easy to understand how Hottois might evaluate Jacques Ellul:

subtract philosophical stature and add more of the religious dimension and there is no significant difference between the position of Ellul and that of Heidegger. The two authors "belong quite strictly to the same family of thinkers" (p.197). Hans Jonas, while ranked as one of the "greatest thinkers on technology" (p.220, ch. 13), is very critically evaluated: the heuristics of fear is a strategy trying to make what is in fact an ethics of conviction pass for an ethics of responsibility (p. 136, ch. 9). In the end, it is Gilbert Simondon who appears to "make a move in the right direction" (p. 198, ch. 12). This is rather surprising since Hotois thinks Simondon downplayed the difference between the symbolic and the technological, underestimated the challenge posed to philosophical thought by the technosciences, and neglected the questions raised by the technoscientific appropriation of man himself. But it is perhaps just this somewhat eirenic optimism that kept him from falling prey to the reactive temptations of Ellul, Heidegger, and Jonas. In a word, one might say that, along with Simondon, Hotois acquired the conviction that philosophical interaction with technology is possible... but he did not necessarily forget the lesson of Heidegger and Ellul: this interaction will be problematic and difficult.

It is certainly appropriate here to recall a remark of Hotois regarding Simondon: "the real coevolution of man and technology is infinitely more laden with unknowns, opacities, and vertiginous virtualities than Simondon, with his universalist, humanist, and technophilic optimism, appears to want to recognize" (Simondon et la philosophie de la "culture technique," p. 135). This positive, factual account of technoscientific practices Hotois dubs "accompaniment."

We can now set aside the biographical aspect of this collection of articles and consider what is at stake here. A review of a collection of articles ought to show the unity of the project behind the diversity of themes taken up. We must nonetheless take a moment to note that this diversity is immense; among other things, it is manifested by:

- an evaluation of contemporary philosophy in its relation to language (chapter 1).
- a (re)reading of the rights of man (chapters 3 and 8).
- a critical reflection on realism in physics and on the presuppositions of the epistemology of paradigms (chapter 4).
- an inquiry into the experience of time and ethical choice (chapter 5).
- a meditation on the difference between symbolized death and operative death (chapter 13); this last piece is certainly one of the most troubling of the collection.

It is time to get to the intention that underlies these texts. It is a question of showing the incapacity of all attempts to efface the difference between sign and technology without necessarily "advocating a return to the major referents and signifieds -- those of ontotheology" (p. 10), and without succumbing to the temptations of secondarity. We know that Hotois means by this that the most original philosophers of the twentieth century renounced a direct referentiality in order to take language as an object: this is the metalinguistic position (the linguistic turn); or even more radically that they chose to situate texts and discursive practices in the margins: this is the adlinguistic position (hermeneutics and deconstruction). In these conditions, the unity of the collection is to be found on the side of an inquiry into the specificity of philosophical intervention in the technological milieu. At first glance, things do not seem too promising: the technosciences challenge philosophy not as a critical conception that could refute them, but "as one form of life supersedes an old one," Hotois asserts on page 194, adding immediately, "they force it to change (but in which direction) or die." In what direction this mutation might occur is just what the encounter with Simondon had indicated -- we will not review this.

But Hotois is not so naive as to speak of "philosophy itself" without further ado. As the reference to ontotheology suggests, he has in mind the "master signifiers" that are the words

³God," ³Being," ³Truth," ³Meaning," ³Desire," ³Speech," ³Society," ³Revolution," ³Duty," ³Law," ³Science." But he is also thinking of that philosophy which is ³fundamentally idealist even if it does not know it or pretends not to know it" (p. 205). And this fundamentally idealist philosophy is that for which it is ³ultimately the subject that constitutes the world and not the world that produces the subject" (p. 205). It is not difficult to recognize here the themes of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Finally, it is speculative philosophy that is called upon to change or die. Here one also discerns the lessons of Wittgenstein (to whom Hottois devoted an important study in 1976). Philosophy is not a cognitive discipline, but rather an activity and an undertaking, Wittgenstein and Hottois tell us. But where the former made it a project of liberation (³Was ist dein Ziel in der Philosophie? -- Der Fliege den Ausweg aus dem Fliegenglas zeigen"), the latter makes it a project of preservation of liberty, a project of readiness for the infinite adventure to which technology invites us. In this sense, Hottois' itinerary is interminable.

-- Translated by Thomas Hilde (Pennsylvania State University)

Conference Report

Scholars explore effects of technology on education and society

³Education and Technology: Asking the Right Questions," held September 17-20, 1997 at Penn State, featured 80 papers and poster presentations. More than 200 participants from more than 30 states and 17 countries attended the ground-breaking event.

