

EDITOR'S LETTER

It was in a modest apartment in Fiesole which overlooks the city of Florence, nestled in the valley below that, in early June 2001, a few friends, a generation younger than Ivan Illich, were discussing, in his presence, what might constitute the key words to his thought. Unsurprisingly, he did not have much to say. But as the conversation proceeded, it became increasingly clear to us that a more sustained effort was needed to both see the building blocks and to uncover the foundations of his thought. It was in the context of that longer term project that I first heard the phrase 'Thinking after Illich' pronounced by Silja Samerski. She noted that the German *nach* has the same two senses that 'after' has in English. *Nach* not only means positional or temporal succession, as in B which comes after A or tomorrow which follows today. It also means to follow in the footsteps of, to mimic the style of, to think in the wake of.

The wake of a ship is formed when its hull cuts through the water. The turbulent waters that spread away from the ship in the shape of an inverted V circumscribe the calm waters of the wake. The concepts Illich forged are honed to razor-sharpness and anchored in enduring felt realities. They cut cleanly through the muddle of confused categories and are immune to faddish scientific abstractions. An example or two may suffice. Illich argues that 'transport' is as different from 'transit' as cars and trains are from pedestrians and cyclists. To think that private cars are categorically different from public buses is to imagine that a difference in the method of financing a technology alters its capacity

to disable humans. If 'work' entails expending effort in exchange for cash, then 'shadow work' is the term Illich coins to describe the unpaid effort needed to make paid commodities useful. In that sense, helping Johnny with his homework is not 'quality family time' but rather the shadow work imposed by education. Such concepts and many more remain to be fully grasped and to be better used to understand our times.

It is for this reason that *Conspiratio* is offered as a periodical for thinking after Ivan Illich. Illich saw so deeply into the present that he seemed to anticipate what became obvious only much later. Perhaps it is for this reason that the philosopher Giorgio Agamben recently suggested that the hour of Illich's legibility has only now arrived. And there is some warrant for this suggestion. A surge of interest in Illich's thought and work is increasingly evident. Podcasts on the contours of a convivial society, online courses on Illich's thought that attract a small but worldwide audience, new blogs and books engaging with his arguments and insights, new attention from scholars, and renewed interest from activists, all suggest a revival of Illich's ideas.

Conspiratio is a periodical, and a periodical is different from a scholarly journal or a popular magazine. It collects the fruits of what is grown in a 'garden of low studies,' a phrase proposed by Giorgio Agamben. *Conspiratio* is a vehicle for those who want to collaborate with each other in thinking after Illich. It is founded on the belief that arguments require the clarity and distance of the written word to be properly understood, even if it is the utterances of fleeting speech that can decisively change a heart. The name *Conspiratio* was previously used by the Mexican poet Javier Sicilia for a publication that is no longer in print. I asked his permission to reuse the name. Though we live in the time of conspiracy theories, fake news, and state and corporate propaganda, both Javier and I were inspired to choose the name by a line in Illich's

essay titled *The Cultivation of Conspiracy* — ‘...*the quest for truth cannot thrive outside the nourishment of mutual trust*.’

This inaugural issue leads with a series of essays on an issue of some moment — the pandemic. David Cayley’s piece was first published on his blog and then widely circulated and translated into many languages. He discusses the pandemic from Illich’s point of view. Two interlocutors — Wolfgang Palaver is an academic theologian and Jean-Pierre Dupuy is an academic philosopher — explicitly weigh in on the possible misappropriation of Illich’s thought. Cayley’s unanswered reply rounds out the series. The question concerning ‘Life’ is at the center of these essays and the reader can decide which of them offers a better understanding of Illich’s insights into this vexatious question.

On Reading Ivan Illich is the theme for this inaugural issue and informs the choice of the articles. The first two articles have almost the same title but are widely separated by time and perspective. The first was written about twenty years ago by Lee Hoinacki, a close friend, to explain Illich’s thought to new readers. The second is an edited chapter from the forthcoming dissertation by Neto Leao who defends how he, new to Illich, reads him. William Arney was kind enough to permit the republication of a chapter he wrote some years ago on reading Illich. His essay insists on the inseparability, for Illich, between the love of truth and the love of others. It is this idea that is amplified over the last two articles. Jean Robert’s searing essay on the necessity to ‘read’ the strangeness of what is taken-for-granted exposes the unnerving aspect of the love of truth. Samar Farage’s tender memory of reading Calvino with Illich affirms the solace found when the search for truth is grounded by the trust in others.

The reviews section focuses on a controversial recent documentary — *The Planet of the Humans* by Jeff Gibbs— and tangentially on the book — *Green Illusions* by Ozzie

Zehner— that informed it. The documentary became the object of a censorship campaign by well-known environmentalists including Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, and Josh Fox. The film and the book argue that ‘greening the economy’ to solve the problem of climate change only renews the very industrial project that creates the environmental crisis. The question the green critics of the film avoid is why they think and act within the confines defined by techno-science and economics.

The section on translations contains a lightly edited translation from Spanish of a short essay co-authored by Valentina Borremans and Ivan Illich. It appears here for the first time in English and explores ‘the need for a common roof’ to beautiful and habitable social forms. The authors argue that technologies — whether money or machines — should be subjected to maximums, to ceilings, to limits. It is not a minimum wage or a minimum caloric input that should be guaranteed by public policy but rather a ceiling on income and consumption that must find community agreement. The language is dated and yet strikes a few notes of surprising contemporariness. The notion of limits — the need for a common roof —in its various applications is the theme of the third volume of *Conspiratio*.

David Cayley’s new book is titled *Ivan Illich: An intellectual journey*. Reader responses to it is the theme of the upcoming second volume. Recalling that the periodical is an occasion to collaborate in thinking after Ivan Illich, all are invited to submit articles, essays, book reviews, and translations to these forthcoming volumes of *Conspiratio*.