

Underground Adventures: Temporal Experimentation in Postwar Countercultures

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Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopies* has been widely used to describe sub- and countercultural creation of spaces. By examining post-war countercultures' abilities to transform standardized notions not only of space, but of *time*, the conference on „Underground Adventures“ set out to explore *heterochronies* in different post-war contexts. „Temporal experimentations“ were presented in two main ways: On the one hand, the participants discussed the movements' positioning towards *history* as affirmation or neglect of a past, present or future. On the other hand, their experimentation with *temporality* in cutting-up, slowing down, accelerating or extending/dragging time was examined.

As co-organizer JOACHIM HÄBERLEN (Warwick) noted in his opening comments, the conference was experimental itself since it drew on a broad range of topics approached from a variety of disciplines, including film studies, history, musicology, cultural studies and literature. Furthermore, participants were asked to circulate their papers beforehand and gave only brief presentations to focus on enabling a joint discussion on common themes and questions. Häberlen pointed towards different dimensions present in the papers, such as the role of sound, technologies, drugs or bodily practices as well as the interconnectedness with heterotopic spaces. He also highlighted the issue of gender imbalance within the conference and wondered if this fact also pointed towards an imbalance in the academic field or even the counterculture itself.

The first panel addressed „History and Narrative“. BEN GOOK (Erfurt) illustrated how Berlin Techno created an aesthetic of intensity and newness that pulled the future into the present, thereby denigrating the past.

Coming from the stasis of cold war, the city's symbolic order was radically reorganized, creating a sense of tempo and collective ecstasy. Given that the mainstream appropriation of Techno has been widely discussed, Gook focused on broader questions of philosophy of history. He argued that the tendency towards the *ecstatic-melancholic*, between intensity and inevitable decline, might be inherent in countercultural and even political movements. Furthermore, Gook wondered how countercultural temporalities „leak“ into everyday life and how this relates to the breaking up of work/leisure barriers in neoliberal times.

TODD HONMA'S (Pitzer College) reconceptualization of the „Tattoo Renaissance“ (Arnold Rubin) also addressed a negation of the past. For Honma, the emergence of tattoo styles should be understood in the light of US military involvement in the Pacific and the development of the prison industrial complex. However, their popularization (for the white middle class) led to an erasure of this past, subsequently resulting in the poor, indigenous, incarcerated or colonized being written out of tattoo history. According to Honma, tattoos are not signifiers of permanence but rather of the recognition of one's corporeality, itself temporally limited. Nonetheless, Honma stated, types of bodies exist in different temporalities, especially in relation to life expectancy. He contrasted the privilege of a white middle class retirement plan with issues of (state) violence and premature death that are more present in black, working class, queer or transgender biographies.

An emphasis on a fast life in the present also characterized JAKE SMITH's (Chicago) account of the West German Punk and New Wave scene. Smith illustrated how these movements were indicative of a subversive way of dealing with history. The protagonists used references to the Nazi past through clothing and imagery as shock effect and as protest against post-war consumption and official temporal narratives. Smith inquired if the refusal of narratives, like those of democracy and progress in Punk, was essentially a form of politics or rather a means of creating self-awareness.

In raising this question, Smith addressed

TOMASZ STOMPOR's (Berlin) discussion of William Burrough's cut-up experiments that sought to disrupt temporal narratives in their own way. Stompor characterized these experiments as a practice of cutting up the past and infecting it with the present, so that a potential future might leak out. Stompor also went on to argue that Burrough's temporal experiments could be read as an attempt to predict the future. In the case of the panel, he asked how temporality survives within fragments and, directed towards Honma, whether one can transplant temporal fragments without knowing their past.

The following discussion focused on the question whether countercultures were more interested in creating extended moments or if they eventually aimed at building a basis for lasting new subjectivities and collectivities. Smith for example wondered whether countercultures must remain unstable social forms, since they are essentially jokes, drag or play. Critique, here, refers to a form of „creative disruption“ that resisted productiveness and rejected instrumental reason to create moments of transgression. Honma argued that the countercultures' aim was in fact to challenge notions of stability that they perceived as regressive. Irony, it was suggested allowed one to take on a sneering attitude and to make oneself immune to counter critique. The case of the „Tattoo Renaissance“, however, provided a contrasting case, as Honma argued, because artists and clients were seriously attempting to establish Tattooing as an art form. Ultimately, the question remained open, whether irony has become a central mode of expressing postmodern subjectivity.

