



The Newest System-Program of Pacific Philosophy

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In this inaugural volume of the *Journal of the Pacific Association for the Continental Tradition*, we have chosen to state our intentions collectively. The title of this essay refers of course to another collaboratively written attempt to chart a course for philosophy in a time of political and intellectual upheaval. Though there is a fair bit of irony in our suggestion that we are proposing anything so grandiose as a system-program for philosophy, we do not disavow the ambition and radicalness that motivated the authors of the original *System-Program*. More works of academic philosophy are published today than ever before, many by for-profit presses, and yet we believe that there are far more articles that still need to be written. We on the *JPACT* editorial board believe there are authors longing to do innovative philosophical work and readers looking for open-access philosophical writing of the highest quality, and we would like to help them find each other.

I. Philosophy on the Edges of the Pacific

From its inception PACT has emphasized place and connectivity. The conference meets at places that in themselves are stunning in terms of natural beauty, and provoke philosophical thought and solidarity. We think “on the edge” of the Pacific, the ocean that connects the places where we have met so far for our annual meetings: Seattle, San Francisco, Hilo, Los Angeles, and Sitka. The planet’s largest ocean connects East and West and is in that regard also an important symbol for PACT and *JPACT*. Although the ocean has brought war and conflict, we emphasize the origin of the word “pacific,” the Latin *pacificus*, literally peacemaking. We attempt to bring together peacefully and respectfully the different traditions we find around the ocean.

It is perhaps peculiar that we call ourselves “Continental,” referring to a tradition that is geographically associated with countries such as Greece, Germany, and France, very far from the Pacific. The continental tradition is close to our heart because it is part of our academic histories, and engages existence as lived in context, in place. Part of our endeavor is to make explicit what happens to Greek, German, Italian, or French philosophy in a different context when it moves West. Do we strap some cowboy boots on Hegel? Do we teach Socrates how to enjoy fine coffee? Do we teach Deleuze how to surf? In all seriousness, thinking and practicing philosophy (as a way of life) cannot be (and should not want to be) immune to its geographical, cultural, social, and economical surroundings. In fact, at PACT we hope to let thinking *emerge* out of a place, rather than simply exposing thinking *to* a certain place. As a place where East and West meet, the western parts of the USA also provide a potential ground for pacific encounters

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between different traditions. The continental tradition may thus offer some guidance to *start* us on our encounters with open-mindedness, but we also hope that thinking responds to our conjoint efforts and emerges out of our place-based being in a way that lies beyond divisions such as continental-analytic or Western-Eastern. If there is anything that should guide our methodology, then it is thinking *with* and *out of place* in solidarity with one another.

II. A Bioregional Imperative with Global Resonance

While PACT has an undeniable locality in that it is founded “here,” at the edges of the Pacific, its bioregional imperative needs to be, from the outset, also globally driven. If the ecological crisis is the great moral issue of our time, and maybe of all human time, we need to radicalize our practices of awakening and collectivization, and do so not only locally but also globally. Stengers has characterized Gaia as becoming increasingly “ticklish” through human mismanagement of the earth, and we are daily reminded of Gaia’s ticklish nature in the near daily news of the disasters brought by climate change. The call to arms has to engage us locally, but it also calls for richer investigations of the political, economic, and historical forces that have made climate change such an overwhelming disaster. It might even call for a reexamination of our global collective.

In PACT we have worked toward a renewal of cosmopolitanism rooted in the intimate connection between the local and the global. Indeed, we are called to think globally and act locally beginning with a transformation of mind: *animus debem mutare, non caelum* (change your state of mind, not the sky). In its perennial receptivity to oppressive ideologies, the Western psyche has undergone acute psychological trauma in repressing the damage we have done to Gaia. While technology - at least in its current formation, as part of the capitalist machine - only continues to promote the cult of individuality through the continued proliferation of images occupying our virtual world, the spoken word and now the written word (hence *JPACT*) remain vital links to a deep past connecting us with our old ways. By retrieving the old ways, we aspire as members of *JPACT* to renew our own pact to those local and indigenous places that constitute and define our thinking. As Gary Snyder reminds us in his poem, “For the Children,” in such a time of unprecedented ecological crisis, we must strive, above all, *to stay together* by recognizing that the *locus* of our union is the common bond we share with Gaia. The “ticklish” nature of Gaia has only prompted us to become more agitated as we begin to realize that even the creation of our own human “political” communities are rooted in our connection to the web of a much more profound and intricate ecological community. As parts of this living world in which we are all implicated, any degree of suffering imposed upon one part pervades all the other parts. The human species is thus now called to recognize and live according to a certain sympathy with all things, *sumpatheia ton holon*.

