Dear readers,

What you are about to read is the very last issue of the ZMK. Since our overall research enterprise, the IKKM, has to cease all of its activities due to the end of its twelve years' funding by the German federal government, the ZMK will also come to an end. Its last topic, *Schalten und Walten* has also been the subject of the concluding biannual conference of the IKKM, and we hope it will be a fitting topic to resume the research of the IKKM on *Operative Ontologies*.

Although this final issue is in English, we decided to leave its title in German: *Schalten und Walten*. As it is the case for the name of the IKKM, (*Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie*), the term seems untranslatable to us, not only for the poetic reason of the rhyming sound of the words. *Switching and Ruling* might be accepted as English versions, but quite an unbridgeable difference remains. In German, *Schalten und Walten* is a rather common and quite widespread idiom that can be found in everyday life. Whoever, the idiom stipulates, is able to execute *Schalten und Walten* has the power to act, has freedom of decision and power of disposition.

Although both terms are mentioned together and belong together in the German expression *Schalten und Walten*, they are nevertheless complements to each other. They both refer to the exercise and existence of domination, disposal or power, but they nonetheless designate two quite different modes of being. *Schalten* is not so much sheer command over something, but government or management. It is linked to control, intervention and change, in short: it is operative and goes along with distinctive measures and cause-and-effect relations. The English equivalent *switching* reflects this more or less adequately.

Walten, on the other hand, is not articulated. It is not divisible, is not based on distinctions or decisions and does not come in the form of interventions or distinct operations. *Walten* is not a technique of domination, but rather dominance or dominion as a given state of being, a form of existence without outside, without any question, or alternative to it. *Walten* has neither origins nor causes. Where the German language seperates *Walten* from *Schalten* precisely by drawing them together, the English *ruling* includes both sides, both that which is simply there and therefore rules, and the technique of domination, such as the setting of rules.

Schalten und Walten, to us, seems to be a core double concept of what we have called *Operative Ontologies*, since *Operative Ontologies* as we have pursued them at the IKKM are grounded in one leading observation: assessing our situation today, we cannot ignore the fact that whatever is given in our environment is more and

more down to technical operations. Whatever exists is made, and the making of what exists requires tools and techniques, in short: (technical) media. This sharply contrasts the ways natural things exist, by *physis*, i.e. growing by themselves into being. Things like synthetic organisms do not reveal themselves in their own right and by their own agency but are called into existence by technology. The ruling (*Walten*) of nature as well as the ruling of the social reside under the command of technology, which as increasingly digitized technology is based on switching operations (*Schalten*). This holds true more and more for the natural and social things themselves as well, which are at hand to us only by technologies of engineering, design, management, and prediction, as for instance the achievements of bioengineering or the computational models of planet Earth teach us. Not only has nature itself turned into a »standing reserve« (*Bestand*) to a degree that Heidegger was unable to dream of, but this standing reserve is pervaded by technical (and increasingly digital) operations which determine how and what things are.

The condition that whatever exists is not simply present or given, but has been called into being through media and their operations in the most general sense demands a reconsideration of the traditional ontological questions (of the type *What is 'x'?*, or *Why is there something instead of nothing at all?*) and a radical remodeling of ontology: the difference between the ontological and the ontic re-enters the ontic. Although the term *Operative Ontologies* sounds self-contradictory—either operative, and hence ontic, or ontological, it seems—, any attempt to adequately describe the prevailing situation challenges exactly the paradoxical interrelation of the ontological and the ontic. The last issue of the ZMK is thus devoted to the exploration of the ways in which ontic and embodied operations establish ontological orders. Although the paradigm of operations which defines the highly technologized ontology of the 21st century is the electronic switching operation (*Schalten*), the topic embraces many ways and concrete situations in which objects are *switched* into being.

Since the industrial age and the possibility to digitally design objects only made obvious the technological processing of the ontological, *Schalten und Walten* refers to a broad variety of operations. The proposed move towards *Operative Ontologies* within media philosophy assumes that different ways of generating or manufacturing also propel different modes of being. Hence, *Operative Ontologies* inquire into the generative and procedural, the medial and the instrumental, the technical and the operative aspects of the *givenness* of that which is given. They investigate the given with regard to the procedures through which and with the help of which it has been made possible, produced, set up, brought into the world and called into being—or in short: *switched on*—in the first place. Through the technical modes and operations of calling something into being the respective mode of being is placed under material conditions.

This is why the topic of *Schalten und Walten* is so suitable to conclude the eleven years of the ZMK and the IKKM six-year research program on *Operative Ontologies*. The latter was structured along polar, complementary or gradual pairs of operations, which in themselves function as dualities or duplicities. Opening and closing, framing and sewing, appearing and disappearing, coupling and separating, compressing and dispersing, pointing and causing, reproduction and multiplication, or recursion and reflection were each examined as interrelated couples of ontological operations. As a continuation of and finale to this pairing method, we now turn towards *Schalten und Walten*.