Opening the panel on „Spaces and Environment“, JULIAN ROSS'S (London) piece discussed Japanese Expanded Cinema in which *intermedia* was introduced as a twofold revolt against the past of artistic traditions and of Japanese imperial politics. Recreating the idea of *environment* in theory as in practice, the interior design of underground discotheques was meant to create an immersive experience. Using strobe light and projectors, time was cut up, slowed down or frozen altogether. Ross especially pointed towards the question of the ephemerality of dance and performance that many of the pieces of the conference dealt

with, arguing that while analyzing flyers, posters and the documentation of events, historians seem to be fundamentally unable to engage with the moment itself. Participants noted the tension in preserving those moments through scholarly analysis since a sense of stability is created that contradicts the fleetingness that originally characterized them.

In his contribution, HOLGER SCHWETTER (Dresden) introduced the *chronotopos* as a concept that accounts for the interconnectedness of time and space as well as that of artistic and social configurations in synesthetic experiences. By playing excerpts of Pink Floyd's „Echoes“, Schwetter demonstrated how the temporal structure of progressive rock, the expansion of the classical song structure, as well as their inner variety and dynamics, created an experience of being dragged into the music. He discussed how acts of dancing and watching the dancefloor became not only interactions with music and extensions of listening, but mainly ways of expressing individualistic subjectivities and imagined sexualities to transgress rural social structures.

Throughout the contributions, a seeming paradox between the ephemerality celebrated in clubs and the melancholia of fleeting spaces became apparent. This aspect was especially present in FAYE CHISHOLM GUENTHER's (York) piece on queer life in New York City, where representations of time were closely related to precarious experiences of spaces endangered by city planning. Like in Gook's and Schwetter's examples, spaces were formally abandoned by normative culture and were transformed by counterculture. Guenther characterized them as being outside or transgressive of the law and linked to experiences of fear, pleasure and exaggerated or extreme experiences. In the light of the AIDS crisis and gentrification, she further discussed the reparative impulse behind the autobiographies as attempts to revisit or reconstitute the past, of risking hope to create new queer futures.

Similarly, the avant-garde/underground filmmakers in BERIT HUMMEL's (Berlin) paper created alternative spaces outside of their rapidly changing urban environment. In the case of „Little Stabs at Happiness“, private spaces, found objects and an emphasis on bo-

dily contact through scratches, voiceovers and camera movements, were presented as symbolic means of creating permanence against the fleetingness of spaces and actors. Furthermore, Hummel argued that the presentation of dragged, sometimes uneventful time introduced experiences that countered the normative temporalities of work/leisure in the city.

JOSÉ GÁLVEZ (Berlin) opened the third panel „Incorporation and Afterlives“ by engaging with the idea that the audience at commercial EDM-festivals also experiences compressed, intensive time thereby accounting for the existence of *mainstream heterochronies*. Referring to Merleau Ponty's distinction of the body in *Leib* and *Körper*, Gálvez argued that there is a pre-cognitive somatic experience that the EDM-audience shares of being *bodies of acceleration* (Leib). Gálvez also considered the materiality of sound, the temporality of EDM-sets as well as its technical conditions. The intensity of sensorial input at the festival could in its own way suspend acceleration, thus also creating a more symbolic, narrative dimension as *bodies of utopia* (Körper).

JOE PERRY's (Atlanta) presentation returned to the love parade, focusing on the simultaneity of different temporalities in. Firstly, he referred to *club time* as the experience produced by a sensory overload and dancing outlined in previous contributions. Secondly, he pointed to the existence of *city time* that reflected the peculiar conditions in Berlin after the fall of wall – between openness and economic crisis – which eventually resulted in the incorporation of Techno for city marketing. Thirdly, Perry defined *world time* as relating to broader developments like neoliberalism, new urbanism, and acceleration.

The following discussion addressed the geography of cultural forms, highlighting the existence of centers for certain phenomena but also *global simultaneities* and connectedness. Some argued that the connections between countryside rock discotheques and musical centers like NYC and London indicate that scholarly interest should also engage with rural areas. SAM LEBOVIC's (Fairfax) paper offered an interesting example of artists consciously engaging with the creation of global simultaneity. While the movie-drome

was similar to other examples of immersive spaces and artworks that also used found documentary footage, lights and sound, Lebovic pointed towards its use of satellite technology which had parallels with the popular „Our World“ broadcast. Lebovic as well as Perry therefore argued for the importance of technologies in temporal experiments and more broadly to the counterculture's utopian visions. For Lebovic, the use of military industrial technologies, as well as the filmmakers' financing and engagement in public discourse put into question the distinction between counterculture and mainstream. Similarly, Ross discussed the involvement in the Expo world exhibitions in the case of Expanded Cinema artists. To paraphrase Perry, the conference's examples revealed „muddled lines“ instead of strict binaries between counterculture and the mainstream.

