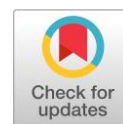


The silence of the educated

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents Wolfgang Schirmacher's philosophy of education. As a "living philosopher" Schirmacher's thought should be regarded as standing at a critical and engaged distance to official, consecrated philosophy. Thus, Schirmacher's *living* philosophy is conceived as explicable both through scholarly essays as well as other kinds of academic *praxis*. Particularly relevant is his founding and then directing the programme in Media Philosophy at the European Graduate School (EGS). At the core of philosophy there is a lacuna, a certain silence: The present text contextualises elements of Schirmacher's relation to the thought of Martin Heidegger as a necessary, productive silence and regards it as constitutive of any relation between master and student. Crucially, this essay seeks to ascertain how the philosophy programme at EGS can be perceived as a product of Schirmacher's philosophy. Analogous to the way the truths of a living philosophy can never be separated from the life – the form – of the philosopher, so the philosophy programme at EGS sought to integrate the form of each course with its critical content: Schirmacher's philosophy programme emphasised *bringing up* and *bringing forth* as much as the more traditional *transmission* of knowledges. Subsequently, this philosophy programme can be seen as a precise and logical outcome of Schirmacher's thought.



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1. Introduction

"Hello, I am Wolfgang Schirmacher. I am a living philosopher."¹

This is how Wolfgang Schirmacher, professor and founder of the Media Philosophy division at the European Graduate School (EGS), presents himself ([Ereignis Center for Philosophy and the Arts, 2018](#)). This essay sets out to outline Schirmacher's philosophy of education. While Schirmacher's explicit writing on education is sparse, his position as educator and educational entrepreneur is colossal. After teaching in Hamburg and New York, Schirmacher founded and ran the renowned philosophy programme at EGS for 20 years, attracting scholars such as Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida ([2019b](#)).

¹ The author wishes to thank the editors and reviewers, as well as Wolfgang Schirmacher, for their generous effort at clarifying and preparing this essay. The author accepts sole responsibility for any infelicities.

Crucially, then, his educational philosophy is sedimented in Schirmacher's actual teaching practice over the entirety of his career. However, in a key retrospective text, "EGS as urban university" (2012b), Schirmacher goes into significant detail with regard to the core elements that made possible his transition from relatively "ordinary" philosophy professor in New York to educational entrepreneur and founder of a programme that stands out as a singular not-for-profit educational enterprise, situated on the intersection of the public and private sectors, and operative on several campuses in Europe.

In so far as EGS is the outcome of a meeting between an organisational opportunity and a distinct philosophy it can be seen partly as an effect of Schirmacher's thought, and partly as a specific intervention into the educational establishment as it appeared at the end of the previous millennium.² The contention here is that Schirmacher did not simply set out to establish yet another alternative in higher education, but that his philosophy predisposed an educational organisation that would run counter to key trends of our time: Higher education as an embodiment of an "audit culture", where monitoring and control through metrics is the predominant form of power; a university governance characterised by top-down managerialism; and an increasing commodification and marketisation of a higher education that emphasises vocational training and employability.³ However, while these counterpoints are component parts of a portfolio of critiques against a neo-liberal university, Schirmacher's educational philosophy implicitly rejects all universalising narratives, including those who call for a revolutionary overhaul of education.

In this essay we therefore set out to (1) unearth and situate Wolfgang Schirmacher's living philosophy; (2) distinguish how Schirmacher relates to a key source, the thought of Martin Heidegger, and how it shaped his philosophy; and (3) how Schirmacher, in the written corpus and in his educational praxis refers to and explains his educational and – to a certain extent – pedagogical approach. In a word, what is required of us as we encounter the philosophy of Schirmacher is that we make an effort to slow down, take a deep breath, and clear our minds; that we allow for a moment of silence. What we should expect to meet is a sense of education that cuts across our sedimented beliefs and assumptions about higher education, and the way this sense is communicated cannot be wholly separated from the message itself.

2. Living philosophy

What do we mean by the term *living philosophy*? Let us take the cue here from Alain Badiou's notion that the history of philosophy is divided between official, academic philosophy – with a beginning in Plato's Academy –, and a more unofficial, *living* philosophy, performed and maintained outside the university system (Badiou, 2011, p. 68ff). While official philosophy – Plato, Descartes, Hegel, say – seeks to constitute itself as theory, their critics – Nietzsche (against Plato), Pascal (against Descartes), Kierkegaard (against Hegel) – remain present in their own statements; theirs are philosophies that can never stand outside their own truths, and as such they are inextricably entangled with their own time.