If the common bond of global community begins in the hearth or home (*oikos*), our home is nothing other than the earth we inhabit with all species. To cultivate such an earthbound awareness also requires that we *learn the flowers* by developing an appreciation for the mutual situatedness and indeed, interrelationality of all things. Once we begin to learn how the world hangs together in its simultaneously unitary and choral intensity, we might finally go forth, as Snyder advises, by *going light*. Above all, how we can live learn to live according to a certain lightness of being? In a world replete with the existential heaviness and melancholy that

accompanies climate change, species demise, and species extinction, this proverbial lightness of being is also a metaphor for how we shall remain true to the earth.

III. Philosophy in an explosive time

As we collectively write these words, on computers linked across continents and islands, a volcano is erupting near the center of the Pacific mere miles from where the journal is officially housed. At this very moment it is likely that a bit of the freon used to cool the servers that host *JPACT* is mixing with sulfuric compounds that have been trapped beneath the earth since long before the dawn of the anthropocene. The Kīlauea volcano has been erupting constantly for thirty-five years, but far more threateningly over the past month. We spoke today about the irony of well-wishers who warn of the grave danger that faces this small corner of the world but ignore the grave environmental dangers that threaten us all, and it was hard to avoid the poignancy of the fact that *JPACT* is launching precisely *now*.

Yet one reason for extending PACT's project into publishing is that written philosophy not only does not *have* to be timely, but perhaps *should* not be timely. PACT's meetings have always stressed the unique time and places where they appear. Most of these meetings have taken place on land whose natural beauty makes it easy to forget that they once belonged to indigenous peoples. And all have taken place in times whose political turmoil made the present difficult to overlook. The first PACT conference coincided with Barack Obama being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; the most recent with increasing belligerence between two nuclear powers. All featured participants who cared deeply about speaking to the issues of our times and the places we occupy, and yet all also highlighted writers who lived long ago and far away. Writing always hides some of its context and forgets much of the rest, and as much as we've devoted ourselves to remembering that context, we also appreciate the liberation that comes with selective forgetting.

The plans for *JPACT* were worked out in Sitka, Alaska, over a week in August, 2016, when the idea of advertising the journal as having the "best words" could still send us into a fit of giggles. That so much has changed in the two years since that meeting gives us hope that our disgust with our country's leadership might be forgotten by the time these words are read. With luck some readers won't even recognize why that joke was once funny. We aim to do our part to disentangle philosophy from its corporate context in the early twenty-first century, but we also hope to publish contributions for which that work of disentangling is beside the point. Philosophy might not be able to transcend its time, but it can suspend it. As such, we will publish articles throughout the year, with each year's submissions belonging to a common volume, allowing each contribution to appear in its own good time.

IV. The "Continental Tradition"

While *JPACT* welcomes contributions from a diverse range of philosophical approaches pursuing varied research agenda, it is also the case that the Pacific—in its multitudinous manifestations and dimensions—forms the soil in which *JPACT* has taken root and in which it continues to grow. Yet this fidelity to a certain place or constellation of places cannot help but to generate tensions with the very idea of "continental" philosophy, which—despite its worldwide

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reach—remains a mode of thinking that is closely associated with continental Europe, especially France and Germany.

Of course, “continental” philosophy is, at best, merely a kind of family resemblance among a number of otherwise quite different forms of philosophical expression. It was first coined by philosophers working in the “analytic” tradition as a way of referring to a variety of traditions they took to be fundamentally different from the kind of philosophy pursued in their own circles. But outside its use as a term of disapprobation or approbation in the culture wars of academia, it is difficult to articulate a clear, positive definition of the genus “continental philosophy.”

What, then, does it mean to pursue “continental” philosophy beyond the bounds of “the” continent (i.e., Europe)? What happens when we take the methods and techniques of continental philosophy—existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and so on—and allow them to take root and develop in non-European soil? Surely other continents have their own distinct experiences and concerns, notwithstanding the importance of universal phenomena or experience shared by different places and cultures. To take only one obvious example, consider the significance of “nothingness” in continental philosophy and, indeed, in Western philosophy more broadly. Buddhist accounts of nothingness are going to shape existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic philosophies in ways radically unlike the accounts of nothingness rooted in Christian Europe.

Our goal here is not to endorse any single philosophical approach, since no one approach exhausts the possibilities of philosophical thinking. Nor do we aspire to express some final word on the various topics we take up, or to lay the groundwork for a new school (Pacific philosophy?) that would constitute a final, ultimate *Aufhebung* synthesizing the various traditions at play. Rather, we hope to support a genuinely pluralistic approach to philosophy as it is engaged with particular places and peoples, especially those within or bordering the Pacific, and to do so while remaining engaged with a certain tradition that, for lack of a better designation, one might call “continental.” Thus, American Pragmatism, various forms and modes of thought arising in Asia (Chinese, Japanese, Indian, etc.), and philosophy rooted in indigenous expression are all part of the dialogue we hope to promote, though this list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. It has often been remarked that “tradition” is a doublet of “treason,” and we welcome articles on both sides of that divide: those that pay respect to the wealth of insights that our plural traditions have made possible and those that look to turn away from them toward something radically new.