So far, though, it might appear as if the concept of *Operative Ontologies* was based on a sound asymmetry between *Schalten* and *Walten*: whatever used to be accepted as just being given, for instance nature, or *physis*, is now increasingly dominated by being called into being through technologies, and mainly digital technologies. *Schalten* prevails to the detriment of *Walten*, it seems. *Walten*, in contrast, is obviously nothing more than a residual category. This asymmetry could be very much in conformity with the foundings of (especially »German«) media theory. None other than Friedrich Kittler himself coined the famous sentence: only what is switchable is at all. We cannot deny that this statement is true in more than one respect. To give just one example, we could say that all electric and electronic images only exist by virtue of their ability to be switched (and to switch), and that hence in the world of the image, only that which is switchable exists at all.

But nonetheless, the concept of *Operative Ontologies* does not necessarily imply the vanishing of the mode of existence of *Walten*. We can show this with reference to an early precursor of Kittler's powerful statement. As early as in 1969, not just by mere coincidence in the year of the flight to the moon, the philosopher and aesthetician Max Bense wrote the following lines:

»Civilization is not a state, but a process (obviously an allusion to Norbert Elias). A process we prefer. It shifts the world from a metaphorical state to a mathematical one, and it will not stop transforming problematic realms into calculable ones. Only worlds that can be anticipated are programmable, only those that can be programmed are constructible and habitable in a human way«.

In their simple radicality and with respect to the ongoing production of desasters and catastrophes of all kinds from natural hazards to violations of human rights even in the increasingly controlled world, Bense's sentences today can probably only be justified historically. But let us take them seriously for once. In this case we can say that in its nearly twelve years' existance the IKKM has struggled continuously to work on adjusting this point of view and supply a suitable alternative. Nevertheless, this alternative should not ignore anything of what Bense's sentence, in all its dogmatism and stubbornness, nonetheless correctly describes.

We can grasp this with the help of the concepts of *Schalten* and *Walten*. All we have to do is read what Bense captures with the *metaphorical state* and the *problematic areas* as what we mean by *Walten* here. On the other hand, according to Bense, the state that can be calculated, anticipated, programmed and constructed would be the opposite or complement. By the way, concepts, conceptual thought and the conceptual world, are to be included into Bense's mathematical state, in so far as they are *clara et distincta concepta*, logically sharp and precisely operable concepts, the *p* and *q* of analytical philosophy, for example. Anyway, in the sense of our research context, we can compare them with what we call *Schalten* here.

The world has got under a mode of switching, and everything that is has been brought into being by operations of switching. Whatever is, is a result of switching operations. This gives rise to concern oneself with the *operative ontology* of switching. And it is precisely here that the path taken by the IKKM in its research diverges from what Bense is proposing. For the IKKM has resolved not to exclude or overcome what is metaphorical for Bense, the problematic, the contingent, the historical and, in short, the material, but, on the contrary, to integrate it.

In short, our findings indicate that the operation of switching cannot be done without *Walten*. In order to be effective in the world, to be precisely operative, they must be implemented into the world. Bense's construable worlds must first be built, erected and even furnished. They are literally contaminated with the material and metaphorical worlds. And when viewed in light, the mathematical state of the world itself or the programmable, switchable mode of existence, is also by no means a bodiless and immaterial one. Calculation, programming and anticipation themselves require an apparatus. They depend on instruments and tools, on computers, for example. They remain attached and even stuck on the *res extensa*. That is exactly the difference between traditional ontology and *operative ontology* as we imagine it.

For Bense, aesthetics and anthropology are undoubtedly metaphorical undertakings. In relation to the human body as a ruling carrier of philosophical operations—which means: switchings—however, there have already been extensive efforts to promote and research the different bodies of thought. These investigations focus on the material conditions and the interactions between philosophical and organic operations, switchings and rulings. Media philosophy now adds to this the consideration of the technical and medial bodies.

We would like to show this briefly by a very simple and everyday cultural technique—the venetian blinds. Logically or conceptually, one could say that the venetian blinds as a cultural technique make a distinction between the inside and outside, which they themselves embody at the same time. The venetian blinds are also a switch; they let the light in or out, make the outside visible from the inside or not. They regulate the access to what we see or do not see through it. As for

the extent this kind of access to something determines its state or mode of being—a basic conviction of media philosophy—the venetian blinds thus also transform the world, namely the world of the visible, from a simply given state into a regulated state. The venetian blinds would be a very simple Bense apparatus.