The teachings of non-consecrated philosophers are as much enabled by their philosophical acts as by their writing. Badiou notes that this holds as much for Pascal's "joy, joy, tears of joy", as it does for Kierkegaard's "I have nothing but my life, and I am happy to put it at risk whenever a difficulty arises". The key here is that with these non-consecrated philosophers thought takes the appearance of an event or act, and, while the singularity their thought cannot be disregarded, what they share is an approach to philosophy that lives up to the notion of a *theatre of ideas*. A *living philosophy*, then, refers to a philosophical *act* that does not set itself up as pure theory, but that can only be constituted as part of the philosopher's life; her or his lessons lie as much in the way a life is given philosophical expression, as if on a stage, as in the abstract theses of an academic essay.

² EGS's division of Media Philosophy was established in 1998.

³ For a current presentation of the troubled state of higher education today, see e.g. Ash Sharma's "Forget decolonising the university, abolish it!" A blog-post of the presentation is available at <https://tabularasa0.wordpress.com/2022/07/15/forget-decolonising-the-university-abolish-it/>.

In the case of living philosophy, we should be particularly receptive to relations between written corpus, on the one hand, and actual teaching and professional practice, on the other. Thus, to those who seek to assemble an overview of Schirmacher's philosophy, at least those who embark on such a task with any aspiration of completeness in their representation of Schirmacher's thought, are facing a daunting task. However, the mountain the seeker will have to climb is in this case of a somewhat different character than those other bibliographers and moderators may find. In Schirmacher's case, it isn't that we are confronted with an overwhelming number of published texts that has to be catalogued and represented in some appropriate form, but, rather, that there is a relatively small selection of texts, but that these texts are variously referenced, mentioned, remembered, or alluded to in a wide array of settings.

When bibliographers set out to establish an authoritative rendering of an *oeuvre*, any quest to find an *original* or *complete* variant of a specific text is made more complicated by the sheer multiplicity – we might even call it opacity – of referencing by Schirmacher and others to his texts. Take, for instance, the relatively recent title, *Just Living*. A web search for Schirmacher and this title returns the following result:

Dr. Schirmacher is Editor of *Schopenhauer-Studien*, and *New York Studies in Media Philosophy*, and author of *Technik und Gelassenheit*; *Ereignis Technik*; and *Just Living: Philosophy of Artificial Life*.

The former two volumes are accessible enough: *Technik und Gelassenheit* was Schirmacher's doctoral dissertation with the University of Hamburg, published in 1983, and *Ereignis Technik* a later, expanded, and revised variant of it, published on Passagen Verlag in 1990. But what about *Just Living*, the only English-language volume mentioned in this brief author biography? A search on WorldCat.org returns many references to the title, but none of them with Schirmacher as author. So, does this work exist?

We dig a bit further to discover that *Just Living* is indeed referred to in an article published in *The Psychoanalytic Review* from 2007. Incidentally, in article there is a declaration that it is a reprint of a text that was previously published in *Poeisis* in 2001. *Poeisis* is a hybrid journal-magazine that is published in Canada by people associated with EGS. So, is it in the article from 2001 that we first find mention of *Just Living*?

A few more inquiries, including on e-mail, to the administrators of *Poeisis* – a journal that is neither indexed, catalogued, nor archived anywhere – reveal that Schirmacher has mentioned *Just Living* on at least three occasions in that journal: In addition to the entry from 2001, there are also articles published in 2012 and 2013 that mention *Just Living* in Schirmacher's author biography. However, while it *does* seem as if the article from 2001 holds the first mention of *Just Living*, none of these instances provide any more clues regarding the place or date of publication. Or do they?

A note in our initial find in *Psychoanalytic Review* indicates that *Just Living* is a book-length study published as *Just Living: Philosophy of Artificial Life* on Atropos Press in 2007, the same year as the reprint in *Psychoanalytic Review*. Atropos Press is Schirmacher's own publishing venture, closely associated with EGS. Did he publish *Just Living* himself that year?

Again, searches in library catalogues and webpages return no relevant results. We continue to widen our search, and finally we find what appears to be the text of a PhD dissertation by William Smith, *Becoming Doll*, where *Just Living* is referenced:

Schirmacher, Wolfgang. *Technoculture and Life Technique*. *Just Living*. Philosophy in Artificial Life. New York, Dresden: Atropos Press, 2011. Print.

Apparently, Smith has read some later edition of the same title, published, again, on Schirmacher's own press. Should we not expect, then, that turning to Atropos Press's own webpage will return publication details for *Just Living*? Alas, while more than one hundred titles are available from Atropos, none of them carry the title *Just Living*. A wide web-search into historical versions of Atropos's webpage likewise returns no result.

