

Time. On the temporality of culture

43rd Congress of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (dgv)

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Call for Papers

Culture and time are inseparably connected. Culture changes over time and simultaneously structures ideas of temporality. The storage and transmission of knowledge over long periods of time organizes cultural actions, identities and their transformations. It is these very practices that make it possible for individuals to position themselves in relation to the world, the past and the future, in relation to cultural processes and social conventions. The temporality of culture is a fundamental premise of empirical-ethnographic and historically oriented cultural studies research.

From the point of view of empirical cultural studies, time is a fundamental achievement in terms of cultural ordering and – unlike in other disciplines – not a pre-existing physical quantity that precedes culture.

Temporality underpins the view of culture as a fundamentally historical phenomenon. Temporal action and knowledge are always specific to space and social conditions. The perception and meaning of time in everyday culture is thus subject to constant change and socio-cultural, political, spatial, economic or biographical differentiations. Continuities but also conflicts between divergent time practices form individual and collective identities in complex interactions with spatial and social categories. Cultures of time give societies their rhythm: policies of remembering and practices of the future, ideas of age and life course events, the different tempi of current worlds of work, the economy, consumption and leisure. Last but not least, temporal cycles also have an economic dimension of value creation, both in working hours and in leisure time.

Currently, various developments illustrate the great importance of retrotopias and revisions of the past on the one hand and utopias, visions of sustainability and future-oriented action on the other. Climate change, reactionary political systems or the “heritage boom”: Numerous global conflicts of the Anthropocene are unfolding along opposing cultural evaluations of continuity and change, of tradition and modernity, of euphoria about progress and fears of the future, of cyclical and linear models of time, of transience and loss. The major thrusts towards individualization of the 20th and 21st centuries and the neoliberal transformation of social systems and working environments have led to a pluralization of temporal orders, historical memory cultures, practices of the future and established regimes of time.

The interest in temporality, the development and becoming of contemporary everyday worlds is a central starting point for European ethnological research. Thus, at the beginning of the 19th century, not only did the first ethnographic epistemology emerge in the discussion of the temporality of cultural phenomena – and here primarily continuities and traditions – but also a broad public awareness of the growing importance of regimes of time in the emerging industrial world. Not least because of its subject-specific interest in traditions and transformations, Empirical Cultural Studies / Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology, as a historically based discipline with a contemporary orientation, has special theoretical and methodological competence in the study of systems of temporal order which can, for example, empirically reflect the theses of the fall of the time regime of modernity (Assmann 2013).

Concepts and perceptions of time are simultaneously of long duration as well as highly dynamic, partly universal and yet always localized. The perspective “time” opens up views of phenomena of compression, acceleration and deceleration as well as resonances and dissociations in macro- and microsocial contexts. The penetration of individual and collective life worlds through rhythmization and the attribution of value forms a focus here. Time as a cultural achievement of order does not merely remain an immaterial quantity, but it is also manifested in a variety of ways in the materiality of culture. The development of calendars and clocks, for example, also refers to knowledge of the natural environment (climate periods, vegetation cycles, moon phases). Through the establishment of techniques of measuring and comparing, time regimes in their cultural significance are increasingly developing power as the pace-setters of global worlds. Measuring and controlling time are important cultural techniques in everyday life. Recent digital regimes are currently de-chronologizing many of these traditional patterns and are establishing new (a-)synchronicities, for example of work and leisure, the local and the global.

Fashions and trends offer everyday rhythms and biographical orientation by structuring cultures of entertainment and pleasure, of physicality, but also of clothing and nutrition. The “spirit of the times” assigns value and significance to cultural phenomena from historical-social contexts and is itself constantly at the center of the question of a “good” and “contemporary” life – for example when it comes to questions of acceleration and the perceived temporal condensation of our everyday lives, of leisure and idleness or the notion of “wasting time”. Thus, there is a wide gap between the self-determined and the heteronomous character of temporal regimes, which fundamentally forms historical and contemporary identities, especially in areas such as work and leisure cultures with their forms and formats of self-organization and self-optimization, but also in everyday life such as in mealtime systems and consumption.

Temporal action takes place in the present, but it is often directed – for example in festivals and rituals – towards the past or the future and thus implies planning and hoping as well as remembering and forgetting. The political and religious recourse to history establishes past events which reach into the present and fundamentally shape it and assign value to it – not least through the materiality of culture, for instance in retro, vintage or collection practices. The boom of Cultural Heritage falls under these active contemporary practices just as much as the protests of the “Fridays for Future” movement that are directed towards a future worth living or practices of sustainability, for example in the areas of food and agriculture. It is precisely the awareness of the time that is inherent to resources and the narratives of transience and finiteness that form a *basso ostinato* of social debates on the Anthropocene, which fundamentally questions global cultures of production and consumption in the face of a fragile future.

