



Aesthetics—Times—Religion

Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen

2 – 3 September 2019

This workshop, organized in cooperation with the working group “Religionsästhetik” of the DVRW (German Association for the Study of Religion), interrogates the potential of the concept of aesthetics as a methodological perspective for exploring the role of time and temporality in the study of religions. Across the social sciences and humanities, scholars of religion have engaged critically with a hitherto dominant tendency to conceptualize religion in terms of meaning and/or doctrinal belief. While semiotic and hermeneutic approaches have focused on language and text as both objects of study and metaphors for theorizing, aesthetic approaches to religion put questions concerning perceptual orders, the senses, material, affective, and media environments, performance, and embodied cognition at the centre of attention.

As is the case in other fields of social theory, however, time has been taken for granted within the aesthetics of religion as a precondition or self-evident background of all kinds of social practices and forms of agency without being made an object of inquiry in its own right.¹ As a consequence, time has figured primarily as a question of historicity: How have ways of perceiving and bodily ways of being-in-the-world changed in the course of history? What role do religious practices play in historical transformations of semiotic ideologies, media practices, or organisations of the sensorium? How can we access and study the aesthetic worlds of past religious cultures in light of the historicity of (our own) perceptual orders?

Following up on critical inquiries into “regimes of historicity” within the fields of the philosophy of time, conceptual history, or postcolonial studies,² the aim of this workshop is to explore the distinctive contribution of an aesthetic approach to a critical rethinking of time and

¹ Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*, Explorations in Anthropology (Oxford: Berg, 1992); Nancy D. Munn, “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 93–123; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Matt Hodges, “Rethinking Time’s Arrow: Bergson, Deleuze and the Anthropology of Time,” *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 4 (2008): 399–429.

² Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik Geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Mike Sandbothe, *Die Verzeitlichung Der Zeit: Grundtendenzen Der Modernen Zeitdebatte in Philosophie Und Wissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

temporality in relation to the embodied, sensorial, mediated, and material dimensions of religion. How can we conceptualize and explore aesthetic figurations of time or the temporalization of aesthetic forms developed within specific religious traditions?³ How do messianic, apocalyptical, ritual, progressive, or so-called secular (presumably empty and homogenous) temporalities gain aesthetic “evidence,” and in what ways do they co-exist, overlap, or exclude one another? How do changing “mediatisations”⁴ of religion affect the way people experience time and engage with competing temporal regimes, which they encounter in changing political and economic environments?⁵

We will discuss these and similar questions, which allow to illuminate time from an interdisciplinary and aesthetic perspective and explore the latter’s distinctive contribution with regard to similar or parallel frameworks grounded in semiotics, media studies, material culture, or art history.

The format of the workshop can be adjusted to suit the needs and interests of participants. Possible contributions may include regular paper presentations as well as discussions based on pre-circulated texts, work in progress, or theoretical literature. If you are interested in participating, please send a confirmation preferably with a title, theme, or short abstract of your contribution by **22 March 2019**.

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³ Niklaus Largier, “Below the Horizon of Meaning: Figuration, Disfiguration, Transfiguration,” in *Aesthetics of Religion: A Connective Concept*, ed. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 147–60.

⁴ Stig Hjarvard, “The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change,” *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 119–35.

⁵ Sybille Krämer, “Friedrich Kittler - Kulturtechniken Der Zeitachsenmanipulation,” in *Medientheorien: Eine Philosophische Einführung*, ed. Alice Lagaay and David Lauer (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Campus-Verlag, 2004), 201–24; Patrick Eisenlohr, “Mediating Disjunctures of Time: Ancestral Chronotopes in Ritual and Media Practices,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2015): 281–304.