It seems reasonable, taking the EGS faculty roster into account, that Schirmacher wrote or planned to write *Just Living* as a response to Jean-François Lyotard's famous *Just Gaming*, published in 1985. Lyotard, a friend and key supporter of Schirmacher's philosophy project with

EGS in the late 1990s, passed away in 1998, just as the philosophy programme was about to launch.⁴

In conversation and on e-mail Schirmacher remains reticent about the manuscript. Not referencing the title directly, he does concede that he has “planned” to write a book “for his son”, but that the manuscript isn’t yet complete (personal communication, cf. [Schirmacher 2018](#), [2021](#)). Could this be the manuscript for *Just Living*?

We don’t know.

3. Silence and education

At the core of our culture there is a silence, a wordlessness that Sigmund Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, referred to as a founding element of culture (1913). In this book, Freud sought to reach beyond the myth of Oedipus to demonstrate that what he called the Oedipus complex is a common, cross-cultural experience that we later repress. To Freud’s student Jacques Lacan it was precisely this initial – Oedipal – cut that served to constitute of our ushering into language and speech: hidden in our symbolic constitution lies a rupture, and this break – this elementary overthrow of positions and perspectives – can never be fully recovered or recuperated; it must remain, in some essential sense, covered over, or *repressed*.

To supplement the necessary silence at the core of our symbolising being, is there not also a kind of speech that can serve to cover over repressed content? As much as speech can reveal and shed light on objects, it seems that it can also be used to shroud unpleasant or unwanted thoughts, it can organise the podium for speech, allow or disallow speakers from speaking, and it can “talk down” repressed content. Speech and silence reappear as two entities that are not mutually exclusive: Silence can be telling as much as speech can be vacuous. To put things differently, it is possible for us to cover many things in speech, and to speak fluently, consistently, and ardently about them, without ever naming the core of our concern: speech can be deceptive. It can hide and repress as much as it reveals.

For this reason, when we approach Schirmacher’s theory of knowledge there is no escaping that at the centre of it lies a crucial elision, and this lacuna has a name: Martin Heidegger. For sure, the twentieth century master of German philosophy is credited at many points in Schirmacher’s writing, so much so that in an interview Schirmacher readily admits that his philosophy was never supposed to challenge that of Heidegger; rather it was of question of carrying on: “I begin where Heidegger ended” (2018; cf. [Dahlstrom, 1985](#)). Thus, while the relation between the parent and the child can be characterised as one of authority, typified by its allocation of power to decide who is to speak and who is to remain silent, it is also a necessary act of repression on the side of those who enter into the symbolic order: with Freud and Lacan we can say that we are symbolic operatives in so far as we uphold the worldlessness of this, our common ground. These are silences that are laid upon us, as commandments on the side of authority, and voluntarily entered into, as if through a contractual obligation on the side of the symbolic entrant.

Further, there is in education also a silence that surrounds the relation between the master and the learner, and this kind of effability of the instruction distinguishes this relation and grants it a degree of autonomy from its environment. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu noted in his “Program for a sociology of sport” (1988) that there is a silent, mimetic character to the communication between master and student, and this silent body-to-body communication entails the possibility of a kind of awakening of the body: the body understands, “outside conscious awareness, without being able to put our understanding into words” (p. 161). In *this* sense education isn’t so much about a set of verbalised instructions, a catalogue of descriptions or knowledges, but instead a kind of pantomime; education isn’t so much a telling as it is a showing. This means that for us to understand masters whose instructions are grounded in a mimetic, silent relation to learners it cannot suffice to look at their written statements, their explicit pedagogy. And where can we find a better expression of this kind of inexplicable *aura* of the teacher-student relation than in Saas-Fee, the hold-out of the EGS.

⁴ There is today a plaque commemorating Lyotard at EGS’s campus in Saas-Fee, Switzerland.

Finally, beyond the instructional thesis of the master, his authoritative command for silence, and the shared, wordless relation between master and student lies silence as a value in itself. As Jacek Surzyn notes, for Martin Heidegger – whose thought certainly served as a key antecedent to Schirmacher’s own – there was a third term lodged between speech – or talking – and silence, and that is *saying*: “Heidegger defines saying as the boundary between [talking] and keeping silent. Being is disclosed between sound and silence” (2021, p. 6). *Saying* would later become a key notion in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas (1969): it is *saying* that divides talking and chatter from silence and the force of the given. Saying, in other words, holds within itself the possibility of speaking truth, and the shared silence between master and learner that envelops this kind of saying serves to shield this ineffable truth from environments characterised by talking and un-truth.

