





ÆSTHETISCHE  
EIGENZEITEN

Kleine Reihe

8

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**What Are  
“Aesthetic Temporalities?”**

**The Outlines of a  
Research Program**

Translated by Paul Bowman

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## Inhalt

- 9 What is time?
- 13 Time and representation
- 20 Historical time and  
polychronic modernity
- 24 Aesthetic temporalities
- 27 On the pluralization of  
conceptions of time
- 38 Notes



**What Are  
“Aesthetic Temporalities?”**



## What is time?

As a fundamental phenomenon of successivity, “time” is constitutive for how humans construct and interpret the world.<sup>1</sup> At least for Western cultures, ideas of change and transformation, of “time” as a medium of internal consciousness, of “time” as an objective measure for all being and becoming, or as a relative condition for observing the world, are indispensable. “Time” is accordingly omnipresent, and it is precisely the resulting cultural essentiality of the phenomenon that has ensured that no comprehensive and unified theory of time exists down to the present day, but rather a juxtaposition of irreducible notions.

Ensuing from this is the question as to ways of systematizing the diverse approaches to time, both those possible at all and those already developed.<sup>2</sup> Often broached in the philosophical tradition, the problem posed whenever there is an attempt to concretely apprehend time, namely its elusiveness, necessarily leads to the recognition that time cannot be grasped as a universalistic dimension or as an abstract chronometric order, one that is in accord with how the events of individual and collective history take place. Rather, time needs to be understood as a complex of various chronotopic notions which

differ in relation to the perception and evaluation of the linearity and recursivity of events and in their diversity bring forth and specify correlative contexts of meaning.

In the strand of thinking about time that emancipates itself from metaphysics, as evident from Kant through to the phenomenology of the twentieth century, three antagonistic tendencies can be made out: time is subjectivized via its transcendentalization, it is then subsequently pluralized, i.e. split into a multiplicity of times, and it is – once again undermining its dissolution into multiple times – universalized.<sup>3</sup> All three, subjectivization, pluralization, and universalization, lay the basis for the wide-ranging research into time today, in which not only philosophy and theories of science, physics, biology, medicine, psychopathology, psychology, linguistics, ethnology, history, economics, ecology, sociology, and theology all have a substantial interest; increasingly, newer research approaches are diversifying further, ranging from chronobiology and the sociology of time through to chronopharmacology.

Within this plethora of approaches and interests, the program “Aesthetic Temporalities. Time and Representation in Polychronic Modernity” focuses on examining configurations of time in cultural modernity as they are represented in the diverse array of scientific, philosophical, and artistic

forms. This entails unfurling the problem of the incommensurability of intrinsic times [Eigenzeiten], a problem that emerged historically with Herder's and Schelling's critique of Kant's concept of time. The aim is to methodologically examine and demonstrate the complexity with which artefacts deal with the temporal multiplicity and the heterogeneity of ideas on time: how they configure different orders of time, correlate different patterns of time with one another and with forms of the everyday experience of time, and how they reflect the changes of historical structures of temporalization.

Starting from this problem, answers emerge to the fundamental question as to how temporality in the multiplicity of its cultural and historical meanings and determinability can be rendered tangible as an experience and so reflected upon. As fundamental as time is in the most varied of conceptual formations, whether as substantial structure of being in Newton's physics, whether as a pure form of sensory intuition as in Kant's epistemology, it itself remains indiscernible, latent, because it is a phenomenon that is not accessible to direct intuition. It can only appear in so far as it represents itself and is perceivable on or through objects. Made materially perceivable, measured, depicted, expressed, recognized, experienced, and estimated, time is always dependent upon and only relevant in

cultural relationships of perception and evaluation. Time is thus a phenomenon that necessarily needs presentation and representation before any knowledge of it can even develop. The experience of time and the reflection on time are therefore both bound to the uncircumventable representational force and vitality of aesthetic *modus operandi*, in other words to the interplay of sensory perceptible techniques, symbols, media, and institutions.

