

Modern Times, Disjunct Temporalities and Divergent Realities

Priority Program 1688: Annual Conference “Aesthetic Temporalities” May 15-18, 2019

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In introducing the concept of polychronic modernity in its title, this PP 1688 conference on aesthetic temporalities centers its research logic on the plurality, heterogeneity and differentiation of modalities of time and forms of representation and manifestation. With this focus, the SPP also addresses a criticism continually confronting conceptualizations of modernity – one which claims that modernity is depicted as too uniform and monolithic, basing its claims for example on the one-dimensionalities of modernization theory in the social sciences as well as on concepts of ‘the’ aesthetic modernity. The annual conference addresses these aspects of the SPP research program in order to develop them further and poses, as centrally important, the idea that ‘modernity’ actually provokes heterogeneous, plural and often confrontational manifestations of time precisely as it is presented or perceived as homogenous and totalizing.

Examples of this are the dynamics presented in postcolonial criticisms which aim both at the constructions of alterity (which consolidate ‘modernity’) in orientalist discourses as well as at, concomitantly, the social, political and aesthetic subversions of and counter-approaches to the hegemony of modernity. Similarly, it has been pointed out in culturally informed, political economic works that, since the time of imperial colonialism, totalizing tendencies inherent in capitalism always brought about their effects in concrete settings, thus mobilizing alteritarian strategies and visions of the construction of sociality. Additionally, in cultural anthropology, the tendency can be observed not to reduce globalization to cultural uniformity, but rather to search for the local and trans-local manifestations and conditions of production of the ‘global’ which position themselves as specific and ‘other’ to a global modernity.

Related to the question of aesthetic temporalities, these approaches merge into a set of problems which could be redefined as follows: Polychronic modernity, which in itself can only be conceived as heterogeneous, leads to further temporal variations precisely because it produces and provokes from the ‘single modernity,’ now criticized as self-identical and hegemonic, alteritarian conceptions and manifestations of time. Thus it is about increasing temporal variations and variabilities through the processing of a homogeneously occurring or perceived temporal modernity, or rather modern temporality. This analysis can take on an agonistic character or also result in change and differentiation by including new temporalities into pre-existing cosmologies and established contexts of agency.

The PP annual conference strives to address paradigmatic settings of such temporal variations and, additionally, questions the extent to which the organization and perception of time in multiple modernities are significantly influenced by artifacts of technical-instrumental media and patterns of order inscribed in them. Such patterns of organization underlie a double discursive imprinting, first of all because they update and differentiate themselves, first, in the linguistic representation and conceptual perception of their artifacts, and, second, because media practice itself takes place in a network of converging discourses which characterizes or rather distorts their perspectives, since media practice and epistemology exist in an inextricable, reciprocal relationship.

This annual conference thus targets findings concerning processes of global entanglements, materializations and fragmented rearticulations of time-conceptualizations in a diverse modernity. Its purpose is to question not only the specifics of the modern aesthetic of time as

universally understood but also its fragmentation into heterogeneous types of temporality. Thus, it also aims to highlight the polychronicity 'within' conceptions of modernity of cultural and linguistic contexts beyond Europe.

The conference focuses also on the meaning and significance of modern time-regimes communicated through and constituted by technical-instrumental media of communities outside of the North Atlantic historical, economic and socio-cultural tradition which did not conceptualize time as Chronos and which never even felt the necessity to develop the concept of 'time.' Thus the conference will also question the extent to which 'foreign temporality/temporalities' were turned into 'proper temporality/temporalities' in modernity. At the same time a fixed proper and a fixed foreign, from which a 'hybrid' could result (or a situation in which one would dominate or extinguish the other in a hierarchical constellation), is not to be assumed. Rather the focus is on cultures which have always been heterogeneous and which have defined themselves by the dynamics of their inner processes of change. Finally, the question of the simultaneity of the non-contemporaneous should not only be directed at the binary construction of European and Non-European culture, but the diverse and polychronic modernity should also be discussed within and beyond the drawing of such boundaries with respects to similarities and ruptures. These general questions will be discussed in the framework of the following thematic sections:

Section 1: Diverse Futurities.

Modernity is often assigned a specific modality of future, specifically that of an 'open,' 'contingent' or 'unsafe' future (Koselleck, Luhmann, Lee/LiPuma). Related to this is the assumption that future and present are categorically separate from one another. As opposed to the past, which to an extent projects its importance into the present, the future can be conceived in all cases on the proviso of the uncertain, utopian and speculative. This approach is challenged in more recent approaches which see (in social as well as in aesthetic practices dealing critically with the results of modernity) an alternative to this shift of future events into the unknown: namely futurity as fact in the present (Adelson, Appadurai). This section takes these findings as a point of departure and investigates the constitution of heterogeneous futurities in the aesthetic and social practices which deal critically with totalizing modernity.

Section 2: Medial Times and Local Practices.

This section deals with the tension and dynamic resulting from the interweaving of temporalities of modern and old media with spatially and locally related practices. It addresses both the reciprocal contingencies of technically evoked temporal arrangements in instrumental media since the early industrial phase as well as its local reconstructions in the most diverse communities. Section 2 also focuses on pre-instrumental, local media practices as well as on conceptions of time and their interrelations with instrumental media. Of particular importance is the interplay between corporeal experiences of time elicited through media practices, including the manipulation of time axes by technical media, local conceptions of time and institutionalized forms of modernistic, linear, (in the Benjaminian sense) empty and homogenous time. Media dispositives, aesthetic practice and their accompanying and formative discourses generate aesthetic temporalities and 'multiple modernities' which stand in local lines of tradition as well as in global trends.

Section 3: Processual Ontologies, Plural Orders

This section observes contrasting lines within the hegemonial European discourse where things cannot always be presumed as objective truths in the same way and, as such, are viewed in an inevitable binarism between their materiality and perception. These contrasting lines define their arrangements beyond any frame marked by the monadistic-oriented epistemological dualism of hegemonial European discourse. The view towards other cultures (which is also targeted in this section) leads even further to, in part, completely differently structured epistemologies and, relatedly, to own ontologies and concepts of order. Philosophies like those from Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, William James, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Walter Benjamin, John Dewey, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Serres, Ilya Prigogine or Isabelle Stengers, literary texts like those from James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, works of visual arts like those from Jackson Pollack, music pieces of different styles like those from Pierre Boulez, György Ligeti, John Cage or Ornette Coleman, and finally also films and their theories, like those from Jean Epstein or Jean-Luc Godard: They all represent only a few examples for thought, poetry and composition, for a poietic or aesthetic of processuality and for an immanent pluralism of the ordering of time and through time in “Western” cultures. Yet the view on other cultural “ways of thinking” (A.N. Whitehead) and the dialogue with them – those of East Asia or of the Arabic-Islamic region, with their dominant and counter-current philosophies, representational media and arts – offer a manifold expansion to the diversity of processual conceptions and realizations of order. Process itself is always at the same time temporal, order from its self-conception conceived as plural. Even in cultural systems where time is not at all or at least differently situated, it can indeed always be described (as should be investigated in this section) as an ontological unity which can be related to our current concept of time.

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