And it would be all the more so as the venetian blinds repeat the regulation that they impose on the world of light and visibility. They make their own function, which they perform in the medium of light, visible precisely in light. They make visible the invisible, the medium, namely light. On the inside of the distinction, in the space in which we find ourselves and which they delimit from the outside, venetian blinds create light and dark stripes. In this way they repeat and show the binary distinction between the visible and the invisible, and the inside and the outside, which they themselves implement. In this respect, the venetian blinds are not only a recursive, but to some extent a reflexive, a logical–philosophical machine in the realm of *Schalten*.

In fact, however, the highlight of the venetian blinds lies precisely in the fact that they are not just this, but a metaphorical and problematic machine in the sense of Bense as well. The nice thing about the venetian blinds is that they know intermediate states between open and closed. The stripes of visibility and light are changeable, manipulable. Exactly this change between the states is what the venetian blinds, in contrast to a simple window shutter, executes. Thus the venetian blinds also generate a time of their own, which is more than, and different from, the mere, sharp, reversible and even expansionless distinction between before and after. The adjustment of the venetian blinds, like any operation, for example that of the departure of a ship, has a course. It takes hold of time and costs time. The venetian blinds do not simply implement the logical operations of separation, differentiation and repetition, but the aesthetic operations of coupling and transition between states or even transmission. They are, in short, a metaphorical machine, and yet and at the same time still a switch, technical and, if you like, mathematical and logical in caracter and function.

In addition, of course, the venetian blinds themselves have a body that extends in space. This is shown by the fact that it wears and wears out, that the handling lines can tear, the lamellas can bend and must be cleaned regularly. It is also directed at our biological bodies, it requires a certain handling. Only these transfers and overlaps of different bodies and materials make the venetian blinds a philosophical apparatus in the sense of media philosophy.

What applies to the venetian blinds probably applies to all switches. They all consist of something material, metal, plastic, semiconductors or other materials. They produce not only mathematical distinctions, logical negations, but also metaphorical contacts, touches and transitions, but also heat and sometimes noise. They generate the *Eigenzeit*, which they need for their execution, and reach out

into space. If complex semiconductor circuits can finally take over thought processes such as arithmetic or even speech, then they are still bodies of thought.

So *Schalten* on its turn brings with it *Walten* like its own shadow, and, of course, media theory is interested in this remaining ontological shadow of digitization and of mediatization in general. But there is even more than the necessary pertinence of *Walte*n even under digital conditions. *Walten* is not only the unavoidable substrate of *Schalten*, it can also emerge from it. One striking example can be seen in what Raymond Williams called the *flow*. The flux of images on TV is, due to the switchability of the screen picture, continuously and constantly interrupted in a most abrupt way by switching over to other images, most heterogenuous image types, TV genres, broadcast formats. They interfere with each other in a way to only leave caleidoscopic meaningless fragments, tiny bits and pieces of what used to be for instance, news, advertising, wheater forecasts, sports, shows, episodes, fictions, live transmissions, announcements, wrap ups, and so forth. There is no coherence of whatsoever quality, especially if it comes to semantics, to meaning or to any form of Gestalt. The term of coherence (or of interruption) loses any significance. Switching operates, as Hartmut Winkler once put it, an operation directed against any kind of context and hence of text.

But, Williams observes, a strange kind of rhythm, or of surfing on the surface of the fragmented sequence of distinctions and of switching operations that comes into being. Based on highly frequent interruptions, a *flow* of plasticity and viscosity arises, a state of experience or even existence, a mode of being, which integrates viewers, images, switchable pictures, sounds, and the world beyond. *Flow* is a bodily and hence physical, material phenomenon, not just a structure or a sequence of otherwise disembodied distinctions. It hence brings *physis* back into the game. *Flow* emerges from switching, *Schalten*, but it rules in the sense of *Walten*.

What can be found in the switchable picture may also emerge elsewhere. The Maltese Cross in the movie camera (and projector) could also be adressed here, or, even more general, language. In what André Martinet called *la double articulation du langage*, the articulation or segmentation of what has already been articulated or fragmented, the coherent dominion of sense emerges as both an artifact, and hence on the side of switching, and an unavoidably and unquestionably ruling condition of existence. Signals, discernable and switchable entities, as they emerge from ruling noise may on their turn, if sequenced, generate a kind of second order flow-like noise and as such turn into given conditions of existence. The cloud, or looped CCTV Systems, or the pervasion of the habitat with computers, and hence switches, may be regarded in a comparable way as modes of turning *Schalten* into *Walten*.

In this sense, with the topic of *Schalten* und *Walten*, the last issue of the ZMK endeavors to investigate the entry or implementation of the mathematical, switch-

able (or conceptual) world into the metaphorical, ruling (or material) world. It is not the replacement of one topic by the other, which is our topic, but rather their coupling and their turning into each other. Thus we suggest that some *Walten* always prevails in all *Schalten*. If only what is switchable can exist, then all *Schalten* requires a *Walten* which it itself generates.

Weimar, February 2020   *The Editors*