Along the same lines, several of the participants wondered about the contribution of countercultural experimentations to new forms of capitalism. While they argued that countercultures can create acceptance for the commercial use of certain technologies, their affinity with neoliberal subjectivities – by promoting skills like self-reliance, productivity or networking – was a more controversial question. Furthermore, some participants asked, if the emphasis on individuality in countercultures is essentially a refusal to engage in scaling or whether the idea of self-expression and non-alienated labor already assumes a universal condition through aesthetics. On that note, Häberlen raised the question, yet to be answered, if the materiality of sound itself can be subversive, by referring to psychedelic music in state socialism. That countercultures had a subversive potential for the authorities becomes apparent when considering the topic of moral panic, policing and the enforced closing of spaces present in many examples. Regulations attacked alternative forms of expression, drug culture or liberal and queer sexualities. The examples of a ban on specific forms of dancing in Japanese club culture, the 1990s law against repetitive rhythmic music in UK countryside raves or underground cinema's violations of the Hollywood production code show that restrictions were directed towards art forms as well as bodies.

Overall, while the conference reflected the broadness of the concept *heterochrony*, it was remarkable how the different scholarly approaches spoke to each other. In relation to *heterochronies*, the notion of normal or standardized time could be theorized further, recognizing the tension between assuming a (somewhat) universal condition and drawing its definition from the protagonist's own accounts. As Honma noted, one must also consider that certain ideas of „normal“ time can be limited, even privileged perspectives. On that note, it was also interesting to see that issues of class, race and gender and their supposedly different temporal consequences played a minor role in most of the contributions. Since the conference examples were solely looking at Europe, North America, as well as Japan as the only non-Western example, further investigations could consider global *non-simultaneities*. To mention an example, it was argued that in state socialism the overtermination of the future through the state's emphasis on progress would have led to very different temporal narratives being subversive. It also remained an open question whether the understanding of countercultures is necessarily that of progressive or leftwing movements or if Neo-Nazi rock could also be described as such.

The immersive nightclub experience of extended moments has long become „mainstream“; as Häberlen remarked, even a football game could create moments of intensified time. If countercultures created new temporalities that were subsequently commodified and incorporated into capitalist relations, do we have to assume then that the *heterochrony* itself, the simultaneity of different models of time, is a condition of neoliberal postmodernity? To investigate the core of *underground heterochronies*, the idea of „experimenting“ might deserve emphasis, meaning a conscious transformation of temporality that explores ideas of a good life and/or seeks to subvert restricting or conservative narratives. Assuming that the idea of a non-rational use of time could still be radical, it might be an interesting question to explore, if and where it is still possible to experience underground temporalities today.

Conference Overview:

Introduction Remarks

Joachim C. Häberlen (University of Warwick)
/ Jake P. Smith (University of Chicago)

Panel 1: History and Narrative

Ben Gook (Universität Erfurt): First Contact with the Music of the Future. Electronic Music, Utopias and Ecstatic Temporality around the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Todd Honma (Pitzer College): The Tattoo Renaissance and the Aesthetic Amalgamation of American Imperialism

Jake P. Smith (University of Chicago): „The World is Horrible. Life is Grand!“. The Apocalyptic Temporalities of New Wave

Tomasz Stompor (Freie Universität Berlin): „Larval Entities“. Heterochronies in William S. Burroughs' Cut-Up Experiments

Panel 2: Spaces and Environments

Faye Chisholm Guenther (York University): Representations of Queer Counterpublic Temporalities in Post-Stonewall New York City

Berit Hummel (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin): Spirits of Listlessness. Metropolitan Temporalities in Films from the Underground

Julian Ross (University of Westminster): Inter-media, Environment and Underground Discotheques in 1960s Japan

Holger Schwetter (Technische Universität Dresden): A different planet. The rock-discotheque from a chronotopic perspective

Panel 3: Incorporation and Afterlives

José Gálvez (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin): „Mainstream Heterochronies“? Temporal dimensions of EDM-festivals

Sam Lebovic (George Mason University): Satellites of Love: Simultaneity, Globality, and the Audio-Visual in Sixties Counterculture

Joe Perry (Georgia State University): Two, Three, Many Chronologies? Berlin Love Parade, 1996

Concluding Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Underground Adventures: Tem-*

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