In this particular sense, to be silent is also to *rest* from speaking. Whereas the traditional seminar is founded upon a subject that speaks – to speak is to impart knowledge, to declare one’s participation in the rule-bound game of education, which includes allow one’s speech to be tested as samples of transmitted knowledge – the EGS, with its emphasis on the arts, created an opening to an educational subject that was not invalidated by its silence.⁵ This element of rest was for Martin Heidegger the moment when art speaks, and when art speaks the truth. The task of the artwork, in a word, is to bring truth into presence and, as such, art presents us with a way to approach truth and knowledge that has a non-necessary relation to words and speech (2008). As a form of silent, restful observance of truth art offers an *inoperative* approach to knowledge. Giorgio Agamben, another EGS professor, notes that for Philo of Alexandria inoperativity was not equivalent to inertia or inactivity, but more like an “energy completely free from labour ... and with the most perfect ease” (2011, p. 250). In other words, what we have is art as a form of silent prayer, and as a space in which praising and glorification can take place (p. 242).

To see again the things as they are in themselves; to allow beings to be present to us in their own mystery; to reach for the generative ground of being, the Being of being: these are among the tasks Heidegger gave to *meditative* or *poetic* thinking (Young, 2002, p. 20-22). Here in the words of the poet Tor Ulven:

The drops of
Iced water
You catch with your mouth

Fell
Thousands of years ago

And ceased
Dripping
Thousands of years ago

They keep on falling

The end of
The series

Has not yet
Reached you. (1987, XVIII)

⁵ Originally founded by Paolo Knill as a programme in Expressive Arts Therapy in 1994, EGS sought to explore “the ways in which a strong engagement with the arts can serve individual and societal well being, and have a transformative function in socio-political and ecological contexts” (2021a). When Wolfgang Schirmacher was invited to open a division in Media Philosophy in 1998 it was a clear understanding that this programme “was created to be an academic institution that would function beyond the many constraints of traditional disciplinary structure ... For the EGS, education remains a process that is both experimental and transformative” (2019a).

There is a light that arrives at our eyes; this light was emitted from a distant star billions of light years ago. By now, that world is long gone. The light we receive from that star is like a drop of iced water falling into an enormous ocean; soon it will become indistinguishable from its inexhaustible surroundings. This is the perspective Heidegger, and Ulven, takes on knowledge and learning.

Let us be clear from the outset on the reality of Heidegger today. A rising star on the philosophical firmament, he was appointed Rector of the University of Freiburg by Hitler's Nazi party in April 1933. Ten days later he joined the party, a membership he never rescinded. While his extreme right-wing views have been undisputed at least from the early 1930s, with the publication of his personal notebooks, *Die Schwarze Hefte*, in 2014 Heidegger's antisemitic sentiments are also thoroughly documented. What some find particularly disturbing is that he never expressed any regrets about the atrocities of the party he had joined in 1933. How should we interpret his silence concerning some of the greatest crimes of the twentieth century, the Shoah, the political and racial purges, and the war of aggression initiated by the party he had joined, supported, and never left.

When Heidegger looked back on his Nazi period, the most he managed to express in terms of doubt was that his political engagement was "the greatest stupidity of [his] life" ("die größte Dummheit [seines] Lebens", Ringguth, 1986). In other words, it is possible to interpret Heidegger's retrospective view of his own acts as having preferred not a different course of action, or to have supported a more palatable political perspective, but, rather, to have maintained his vicious and murderous standpoint, but to *remain silent* about it. The older Heidegger, looking back at his younger self, would have given but one advise: keep the faith in your chosen path and do not deviate from it, but by all means *don't tell anyone* what it is you support.

The horrors of the Shoah, the millions of Poles, disabled people, homosexuals, and political opponents who perished under the heel of the German National Socialist party in the 1930s and 40s: can anything sensible be made out of it? When Marice Blanchot, writing in the impenetrable darkness that emanated from the Shoah, abandoned the academic essay as a form that could render the world knowable, visible, governable, was it not because the essay had become radically compromised, indeed complicit, in the very horrors Blanchot wanted to expel (1986)? Beneath our feet, the very ground we stand on, our most cherished cornerstone of academic reason... Aristotelian logic, can we any longer trust it with its completeness, totality, non-contradiction?

