Délia Popa

**Repeating the Present. From the Phenomenology of Time to a Phenomenology of History**

Temporality was analyzed in Husserl’s work as emerging in the inner conscious from an original impression (Urimpression). Still, the Husserlian phenomenology of time doesn’t give a clear account about the way inner temporality becomes objective history. The paper will analyze two paths: the one coming from the theories of personal identity, that underline the necessity to narrate the lived experience in order to recognize it as belonging to a history; and the one coming from the philosophies of history, that bring forth the objective history as it includes and determines the temporal consciousness. The key point of our investigation will be the repetition, understood as the operation that allows the original impression to become a historical moment.

Kenan Van De Mieroop

**Shifting Historicities**

My paper will focus on the concept of historicity as it appears in much of the phenomenological tradition of philosophy. I will argue that the notion that the human exists as a member of a historical community is founded on ethnocentric assumptions and has ethnocentric implication. It is an especially problematic concept when applied to minority groups in multicultural societies and people who have complex identities. I take up the narrativist notion of historicity that is formulated by Paul Ricoeur and modify it so that it can resolve the problematic ethnocentrism at the heart of so many accounts of human historicity. This modification involves abandoning the notion of history as a collective singular.
Egon Bauwelink

_Talking about the past…_

People commonly observe that the “past in itself” cannot arbitrate between its representations. This observation finds strength in the image of things-in-themselves being indifferent to their linguistic representations. Such an image becomes a sterile dead-end, if it doesn’t serve as a hypothesis to be tested. The semiotic gesture of bracketing referent (and subject) of an enunciation, should be a starting point rather than a dead-end. It can stimulate research into the various ways the referent becomes implicated in discourse.

Can we now characterize historical discourse as a particular mode of reference? The philosopher Charles Péguy (†1914) helps us probe this question. His doctoral thesis first exposes the common view of the historian as a craftsman anterior to the matter he treats. Endowed with historical method he forms any matter into a well-made history. Péguy turns the image on its head. A counterexample serves as pivot. The historian of mathematics, Péguy observes, is firstly a mathematician, and only a secondarily a historian. Talking about mathematical objects, one is forced to be competent in a mathematical way of speaking. This example turns out to be a limit case of a broader phenomenon. Most slices of reality demand a specific form of speaking, and impose a particular competence. The indifferent subject matter of historians, or of “history without epithet”, appears as the left-over parts of reality not implicated in such organized modes of discourse. The historian’s past is no longer capable of organizing its own mode of access.

The historian Michel de Certeau (†1986) encountered the same problem, starting from an example opposite to Péguy’s mathematician. How is it that a history of religion, in no way demands its historian to be competent or engaged in religious matters? One needn’t be a Christian to produce historical knowledge about Christianity. What does this say about Christianity? What does it mean for a living practice to become a subject-matter for a history? Both Péguy and de Certeau connect the becoming-past of a practice with a rearrangement of the relationships between the referent, the subject and the enunciation. This reconfiguration provides the conditions of possibility for a “history of...” written by an indifferent “everyman”. The image of language divorced from indifferent things-in-themselves might be apt to describe the relationship between the historian and his object. From the point of view of competent practitioners however, it is a sign their practice is dying.

Berber Bevernage

_Tales of pastness and contemporaneity. A critical reflection on concepts of time and historicity in modern historical and anthropological discourse_

In this paper I want to address the political use of discourses, symbols and logics of time in historiography and anthropology. I want to plea against the idea of a unified or contemporaneous present which can then be contrasted with the idea of ‘the past’. This
idea is central to the modern discourse of history, but I believe it is problematic and that it reinforces abusive forms of ‘politics of time.’ Because I know no single explicit defense of the contemporaneous historical present by a historian, I choose the anthropologist Johannes Fabian as my opponent. Fabian criticizes anthropology for treating the Other as if living in another time, and he proposes to counter these ‘politics of time’ by stressing the coevalness of humanity. I follow Fabian’s analysis of the political (ab)use of spatiotemporal ‘distancing’ but argue that this (ab)use cannot successfully be addressed by stressing coevalness. Rather, I radically embrace the idea of non-coevalness and argue this is both necessary on scientific grounds and ethically the most attractive. I argue that allochronism results not necessarily from a ‘denial of coevalness’ but, rather, from a specific notion of coevalness. Drawing on arguments by Jacques Derrida I claim that Fabian’s theory of coevalness is dependent on a problematic ‘metaphysics of presence.’ Drawing on the work of Louis Althusser and Peter Osborne I argue for a more emancipatory analysis of the politics of time that should guide critical anthropological as well as historical discourses.

