

## **Aesthetic Temporalities Today: Present, Presentness, Presentation**

Fourth Annual Conference of the SPP 1688: Aesthetic Temporalities. Time and Representation in Polychronic Modernity, June 13-15, 2018, Berlin.

For a long time an ostensibly feasible concept of neutral temporality, the present is no longer seamlessly available to us. If since at least the 1960s the discussion of “contemporary art” had supplied a useful vehicle for supplanting the ideology of modernity and its related notion of progress, this predominance of the present has itself now been increasingly called into question. According to this critique, an “eternal present” instituted by technical dispositives has long since replaced the effort to safeguard the present from the false promises of the future.<sup>1</sup> Not only do we see increased historicization of the concept of “the present”<sup>2</sup> and the study, for instance, of its emergence at the beginning of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Medial, technological, economic, and, last but not least, political upheavals have also resulted in proclamations of the “end of the present” as a time familiar to “us” that can be interpreted and stabilized using traditional semantics.<sup>4</sup> With a view to the arts, there are also calls for the end of “contemporary art” and an orientation toward a “future art.”<sup>5</sup> An “attack of the rest of time on the present” seems to have replaced an “attack of the present on the rest of time” (Kluge) without it at all being clear what is meant by “the rest of time.”

However, what remains unaffected by these historicizations from “the present” and its proclaimed end is the fact that it represents an indispensable point of reference for reflections on what is, is not, and could be “only just now.”<sup>6</sup> The proliferation of such concepts as “presentness” and “presentation” attests to this, concepts which are unthinkable without a sense of “the present.” Moreover, the sustained significance of the present is revealed by the persistent reflection on “contemporaneity” as the promise of a shared time whose realization is still

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<sup>1</sup> See Geoffrey C. Bowker: *All Together Now. Synchronization, Speed, and the Failure of Narrativity*, in: *History and Theory* 53 (2014), p. 564-576; or also Marcus Quent (ed.): *Absolute Gegenwart*, trans. by Hannes-Caspar Petzold, Berlin 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Muhle: *History will repeat itself. Für eine (Medien-)Philosophie des Reenactment*, in: Lorenz Engell, Frank Hartmann, Christine Voss (eds.): *Körper des Denkens. Neue Positionen der Medienphilosophie*. München 2013, p. 113-134; Doris Gerber: *Analytische Metaphysik der Geschichte. Handlungen, Geschichte und ihre Erklärung*, Berlin 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See Achim Landwehr: *Geburt der Gegenwart. Eine Geschichte der Zeit im 17. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 2014.

<sup>4</sup> See Armen Avanessian, Suhail Maik (eds.): *Der Zeitkomplex. Postcontemporary*, trans. by Ronald Voullié, Berlin 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See Ludger Schwarte: *Notate für eine künftige Kunst*, Berlin 2016. On “contemporary art” see also Christine Ross: *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too. The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*, New York/London 2012; Juliane Rebentisch: *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2013; Peter Osborne: *Anywhere or Not at All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Eckhard Schumacher: *Gerade Eben Jetzt. Schreibweisen der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

pending,<sup>7</sup> even though economic and medial globalization seem to have already brought it about.<sup>8</sup> Questions about what it means to be “contemporary,” how “the present” and “presentness” are even possible in the first place, and how and through which media, techniques, and procedures they could be produced are just now becoming virulent.

Just now? Those perceptions of a globalized present provoke far more fundamental questions about the functions that “presentations” have in transcultural fields of reference. Recent attempts to understand the “present” make clear that it cannot be grasped through universalist reflections and is tied to a geopolitically-determined spatial opening, establishment of contact, and perception of relational authority.<sup>9</sup> If we understand the present, in this sense, as both a global and relational contemporaneity, it then runs counter to those tangible and spatially-bound forms of material presence and temporality that, as the “present tense” or “presence,” as perceived presentness or presence of a present, suggest a relinquishment of historicity and hermeneutics.<sup>10</sup> An example of this is the “ethnological present-tense,” the protocol of an experience of another present, or the reference to the present as a “disconcerting,” corporeal presence that can be experienced in artifacts, objects, and images.<sup>11</sup> Notions of the present as contemporaneity, in contrast, have been formulated, for instance, by Bruno Latour and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, with their programs for a symmetrical anthropology, as well as by Achille Mbembe in his theses on the contemporary temporal regimes of a “black” Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup>

However, a conception of the present characterized by “the present tense” and “presence” can be broken down, not only by recourse to considerations of contemporaneity but also by reflections that even more forcefully relativize it from a temporal perspective. To do so, we might on the one hand question the present’s relationship to the (post-)modern historicity that per-

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<sup>7</sup> See Giorgio Agamben: *What is the Contemporary*, in: *What is an Apparatus? And other Essays*, Stanford 2009, pp. 39-54.