Paul de Man, another academic undermined by his activist past, rendered the logic of visibility beyond question: When Plato saw, he knew; when the inhabitants of the dark cave saw, they knew; when we see, we know (1983). To be blind is to be unknowing; to behold in vision is to know. But how could this fanatical ethic of visibility become so blind to itself? When Paul de Man, or Martin Heidegger, refused to, or were unable to, recognise their complicity in the horrors unleashed by their generation, how can we any longer rely on their most profound insights?

Young people – your students? – will look at you in puzzlement. Who is this Heidegger? What could he have done to stir up such emotions? And it's true: Heidegger will soon be forgotten, like the rest of us. However, as much as silence can shield and protect, open up and give occasion to rest, it can also serve to hide and cover over. In so far as Heidegger – his thought and the *aura* of his personality – carries the name of the lacunae in Schirmacher's philosophy of education, we have reason to suspect that this silence is borne not out of contingent aspirations for ontological or epistemological openings, but out of necessity. The controversy of Heidegger is even more heightened today than when he was banned from university teaching after World War II, a ban Heidegger responded to with "extreme anger" (Schirmacher, 2012b, p. 198).

Do we not have here the archetypical example of the extent to which silence can be repressive, and of how it can be used as a technology to hide from view truths that are too dangerous to bring out into the open? After Heidegger we find roughly three responses: first, there is the initial anti-Heidegger wave of critics who, indeed, held that his ethical contradictions are so overwhelming that we cannot continue to regard Heidegger as an important philosopher on the twentieth century. The most prominent of these "truthsayers" is Víctor Fariás, a Chilean historian, who concluded that Nazism was not some contingent feature of Heidegger's life, but that it was a deeply embedded and indeed a founding element of his philosophy (1987). A similar conclusion, that Heidegger's thought was deeply flawed, and that his misguided political acts were merely symptoms of a more profound error in his philosophy, was supported by, among others, Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Pierre Bourdieu, and Maurice Blanchot.

A second, more affirmative response to Heidegger's philosophy – tabled by writers such as Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, and Catherine Malabou – hold that Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi movement was contingent to his philosophy, and that it, in some ways, can be distinguished from his thought. One way to understand this critical response to the initial rejection of Heidegger *tout court* is by way of the burgeoning rejection of determinism in political theory from the 1970s onwards. Determinism, the idea that ideology or the actions of the State are wholly or “in the last instance” (1971) dictated by a “material base”, became untenable among other things because culture increasingly came to be seen as having a materiality of its own, and because of the impossibility – within this framework – to grasp how cultural acts may effect change. Beginning with writers such as Antonio Gramsci, Ferdinand de Saussure, and, later, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, it became necessary to allow for a degree of “relative autonomy” to cultural and political acts. In other words, the relation between thought and politics could no longer be one of determination, but of dominance, and, as a consequence, one could no longer exclude the possibility that one may find contradictory or subversive thoughts even in the most reactionary of political positions. In other words, for someone like Slavoj Žižek it became not only possible but necessary to read Heidegger not *despite of* his misguided political opinions but *because of* them: the matter at stake was no longer to reject Heidegger's thought as carrying the seeds of an erroneous politics, but to find in it elements that contradict or undermine the very political positions Heidegger explicitly sought to bolster. What we have is a situation where we are forced to concede that “no matter how we hate him politically, unfortunately Heidegger is the real thing. He is one of the great philosophers”.⁶

The question nevertheless remains: are we not, even as we “critically engage” Heidegger's legacy, in a crucial sense in thrall to his mysterious contradiction, what Walter Benjamin referred to as the *aura* of the personality?⁷ It seems that what is required of us is neither to reject nor critically affirm Heidegger *per se*, but to somehow move beyond the moment that made Heidegger's thought possible. Such a transcending move, while inclusive of his thought in both critical and affirmative ways, would essentially regard Heidegger's positions, as well as those positions that made Heidegger possible, as moments of the past. It is this third, transcending stance that defines Schirmacher's relation to Heidegger. From his early work, such as *Ereignis Technik*, Schirmacher points to three major progenitors: Spinoza, Hegel, and Heidegger. In all cases, what we have is not a philosophy *alla* Spinoza, or a kind of Spinozism, but a philosophy that emerges *after* Spinoza, and ditto with Hegel and Heidegger. We should regard his philosophy as an act of care, and as an attempt to honour that which is worth honouring in the boldness of an attempt to think against the moment that generated the lifeworld of Heidegger.