## Time and representation

Two aspects are therefore of particular interest within the cultural articulation and modelling context of temporality in terms of the program's specific approach: firstly, the concentration on the material and individualized manifestation in single objects, object groups, or subject-object connections; and secondly, the striking form components in the constitution of artefacts, i.e. of works of art like architectures, design objects, cityscapes, art craftworks, aesthetically formed landscapes, adapted or observed nature, etc. The first moment furnishes a perspective enabling the concrete material realization of time to be examined, an inlet to the phenomenon that above all promises to be interesting when the results of the different studies of single objects can be compared and correlated. Such an approach potentially allows us to embrace cultural epochs through their succinct time forms and nevertheless understand them in their diversity as succinct units. Here is where the second aspect comes into play: the propositional consideration of the subject matter, above all in philosophical treatises, but also as an element of literary plots, may provide important insights; ultimately however, integral knowledge about time is only ascertain-

able in the analysis of the constitutive form and representational mode of artefacts.

Fundamental for the knowledge of time is thus a concept of representation that encompasses the sensory, aesthetic perceptible articulation and formation through the material concretization and how this is charged symbolically and semantically. Representation prefigures, produces, and interprets the represented, whereby it marks itself and thus stands out. Consequently, it allows implicit knowledge of its own *modus operandi* to follow in its trail and constructs a strong material self-referentiality in its objects. Recent art and literature studies have examined the representation paradigm mainly as a theoretical conception evolving in the course of the autonomization of the arts,<sup>4</sup> while in the poeology of knowledge<sup>5</sup> the concept of representation has been influentially established as a fundamental analytical inlet for examining all areas of knowledge, but has yet to be made systematically productive for the time dimension inherent to and structuring the orders of knowledge. Accordingly, a conception of representation is necessary that is capable of combining a consciousness of fiction and construction, self-reference, and material concretion with the plurality of cultural historical fields of application. This concept of representation, sketched but yet to be elaborated in its exact characteristics and concrete

application, serves, when distinctly aligned to theories of time, as a model for analyzing works of art, artefacts, and aesthetically presented object culture.

The factor of time is of such importance for a conception of representation attuned to cultural studies because it inevitably appears on both sides of the distinction between content and form: knowledge of time is bound to a temporality of this knowledge and a temporality of its representation, while every representation produces – through its temporality – a knowledge of time. Not every random artefact embodies and reveals this dialectic to the same degree, but it is certainly subject to it in some shape or form.

This pertains expressly for particularly form-conscious objects, i.e. above all for those works of art which open up experiential and ludic spaces wherein a specific, intensified unfolding of time can take place. For these objects, in the specified reformulation of the aforementioned dialectic of time knowledge, it seems clear that precisely the relations determining aesthetic forms are always also time relations, and form is essentially an organization of time.<sup>6</sup> In the process, form can, beyond its qualities as a sensory expression for attaining specific aims in the aesthetics of reception, also be understood as a manner of representation that compactly renders complexity perceivable and communicable. As

articulated content, form then engenders an insight unattainable in any other way;<sup>7</sup> it thus lends itself to a specific, historically composed semantic permeated by temporal structures.<sup>8</sup> Form therefore functions here as a non-propositional component of time knowledge that responds to everyday, social, and scientific challenges.<sup>9</sup> In turn however, it itself – even in its production processes – is due to the complex temporality structures, and this temporality, deposited in it as continuous transformation, also shapes the processes of reception. Form cannot, as classicist aesthetics often intended, be understood as a presence that wrests material away from time, but is a result and expression of temporality.<sup>10</sup>

Such an inlet analyzing representation goes beyond those approaches delineating the history of a discourse and the poetology of knowledge by focusing on the specific representational competence inherent to individual artworks and artefacts and seeing their genuine knowledge of time as being based in their performative and representative dimensions. This entails paying attention to the material and situative concreteness of objects and their time dimensions, as productively demonstrated in recent years by literature studies into the writing process and authors' scene.<sup>11</sup> These approaches have shifted attention from the production and reception aesthetics of the "work" to the "practices" and