Theology & Contemporary Culture research group
presents

Christianity after Christendom:
Theology, Philosophy and Media Theory
in Conversation
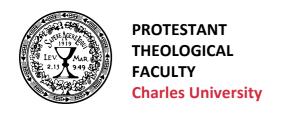### PRIMUS/HUM/23 project concluding conference

During the past three years, our team of scholars gathered under the heading of the Primus project "*Christianity after Christendom: Paradoxes of "Theological Turns" in Contemporary Culture*" (PRIMUS/HUM/23) endeavoring to investigate new possibilities for conversation between Christianity and contemporary mediatized culture, in general, and among theology, philosophy and media theory, in particular. A number of academic publications and events as well as several conference presentations and public lectures resulted from the project team's efforts. Today, as our project comes to a close, this conference draws together diverse perspectives developed through the course of the project in an open debate and discussion with internationally renowned scholars from the fields of theology, philosophy and media theory. Namely, the aesthetic valences of mediation (the poetry of Hölderlin), current theopolitical ramifications in the public sphere (the biopolitics of Foucault and the role of social media in collective action), and the technological conditions of datafied society entangled in canonical theological motifs (the posthuman revolution in the wake of the cybernetics of Wiener).

The aim is not to produce a particular concluding statement on the interrelation between these fields, but rather to open new questions and possibilities which may suggest future possibilities of research for our new and quite recently established research group, now, focusing on the ongoing dialogue between theology and contemporary culture.

Date: **Thursday 28/11/2019**
Venue: **Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University;**
          Černá 9; Prague 1 (CZ); Room VP

Program

10:00-10:30	**Welcome, coffee and introduction**
10:30-11:15	**Mediation of religious experience through art: Hölderlin's Fragment of Philosophical Letters** *Jakob Deibl* (University of Vienna)
11:15-11:25	**Response 1** *Kateřina Kočí* (Charles University)
11:25-11:35	**Response 2** *Alicja Rybkowska* (Jagellonian University Krakow)
11:35-12:00	**Discussion**
12:00-14:00	**Lunch break**
14:00-14:45	**New Orientalism: Foucault, the Iranian Revolution & Social Media** *Arda Güçler* (Ozyegin University, Istanbul)
14:45-14:55	**Response 1** *Martin Kočí* (University of Vienna/Charles University)
14:55-15:05	**Response 2** *František Štěch* (Charles University)
15:05-15:30	**Discussion**
15:30-16:00	**Coffee break**
16:00-16:45	**Techniques of Creation - Questioning the Cybernetic Golem** *Kateřina Krtilová* (Collegium Helveticum Zürich/Zürich University of the Arts)
16:45-16:55	**Response 1** *Virgil W. Brower* (Charles University)
16:55-17:05	**Response 2** *Gábor Ambrus* (Charles University)
17:05-17:30	**Discussion**
17:30-20:00	**Free time**
20:00- on	**Dinner**

Jakob Deibl
Mediation of religious experience through art: Hölderlin's Fragment of Philosophical Letters

For Hölderlin, in his theoretical writings, religion and art are inseparably intertwined. In his Fragment of Philosophical Letters, he develops a theory of religion as a balance of opposites: the intellectual and the natural, the moral and the mechanic, the singular and the continuous etc. This balance must, however, find an ever-new expression in specific configurations of "subject-matter" ("Stoff") and "presentation" ("Vortrag"). In order to describe these constellations Hölderlin refers to different types of poetry which mirror the balance in which religion consists. Different forms of art are therefore derived from religion whereas religion is mediated through the arts.

Kateřina Krtilová
Techniques of Creation - Questioning the Cybernetic Golem

Norbert Wiener`s interpretation of the Golem legend "God & Golem Inc." suggests a fairly straight-forward link between the golem and computation based on the topos of a machine turning against its (human) creator. Already early on in the development of digital technologies as we know them today, Wiener addresses fear projected on computers as "smart" machines or "artificial intelligence", but also outlines the premises of the "cybernetic hypothesis" (Alexander Galloway following Tiqqun) - a specific understanding of man, thinking and creation. The paper will contrast this perspective on the golem and technology with a media philosophical interpretation of the figure of the golem in Jewish mysticism and the notion of practices of creation it implies. It will suggest that taking into account religious practices as "cultural techniques" or media practices might offer a new perspective on the question of "artificial" creation in digital technology.

Arda Güçler
New Orientalism: Foucault, the Iranian Revolution & Social Media

Michel Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution have been quite divisive. Some read him as an orientalist thinker who was fascinated by the Islamic character of the revolution at the expense of modernity. Others read Foucault's writings on Iran as unsettling the orientalist imaginary due to its focus on the singular character of the revolution. Despite their disagreement on the question of if Foucault was an orientalist, the literature agrees that we should assess him based on the classical definition of orientalism that was provided by Edward Said. This talk will assess Foucault based a new form of orientalism that is different from the classical form. I define this new orientalism as an excessive trust in the democratic potential of an emergent political will, which lacks enough practical precedents to warrant such trust. It is different from classical orientalism in three key respects: (a) its main point of reference is political rather than cultural, (b) its articulation of tradition is thoroughly modernist and (c) it relies on contingency instead of determinism. The talk will use the recent social media responses to the Turkish invasion of Syria as an illustrative case of this new form of orientalism that I am observing among the members of the Western intelligentsia.