4. Schirmacher's education

When we think in a structured way about education today, we'd be hard pressed not to notice how this area of human endeavour has been rapidly framed by mechanisation and other kinds of technological interventions. Partly this development is due to a general societal trend: as we become more complex and inclusive in our organisation, a certain demand for predictability, enunciated as formal standardisation, sets in. This tendency is present everywhere in contemporary life, from the way consumer products are manufactured and circulated to state governance. However, what sets education apart in this respect is that there used to be, at the beginning of Western knowledge, an ideal by which *to know* crucially and essentially meant *to know oneself*, and connected to this idea was the sense that the *path* to such self-knowledge was incongruous and fraught with danger. This path was singular to us, and it could not, essentially, be standardised.

⁶ Žižek, 2017, at 1:09:40. See also, e.g., the entry by Arne Næss in Britannica.com, where Heidegger is pronounced as having “determined the course of 20th-century philosophy on the European continent and exerted an enormous influence on virtually every other humanistic discipline, including literary criticism, hermeneutics, psychology, and theology” (2019).

⁷ In *Illuminations* Benjamin refers to the “aura of the storyteller” (p. 109) as a “cluster around the object of preception” (p. 186).

For this reason, even a cursory look at the etymology of *education* reveals that there is a two-fold sense to this word: While the dictionary will have us believe that education primarily refers to the “act or process of acquiring or imparting knowledge, or this knowledge or training itself” (Collins, 2022), the Latin *educare* meant to “bring up, rear, or educate” children, also in the sense of “bringing out” something hidden or not yet apparent (Harper, 2022). While a modernist, more mechanical view on children and education would have it that ours is a pool of discreet and, in their totality, complete knowledges that educators impart to learners, so that, on the completion of their education, learners will know or master these given truths or skills, this is a perspective both on learning and on learners that is becoming less relevant. In the face of it, contemporary national curricula and text-books on education praise the independent learner.⁸ However, our contemporary tendency to standardise doesn’t stop at the level of the learner, because the questions that are asked of education include, crucially “How do we know what this learner knows when we are considering hiring her or him?”, “How do we know whether we are spending tax-money at the highest efficiency in the education sector?”, and “How do I, as a student, know that I am spending my time and resources on education as cost-effectively as possible, when what I want is to get a good job with a top salary when I graduate?”

Our contention here is that in the living philosophy of Wolfgang Schirmacher we find profound questions and compelling solutions both regarding knowledge and education as a form of training and practice. The success of the philosophy programme at EGS, operated wholly outside established state and private-sector educational institutions, was due in large part to Schirmacher’s ability to attract international top scholars. The prominence of these teachers has led EGS in a recent document to warn that

Certain faculty are so celebrated that students begin to look to this fame as the primary offering of the institution. But in fact, there is a cross-disciplinary curriculum in place that is designed to complement the special contributions of individual faculty (2019a).

What is clear is that the recent spate of technical-legal documents emanating from EGS after the retirement of Schirmacher to a large extent is due to the increased demands made on institutions in connection with EU accreditation (2021b). In other words, what we have is a standardisation and technological enframement of EGS that is due to forces outside the immediate command of the institutions itself.

Pedagogy, as a discipline or as part of a teacher training programme, always seeks to situate itself on the side of practice. The word refers simply to teaching – or *education* – and as a university subject it deals centrally with *how* to teach, sometimes to the expense of *what* to teach. As such, pedagogues tend to see themselves as service providers. It is the academic historians, mathematicians, physicists, etc., that hold the *what* of knowledge. The pedagogues, the teachers, are experts on *how* to mediate it.

Already at this very basic distinction Schirmacher takes an oppositional view. In his key essay on education from 2012, “The school of philosophy: EGS as urban university”, Schirmacher underlined the claim that theory and practice cannot be meaningfully separated in education:

To separate theory and practice always seemed to me to be the greatest folly of adults ...; my contribution to successful existence is to discover techniques for living before (any) theory and practice in order then to forget those techniques so that they do not become instrumentalized (2012b; emphasis added).

Crucially, then, in Schirmacher there cannot be a clear distinction between *what* and *how* we teach. However, Schirmacher’s chief interest in this text is the organisation of EGS from its inception as a dedicated Arts Therapy programme, with emphasis on Schirmacher’s involvement as the philosophy division of EGS got under way from the late 1990s.

⁸ See, e.g., the national curriculum in Norway, introduced in 2020, where “learning how to learn” is introduced as a new, higher-order goal for all learners: Schools are partly responsible for ensuring that “learners reflect on their own learning, understand their own processes of learning, and acquire knowledge independently” (2020).

