



"SCHALTEN UND WALTEN"
Towards Operative Ontologies

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Assessing our situation, we cannot ignore the fact that whatever is given in our environment is done so by technical operations and not in the ways natural things exist, by *physis*, i.e. growing by themselves into being. Things like synthetic organisms do not reveal themselves by their own agency but are called into existence by technology. The ruling (*das 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 (*das Schalten*). This holds true more and more also for the natural and social things themselves, 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 things 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 (“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, any attempt to adequately describe the prevailing situation challenges exactly the paradoxical interrelation of the ontological and the ontic. The IKKM Biennial Conference 2019 is 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 twenty-first century is the electronic switching operation (*das Schalten*), the conference title 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, “Walten und Schalten” 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 — “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.

The conference will conclude the IKKM six-year research program ‘Operative Ontologies’ which 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 this pairing method, the IKKM invites contributors to present papers on ontologically relevant pairs of operations that may or may not explore one of the examples mentioned above or others – for instance folding and unfolding, or, in a recursive manner, the operations of pairing and cleaving themselves.

We would like to invite those interested in presenting a paper to hand in preparatory abstracts of 350 words by March 1st, 2019. Your final paper should not exceed 5000 words.

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