<sup>8</sup> See Gabriele Genge: *Art. “Kunstwissenschaft”*, in: Friedrich Jaeger, Wolfgang Knöbl, Ute Schneider (Hrsg.): *Handbuch Modernforschung. Interdisziplinäre und internationale Perspektiven*, Stuttgart/Weimar 2015, p. 132-142; and Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996; Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee (eds.): *Antinomies of Art and Culture. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, Durham/London 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Mathur Saloni (ed.): *The Migrant’s Time. Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, New Haven, Conn. 2011; Mieke Bal: *Heterochrony in the Act. The Migratory Politics of Time*, in: *ibid*, Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro (eds.): *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture. Conflict, Resistance, and Agency*, Amsterdam 2011, p. 211-139.

<sup>10</sup> Prominently, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: *Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fried: *Kunst und Objekthaftigkeit (1967)*, in: Gregor Stemmrich (eds.): *Minimal Art. Eine kritische Retrospektive*, Dresden 1995, p. 334-374. See also Gabriele Genge, Angela Stercken (eds.): *Art History and Fetishism Abroad. Global Shiftings in Media and Methods*, Bielefeld 2014.

<sup>12</sup> See in particular Bruno Latour: *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, Mass. 1993; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales. Lignes d’anthropologie post-structurale*, trans. by Oïara Bonilla, Paris 2009; Achille Mbembe: *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine*, Paris 2000.

sists within it, is scattered within the global or transnational conglomerate, and exposes itself to other temporalities and chronologies. On the other hand, the present might also be opened up to the future, “punctured with FUTURITY.”<sup>13</sup> In each case we would have to bear in mind that the present never simply is and is never simply given, but must be produced again and again.

The annual conference of the DFG Priority Program “Proper Times of the Aesthetic: Time and Representation in Polychronic Modernity” seeks to raise the question of the present primarily with a view to its own “present.”

Alongside the concept of the “present,” we will also address the neighboring phenomena of “presentness” and “presentation,” where “presentness” designates a mode, as it were, of subjective or collective “being-in-the-present,” and “presentation” refers in contrast more to the media, techniques, and actions that produce the present. We wish to consider “present,” “presentness,” and “presentation” not so much as phenomena of spatially conceived presence but as instead temporal phenomena: as phenomena that are polychronal and intertwine a quest for duration and eternity with shortness and ephemerality and are distinguished by both their hypostatizing of the “now” and their yearning for the “only just” and the promise of the “right now”; but also as phenomena that we can comprehend as the results of specific temporal configurations and regimes that, in turn, shape specific times and as well as their own times and, last but not least, structure agreements about what characterizes time “only just now.”

The conference will address its topic in three sections – although we anticipate that interesting constellations will arise precisely out of their areas of overlap:

### **Section 1: *The Present of Art – Perspectives from Art Studies***

Keywords: The presentation and reflection of “the present” in aesthetics and art studies. Debates surrounding the “historiographic turn” in contemporary art, that is, calls for the dispersal of disciplinary cultures among cultural spaces and the search for new definitions of the presentation of the past in the artwork shall be discussed along with orientations toward the future. We will also investigate transcultural forms of presentation and their anchoring in the temporal regimes of the arts, archaisms in contemporary art, and nomadic and transnational artistic concepts of the present.

### **Section 2: *Global Spaces of the Present?***

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<sup>13</sup> Schwarte: Notate für eine künftige Kunst, p. 15.

*Keywords:* Raising questions informed by cultural studies and political science, which demand networked definitions of the present in the context of globalization, postcolonialism, and transculturality. The dimension of the political is central. As a form of negotiating the social, it necessarily shapes “the present” and is irreducibly connected to nearly every experience and production of “the present.” Here, the study of temporally induced and indexicalized forms of building a collective (contemporaneity) and of historical reflection on postulates of the (Western) enlightenment or of the “global south” are especially fruitful.

### **Section 3: *Presentness and Presentation as Aesthetic Problems***

*Keywords:* Phenomenological perspectives on the act of producing the present, for a (transcultural) view of “presence” and “reenactment.” The field of media shall furthermore be explored using approaches of media studies and media philosophy, which focus on the transposing and transformative effects of “mediation,” “means,” and “the middle” and discusses their temporal implications.