As powerful categories of cultural order, time is thus at the center of competing orders of knowledge and values and is thus itself an object of cultural studies knowledge production. Especially the seemingly infinite possibilities of the digital storage of knowledge have led to a paradigm shift in the visibility of the past in recent decades. Against the background of these increasing synchronicities of historical representations, utopias and dystopias, cultural-historical museums in particular are facing enormous challenges in the midst of a growing political and national-cultural appropriation of history. Temporality as a structuring condition becomes apparent in the museums through practices of collecting and curating, telling and remembering, but also in the context of public history and citizen science, but beyond this, it calls for an ongoing debate at the level of methodological discussions as well as in terms of the research process.

Due to recent events

In times of crisis, unknown and unpredictable developments break up established and familiar structures; everyday routines, security systems and material conditions of existence lose their basis; political, economic and sociocultural systems re-form. Temporal orders are also undergoing massive shifts, as is evident in the current Covid-19 crisis: Depending on the life context, time is limited or delimited, personal and societal plans lose their binding force or take on special urgency, relations between time and space need to be redefined, new (in)simultaneities arise and existing ones are intensified. Social relationships are partially detached from local points of reference and are increasingly bound to knowledge about and the availability of technical equipment. The consequences of restrictions on the one hand and free spaces on the other are both a loss of trust and reliability as well as increased hopes for a future with solidary processes of communalization. Dystopian and utopian ideas overlap and illustrate the contradictions and openness of the current challenges.

A cultural-scientific, theoretically informed examination of time and the temporality of culture seems more urgent than ever, especially in view of the global pandemic with its political, social and economic upheavals.

Contributions and formats

Under the title “Time. On the temporality of culture”, the 43rd Congress of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (dgv) would like to stimulate a deeper examination of time as a fundamental category in the formation and study of contemporary and historical cultures. We welcome theoretical as well as empirical and practice-oriented contributions that discuss the significance of time as a cultural category of order and the epistemological framework of current and historical processes of transformation in a manner that is focused on the present, the past or in a comparative manner. The 2021 dgv congress offers interested parties three different formats for participation:

Plenary contributions: Individual contributions of about 30 minutes in a plenary session with subsequent discussion. The selection will be made by the congress organizers from the submissions. In addition, direct inquiries will be sent to individual experts.

Sections: Parallel two-hour sessions, usually consisting of three thematically related individual presentations (each lasting about 20 minutes, followed by a discussion). The grouping of the talks will be determined by the congress organizers.

Panels: Parallel two-hour sessions with an overarching theme. Panels with a maximum of five thematically related individual talks (including introduction, comments, resumes, etc.) are proposed by a panel leader. The joint abstract includes the title and brief abstract of all individual panel contributions as well as the names and short CVs of the panel participants.

Innovative and experimental formats: In addition to these classic forms of presentation, there will also be space for individual formats which, for example, facilitate new or unusual didactic methods or interactive work.

Furthermore, the Regensburg Congress intends to continue the tradition of **workshops** related to research practice and disciplinary policy that was established at previous congresses. Topics may include questions of research ethics, methodology, digitization practices, etc.

The **student panel**, which will offer various possibilities to discuss current student research and projects, will also play an important role.

Organizational notes

When submitting your abstract, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- In addition to a short summary, the abstracts must contain information about the research question and the empirical basis respectively provide information about the context in which the work originated, including details of existing publications, the state of research already conducted or initial results where applicable.
- Naturally, research presentations must be new and previously unpublished.
- We assume willingness to publish the contribution after the congress!
- Contributions can be presented and published in German or English.
- Please provide current contact details; for panel proposals, both of the responsible organizers as well as **all contributors!**
- Abstracts must not exceed 2,500 characters (including spaces) for individual presentations and 5,000 for panels.
- Submissions can only be made using the form provided on the dgv website: <https://www.d-g-v.de/call-for-papers/>
- Please address any queries to: geschaeftsstelle@d-g-v.de
- The closing date for entries is **August 31, 2020**.

In order to facilitate the selection process and make it transparent, all applicants are strongly encouraged to follow these guidelines. The executive and the main committee will select the entries and determine the program at their joint meeting with representatives of the local host in autumn 2020. Notification of acceptance or rejection will be given in December 2020.