What we find – unsurprisingly – is a great emphasis on the practical details of founding an educational programme: We hear of conference meetings between Schirmacher and Paolo Knill, the founder of the initial EGS Arts Therapy programme, of later invitations and speeches while Schirmacher was a professor with the New School in New York, and so on. When Schirmacher's attempt to launch a school for media philosophy in Luxemburg collapsed, Knill invited him to launch the programme under EGS's auspices in the Wallis canton in Switzerland, where Knill had already begun teaching. Schirmacher brought his contacts from New York and experience from the attempt in Luxemburg, so that from 1998 EGS had two active divisions: Arts Therapy and Media Philosophy.

Analogous to the way a *living philosophy* can never stand outside its own truths, so the philosophy programme at EGS was set up in such a way that the way it was taught and administered was integral to the sense of its teaching: Rather than a standardised, template-based format for modules, Schirmacher's EGS allowed each professor great leeway in the design, execution, and assessment of courses. In some cases, this meant that students might receive little or no information on course content prior to the opening of the semester; seminars could be run in its entirety as readings of a professor's manuscript, with little or no discussion; and in many cases there would be no requirements on the side of students that would allow professors to assess student learning. For students who have grown accustomed to the virtues of student involvement, active learning, and clear, contract-type relations between students, instructors and institutions, such contingencies would verge on the intolerable: How should students prepare for class? What was expected of students during the course? How would students be assessed? The lack of clear answers to these questions led to that the non-bureaucratic style cultivated under Schirmacher had to be abandoned in favour of a more accreditation-friendly system.

Nevertheless, the less bureaucratic-oriented approach favoured under Schirmacher, while unfamiliar to many, had some clear advantages: professors were trusted to use their professional judgement in formulating and administering syllabi, which in some cases included making profound changes to it as the course progressed; responding to student requests and engaging in dialogue, often outside the traditional seminar-room, was made easier when a rigorous demand by a pre-set syllabus was no longer the over-arching authority; and, despite what some purportedly learner-oriented pedagogies may tell us, a professorial speech can be interesting and dialogic, even when students are not at all times compelled to be physically "activated"; they are worth listening to because of their knowledge and experience, and their discourse can be *more* rewarding than any schematic pre-ordained *faux* dialogue between young, inexperienced graduate students and a tenured professor who is forced, through some bureaucratic measure, to respond.

What about assessment? In Schirmacher's own modules there were always a clear demand that students be active, including a requirement to write a final essay that would be marked and given detailed response. However, many professors during his tenure as programme director at EGS would give only perfunctory attention to student assessment. Without clear assessment criteria students would wonder how they were expected to act, and some would express frustration with what they saw as a diminished return from their student fee: they had expected clear instruction from their professor as part of the service they had paid upon registration. It could be argued that by not responding to this kind of levelling down of higher education – the reduction of graduate provision to the type of service one would expect at a gas station or at the hair-dresser – EGS was in actuality upholding its duty to educate; refusing to respond is in itself a response. Conversely it could be argued that the ongoing pressures to streamline higher education precisely is a force to reduce and level down provision to the point where economic and legal contracts become the norm and standard in every societal practice. In order to stand up against this flattening of education it is required that we question the division between formal standardisation and the actual teaching content; that we insist that the formal frame and actual teaching content of education are integrated in much the same way as a living philosophy can never stand outside its own truths. Under Schirmacher, what was

taught was imparted as much by the course content as by the form in which the content was embedded, and this form was never given in advance.⁹

In so far as the technological pressure – in our case associated specifically with accreditation and standardisation – operationalises a sense of education in which the chief task of a school is to transmit a series of knowledges, skills, or competencies, what is in danger of being elided is a sense of education as *bringing up* or *bringing forth*; in this latter sense, the means-ends relations that we associate with educational *metrics* is not so easily computed: how can we know in advance what shall be brought forth, by and to whom; and how can the effects – outcomes – of such events be quantified so as to be compared and tabulated? The answer is, of course, that, due to these difficulties, an education that emphasises such events stands at risk of being marginalised and, under duress, given to abandon its singularity.

5. Schirmacher's beyond

What we find under Schirmacher is a radical questioning of knowledge itself, and this questioning acquired a special power in confrontation with metrics-oriented educational technologies, such as we find in institutional assessment processes. In so far as educational standardisation require that we operate with a clearly defined catalogue of what counts as knowledges, and rigorous sets of criteria to assess whether these knowledges have been acquired, what qualifies or counts as knowledge crucially determines the educational content. In Schirmacher we find a very different approach to what it means to know, what we can know, how we know, and what counts as truth, i.e. there is a different questioning of the relation between truth and knowledge.