Britta Hochkirchen

*Presence on Display. Models of Time Produced by Art Exhibitions*

Every art exhibition produces a specific approach to time and temporality through the choice of artworks, the structure of the display and the way the visitor is addressed to. During the 20th century, exhibitions displaying “modern“ (or better yet: “contemporary“) art constructed a specific understanding of the present in relation to the past and future, thus mediating a social and political potential of “acting“. My aim is to analyze the various problems arisen by this type of exhibitions and, more particularly, to underline the tensions created in these cases between the political message (made up by the construction of a historiographical model of time), the particular concept of “modernity“ and the given presence of the artwork.

Anton Froeyman

*Moral Anachronisms: What are they, and how should we deal with them*

In this talk, I will introduce the concept of ‘Moral Anachronisms’. Moral anachronisms are past traditions, objects or phenomena that are still present today, yet represent or embody values that are perceived to be out of place in our current-day society (or at least in a certain part, or subgroup of that society). Typical examples are statues of past dictators or morally questionable leaders. For example: people of the past might have believed that it was a good idea to erect statues for king Leopold II, but we would never tolerate this nowadays. Nevertheless, statues of Leopold II are present today all around Belgium, and they remind us that there was a time when people admired his personality and his policy. The many statues of Stalin scattered around Eastern Europe are another example. However, there are also some more prosaic instances in popular culture, such as
the early Tintin books (which were the subject of a court case in Belgium), the French ‘Babar’ stories, or the ‘Black Pete’ tradition in the Low Countries.

The argument I will make, is that moral anachronisms are a distinct moral phenomenon, and that it is their temporal nature that makes them so. Moral anachronisms present modern-day society with a special challenge: on the one hand, they confront us with values that are impossible for us to accept. On the other hand, we cannot simply dispense with them, for example by demolishing statues, or prohibiting all morally dubious children’s books. Firstly, they are often deeply embedded in our daily routine. Secondly, their removal might actually result in ignorance about, or even a denial of, our problematic history. In Derrida’s terminology, moral anachronisms are ‘spectres’, parts of a problematic past that continue to haunt us and that will not go away. At the end of talk, I will make suggestions about how we should deal with these spectres of the past, based on the views of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe.

Zoltán Boldizsár Simon

History in Times of Unprecedented Change

Briefly put, I will talk about how our vision of the future informs our notion of history. In the longer version it means that I will run an argument about how our current technological vision, especially the vision surrounding artificial intelligence and the technological singularity, challenges the particular developmental notion of history we inherited from the Enlightenment and German Idealism. I will characterize this future vision as the prospect of unprecedented change, meaning that whatever we expect or envision taking place, has no origin in and does not unfold from the past, thereby defying the developmental view.

Besides the critical work, as a positive contribution I will outline another concept of history that derives from such a vision, backed up by an argument about how history begins in the future, an argument about how any notion of history must begin in a future vision that enables to postulate a temporal plane where change can take place. Further, I will argue that notions of history, change and future visions presuppose each other and come in a package. And if our current vision of the future is other than the fulfillment of a development, if our current vision of the future is that of unprecedented change, then we have to have a corresponding notion of history that I will try to sketch at the end of the talk.

Kalle Pihlainen

The time of the outcome. Or: Some obstacles in the path of substantive philosophies of history

In this paper, I will question the usefulness of theorizing history in any (even “quasi”) substantive sense. While both the dangers and the theoretical problems relating to
speculative or substantive history have been elaborated on at some length in earlier debates, this does not seem to have deterred contemporary proponents of such positions from discussing history in ways that contain mechanistic and – at times still – even deterministic assumptions. The aims of my paper are twofold: 1) To reiterate some of the standard objections to viewing history as a cohesive unit or a “collective singular” – and hence also to any consequent thinking of it in terms of “a course of events.” 2) To present a more detailed explanation of why a future perspective can be more productively incorporated into theory in, for example, cultural, socio-political or even ideological rather than the “historical” terms. This latter also entails a brief discussion of the often missed distinction between “time” and temporality in debates concerning history as well as the elaboration of a cognitive dynamics that I will describe in terms of “the time of the outcome.”