The idea for the conference began in Dr. Henry C. Johnson Jr.'s seminar on the impact of technology on education and human life. Students were so concerned about the issues they were discussing they urged their professor to find a way to share this information with a broader audience. The result was the development of an international conference.

³The planning committee decided to dedicate the conference to Ellul and Ivan Illich, another primary voice and critic of technology who now teaches at Penn State," Johnson noted. Ellul (1912-94), a French philosopher, sociologist and social critic, is best known for his landmark work of 1954-the book *La Technique: ou l'enjeu du siècle* (*The Technological Society*). He spent his life warning against the power, not of this or that machine, but of the technological ordering of all human life, Johnson said.

With the writings of Ellul and Illich as a foundation, the conference planners developed five themes: technology and education in general, the effect of technology and education on the person, the effect of technology on the socioeconomic situation, the effect of technology on the culture and the effect of technology on schooling. They placed special emphasis on the impact of technology on the Third World.

³On the first night of the conference, we immediately began a conversation that continued throughout the conference," Johnson added. ³It was unbelievable how people who did not know each other personally, but who shared very strongly concerns about technology, melded into a community during the conference."

The addresses and papers from the conference are being prepared for a volume on the major themes of the conference, as well as for publication in various professional journals which have requested them, Johnson said.

Partly in response to the suggestions of many attendees, another conference - on ethics and education and technology - is already being planned for 1999 at Penn State. This conference, under the chairmanship of Carl Mitcham, will continue the conversation begun at the 1997 conference.

Angela Rogers

Events Of Interest

Upcoming Meetings

International Conference on Science, Technology and Society; 16-22 March 1998, Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima, Japan. The world is changing radically by virtue of technological transformation. Not only the production system and economic structure, but also our daily life and value system are now subjected to the fundamental transformation. Although science is regarded as the backbone of technological society, public understanding of scientific knowledge is seriously questioned. We believe it is time to examine the reality and the problems raised by undergoing technological change. Our Conference "Science and Society- Technological Turn" is aimed at providing a wider international forum to discuss this issue for those who are interested in research and education on Science, Technology and Society (STS). Sessions will cover the following hot topics around Science & Technology (ST): World Economic Change under New ST System, Transformation of ST Research System: New Method to Assess ST Development, ST Development and New Value System, ST in Post Cold War, Science & the Public in New ST Era, and ST and Japan. More information on the conference, including a call for papers and registration form, is available on the Web at: <http://hostcinf.shinshi-u.ac.jp/sts/Index.html>.

The organizers of "Art and Technology: In the Age of Information" has issued a call for papers for its meeting in Liverpool, UK, 1-3 July 1998. This conference is aimed at a wide range of participants. Deadline for proposals is 31 January 1998. Contact: Toby Jackson, Tate Gallery Liverpool, Albert Dock Liverpool L3 4BB, U.K.

Thirteenth Annual Conference on Computing and Philosophy. This conference will be held in conjunction with the World Congress of Philosophy in Boston during the week of 10-16 August 1998. The CAP Program committee welcomes submissions dealing with, but not restricted to: the use computers in the teaching of philosophy; the use of computers as research tools in philosophy; the philosophical aspects of artificial intelligence; and the area of computer ethics. The deadline for submission (1-2 page abstract) is Monday, 9 February. Further information regarding the conference, including submission forms, can be found at the CAP home page (caae.phil.cmu.edu/CAAE/CAP/CAPpage.html). This year's conference coordinator is Robert Cavalier, Center for the Advancement of Applied Ethics, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA 15213 (412/268-7643 or rc2zz@andrew.cmu.edu).

On 18-22 August 1998 the 25th Symposium of the International Committee for the History of Technology (ICOHTEC) will be held in Lisbon, Portugal. Contact: Prof. Carroll Pursell, History Dept., Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH 44106, e-mail: cxp7@po.cwru.edu.

The Society for the History of Technology will hold its 1998 annual meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, 15-18 October 1998. The program committee welcomes proposals for individual papers and sessions on topics related to all facets of the history of technology, including pre-modern themes. Proposals for individual papers must include 1) a one page abstract, and; 2) a one page curriculum vitae, including current postal and e-mail address. Proposals for complete sessions must include 1) a description of the session's thesis; 2) a list of the presenters' name and paper titles; 3) a one page abstract and one page c.v. for each of the presenters; 4) a one page c.v. for the commentator, chairperson, and session organizer - if she or he is not participating in the session. The session descriptions should indicate the individual papers's relevance to the session's thesis. Send a hard copy of the complete proposal bearing a post-mark or equivalent indication of submission date by 10 April 1997, to: Dr. Brett D. Steele, SHOT Program Chair, Department of History, 6265 Bunche Hall, University of California - Los Angeles, CA