Schirmacher's theory of knowledge is grounded in phenomenology, or what Anglo-American philosophers often refer to as the "continental" tradition. Already in *Ereignis Technik* he set out to distinguish his approach to technology from a perspective characterised by what he would call an *instrumental prejudice* (2021; cf. 1990, ch. 3). These two approaches are associated with two sets of elementary practices: the instrumentalist technologies of war are contrasted with more Socratic oriented techniques of truth. In what follows we will give a brief introduction to this philosophy of knowledge and technology.

The instrumental prejudice reduces technologies to tools: technologies are instruments to achieve some goal; they are means to an end. At its core this perspective takes technologies as expressions of crafts: we can learn to build a car, a computer, or a computer programme, and the craft behind this building can be taught and learned much like the craft of the welder, carpenter, or blacksmith. There are two problems with such a craft-oriented, instrumental approach to technology: it bolsters a division between theory and practice, privileging the latter on the expense of the former, and it essentially undermines our own existence through its own successes. Let's look at these problems in turn.

First, we find a division between *techne*, or craft, and *episteme*, or knowledge, from the very beginning of Western philosophy. In Aristotle the distinction was meant to convey a difference between theory (*episteme*) and its application (*techne*) (Aristotle, 1934, 1139b15). However, while Aristotle held that there is a knowledge to every craft – that there exists an account of every craft that is grounded in knowledge – in our time the distinction between the two has become increasingly rigorous and solidified. With the rise of the sciences as epitomes of knowledge from the nineteenth century, experience and experiments have become the benchmarks of truth. While in scholastic societies theory and scripture was directive of real-world experiences, what we find today is increasingly that the practices of experience and experiments are regarded as more truthful and real than theoretical, desktop philosophy. What is missing, then, is an account of technology that includes thinking as much as doing, *episteme* as much as craft.

Second, when thinking is reduced to problem-solving, and technology to means that are more or less appropriate to fulfil some already-defined goal, what we have is a thought that fails to include

⁹ To be clear, in his own courses Schirmacher tended to provide detailed feedback, or assessment, on each student's effort; however, as administrator he would leave the question of student assessment up to the professor.

its own goals and its own means-ends relations in the equation. Technology has brought us cars, logistics, and advanced chemistry, but it has also ushered us into climate devastation, consumerism, and gas chambers. It is as if, to put it in Schirmacher's terms, the more technologically skilled we are – the better our technologies become –, the more death technology brings us: technology, or, more precisely, the instrumental prejudice of technology, causes us to deny our own world: they are technologies of war.¹⁰

Against this view, Schirmacher holds what he calls technologies of truth. The notion of truth here is grounded in the Socratic philosophical practice: truth emerges in a dialogue where no one participant holds the sole power to decide the purpose of the dialogue or the means by which such a purpose is achieved. Essentially, what Schirmacher calls for are “thick” phenomenological accounts of technologies as events (Geertz, 2020). Schirmacher ultimately holds out technology as a cosmic relation manifest in our lived experience (2021). Technology is something we live by and through, it is something that happens; it lies at the core of our relation to cosmos, and in our instrumental prejudice, we are blind to it.

And yet, despite of these oppositional stances vis-a-vis the trajectory of official education, Schirmacher's philosophy cannot be regarded, *strictu sensu*, as a revolutionary alternative. Crucially, the influence of Jean-François Lyotard, known for his formulation of the basic tenets of postmodernism, features prominently, particularly from the early 1990s.¹¹ In Lyotard's view the rôle of education is to seek and re-present “what is unrepresentable in the present”.¹² Can we not perceive Schirmacher's tenure at EGS as precisely an attempt to facilitate Lyotard's vision, including his gentle critique of cases where a contrarian – revolutionary – logic has shown itself as captive of modernism? In this respect, a further understanding of Schirmacher's philosophy should be directed in dialogue with the work of figures such as Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, as well as Lyotard and Heidegger, so as to uncover the paths that made possible what became the key concept of his later works: Homo Generator.

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¹⁰ Note that the target of Schirmacher's critique was what we today tend to refer to as techno-utopianism. See, e.g., Lovink and Rossiter, 2018.

¹¹ Schirmacher was deeply involved in the philosophical labour of Lyotard in the 1990s. In 1991 Lyotard lectured at the New School in New York at Schirmacher's invitation, and they went on to collaborate on several projects that led up to the foundation of the philosophy programme at EGS. Lyotard would have taught there, had he not passed away in 1998, the year before the first philosophy session at Saas-Fee (2012a).

¹² With Lyotard we could say that postmodern education is devoted to “present the fact that the unrepresentable exists [...] to make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 79; cf. Gratton, 2018).

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