SciencesPo

Sciences Po Paris Graduate Conference in Political Theory
Paris, France, May 22nd and 23rd 2024

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE SELF:
TECHNOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND POWER IN LATE MODERNITY

With Shoshanna Zuboff

We are pleased to announce that the tenth Graduate Conference in Political Theory will take place at Sciences Po Paris on May 22nd and 23rd 2024. The topic chosen for this year is "Metamorphosis of the Self: Technology, Identity, And Power in Late Modernity."

In an era marked by climate change, technological revolutions, and political upheavals, thinking about the self may seem disconnected at first. When the planet is burning, when AI threatens to render obsolete the livelihood of many, and when we are witnessing important nationalist resurgences, focusing on the self may appear less urgent, if urgent at all.

Yet, and this is the bet that this conference makes, when one remembers that the self, the self-sufficient, "buffered" self (Taylor 2018), is also the distinctive modern phenomenon, one starts to see connections between these pressing issues and these more distant ones. For example, many authors have already paved the way to think about how consumerism is connected to a specific conception of the self (Baudrillard, 1970; Campbell, 1987). The same kinds of connections have been made recently between unrestrained narcissism and ethnic nationalism (Shoshat and Stam, 2007; Cichocka and Cislak, 2020), and between artificial intelligence and the manipulation of empathy (Turkle, 2011 and 2021).

The questions of the self – what it does, and what is done to it – are thus not remote: they stand at the intersections of urgent contemporary issues. Surveillance (Zuboff, 2018), quantification (Lupton, 2016), and exploitation (Burrell and Fourcade, 2021) are remodeled by the new complexity of a self that is more and more digitized and submitted to new technologies. Accelerated by the digital sphere, the reign of the abstract form of commodities (Marx, 1996), the alienated life within the spectacle (Debord, 1983) and the speed-up of capital turnovers (Harvey, 2016) raise numerous debates around subjectivity and fluidity within critical theories, opposing poststructuralist to materialist approaches.

Big Tech corporations and the technological change they often drive are an integral part of these transformations, and Shoshanna Zuboff pioneering work had provided notable lights in the course of the last decades to navigate our challenging times. From *In the Age of the Smart Machine* to *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, her scholarship has paved the way to understand what technology does to the self and to our politics. Strongly believing that the best political theory is also that which builds upon rigorous empirical analysis, Shoshanna Zuboff's participation to our conference will ensure that discussions remain grounded in the particularities of technological change and innovation.

The conference will address a range of critical questions, including how the proliferation of digital technologies has shaped the construction and expression of personal identity in the modern age. We welcome contributions that explore the implications of the digital self on political engagement, social activism, and the dynamics of power, including the potential for empowerment and vulnerability

within digital spaces. Other contributions that give specific insights into the intellectual history of the technological self, or the rearticulation of political theory under contemporary technological conditions will be appreciated as well. Key themes of the conference will include the impact of social media, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence on self-perception and self-presentation, as well as the potential for technology to amplify existing power imbalances or to facilitate subversive and emancipatory movements.

Even though this conference is under the umbrella of political theory, we welcome contributions from other areas of research as well. Possible topics, without being limited to this list, can include:

1. Technology and the self in the history of philosophy and political ideas.
2. The self and the social in the intermingled nexuses of alienation, domination, new technologies, and resistance.
3. Quantification, exposition, and uses of the self in the context of contemporary individualism.
4. The simulacra of the self: new artificial intelligences and new artificial agents in the political and social spheres.
5. The ethics and politics of technological change.

Authors are invited to submit proposals in the form of an abstract (400-500 words), a sample bibliography, and a brief biography (75-100 words). Submissions can be made in French or in English. They should be emailed in **two PDF files to Georges Mercier**, one containing **only the anonymous abstract** and **the other the short biography**. **The deadline for application is March 1st. Successful applicants will be notified by March 15th at the latest.**

The conference will be held in Paris, at Sciences Po, on May the 22nd and 23rd. Professor Emerita Shoshana Zuboff will be the main Guest and will deliver a lecture at 5 PM on the 22nd, before participating in a dinner with the other participants.

Travel grants will not be awarded, but lunch and dinner will be provided for both days of the conference.

Specific questions can be directed to the conference co-chairs:

Charles Corval : charles.corval@sciencespo.fr
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