Foreword from the Editors

After almost two decades, Symbolism looks back on a tradition of interdisciplinary volumes exploring symbolic practices of signification across the arts and beyond. Still, the present volume is exceptional in that this year’s special focus, edited by Natasha Lushetich, takes the annual’s commitment to interdisciplinary explorations of critical aesthetics to new lengths. Already in the range of aesthetic work it discusses, in the artistic backgrounds of several contributors, and in the critical stance it takes towards received ideas in academia, ‘Beyond Mind’ stands out. However, it is most remarkable in the assault it undertakes, in its very conception, on symbolism as a practice of meaning-making: in the spirit of avant-garde and experimental aesthetics, ‘Beyond Mind’ explores artistic practices centred on the refusal to ‘make sense’. As the corresponding editor states, the essays discuss “a-rational forms of thinking and doing” in art as challenges to the reification and commodification of knowledge in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, mainly, but not exclusively, in the Western world. From Fluxus to digital disinformation, from Endgame and Prospero’s Books to Synecdoche, New York, from John Cage’s experimental music to Susan Sentler’s choreography, from Islamic calligraphy to photography, the special focus highlights how art has been and continues to be a thorn in the side of rationalist ideology and its grand narratives.

Three stimulating essays in the General Section round off the volume: Sijie Wang’s discussion of the panopticon and pilgrimage as structural principles of Joseph Andrews; Mark William Brown’s reflections on an inadequate symbol in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Woodspurge”; and Jack Stewart’s expansion on his previous reflections on the pictorial arts and symbolism in the work of A.S. Byatt, this time addressing The Children’s Book.

The editors are grateful to Natasha Lushetich for her original proposal, as well as her dedication and resourcefulness, as guest editor for this volume’s special focus, and to all contributors to this volume. As assistant editor, Marlena Tronicke has once again adroitly coordinated the volume’s production, aided as ever by Chris Wahlig and supported by Svea Türlings as well as Laura Schmitz-Justen; to them, thanks are due for their diligence and thoroughness in processing the manuscript. At De Gruyter, Stella Diedrich was an immense help in seeing the volume through the press.

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