

Entangled Histories Alternative Descriptions (Graz, 7–9 Dec 23)

Universität Graz, Meerscheinschlössl, Dec 7–09, 2023

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Entangled Histories Alternative Descriptions of Modernities and the Contemporary in History and Self-Conception.

Annual Conference Center for Contemporary Art, University of Graz, in cooperation with the Department of Arts and Musicology, University of Graz, and the Strange Tools Research Lab, University of Cincinnati.

Organizers:

Sabine Flach, Kris Holland, Katrin Nahidi, Elisabeth Zuparic-Bernhard

In recent years, global art history, postcolonial and poststructuralist theory contributed to a self-reflexive diversification of art historical endeavors. These repercussions enabled a discursive shift of earlier conceptions of Modernisms, Modernities, and their inherent epistemological violence, calling for new concepts and redefinitions of terms.

Modernism is often defined as a specific mode of thinking characterized by the rejection of the certainties of Enlightenment thinking and religious belief. Modernity describes a modern way of living determined by the industrial world, urbanization, and media technologies. Modern art is characterized by abstraction, montage, collage, non-linear narratives, stream of consciousness as well as the use of media technologies. In the historical analysis of Modernities, emphasis is placed on the notion of 'epochal thresholds' (Cornelia Klinger, 1995) that have characterized Modernities to the present and that have been foundational to the 'cascades of modernization' (Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, 2002). Such an orientation, in fact, conditions any critical view on the aesthetic category of the "Modern" as much as the "Contemporary" in art. Methodologically, both critical engagement with the discipline and addressing its various historical, theoretical, and artistic transformations are of significance; requiring a reconfigured notion of theory.

There have been historical parallels to this notion of reconfiguring the theory of the 'Modern' since the end of the eighteenth century. For example, it has stood for epistemological approaches to objects that cannot be grasped via traditional methods of observation or categories of analysis and hence necessitate new ways of seeing and forms of access (one might think, for instance, of the discipline of philosophical aesthetics founded by A. G. Baumgarten in 1750, as well as of new forms of aesthetic theorization).

Furthermore, in his essay 'The West and the Rest – Discourse and Power,' Stuart Hall explores the role societies outside Europe played in this process. He examines how an idea of "the West and

the Rest” was constituted; how relations between Western and non-Western societies came to be represented. Hall writes “the West” is no longer only in Europe, and not all of Europe is in “the West.” The historian John Roberts has remarked that “Europeans have long been unsure about where Europe ‘ends’ in the East. In the West and to the South, the sea provides a splendid marker ... but to the East, the plains roll on and on and the horizon is awfully remote” (Roberts, 1985, p. 149). Eastern Europe doesn’t (doesn’t yet? never did?) belong properly to “the West”; whereas the United States, which is not in Europe, definitely does. These days, technologically speaking, Japan is “Western,” though, on our mental map, it is about as far “East” as you can get. By comparison, much of Latin America, which is in the Western hemisphere, belongs economically to the ‘Third World’, which is struggling to catch up with “the West.” Hall states that ‘the West’ is more an idea than a geographical fact, therefore, ‘the West’ is a historical not a geographical construct. He concludes that the term’s meaning is virtually identical to ‘modern.’

Additionally, the curator Okwui Enwezor takes a critical stance on the notion of proximity to “the West” as the paradigmatic interpretation of non-Western Modernisms since this idea contributes to the depoliticization and decontextualization of art production. Instead, Enwezor suggests a “postcolonial response” to the emerging fields of global Modernisms because, “in its discursive proximity to Western modes of thought, postcolonial theory transforms this dissent into an enabling agent of historical transformation and thus is able to expose certain Western epistemological limits and contradictions.” (Okwui Enwezor, *Manifesta Journal*, 2002, p. 113) This observation leads to broader questions: How can we redefine concepts of Modernities and Modernisms? How can one write Modernities histories while being aware of “The darker Side of Modernity” (Walter D. Mignolo, 2011) such as colonialism, imperialism, and universality? The foundational notion of Western Modernity as the universal norm rests on the problematic and paradigmatic presupposition that “the Modern is just a synonym for the West,” which often understands Modernity as the intellectual property of enlightened Europe. This means for non-Western countries, “to become modern, it is still said, or today to become postmodern, is to act like the West,” as Timothy Mitchell explains. (Mitchell, 2001, p. 1.)

In the face of globalization, we must rethink concepts of Modernities; the ‘classical’ and any static conceptualization of Modernity is insufficient for a more in-depth study of Modern art histories. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on theoretical concepts of Modernities, which may help us consider the complexity and multitude of Modern and Contemporary Art and liberate its artistic expression from constant comparison and tropes of imitation and belatedness.

These are the perspectives which frame the conference “‘Entangled Histories’ - Alternative Descriptions of Modernity and the Contemporary in History and Self-Conception.”

We would like to examine discursive shifts, historical experiences, and alternative descriptions of Modernisms and Modernities. In addition, the conference seeks to put into play different forms and functions of theories about art that create tensions with one another – not least in terms of the distinctions established concerning other academic subjects such as philosophy, cultural studies, visual studies, etc. Such a historical perspective on theory must not, however, exhaust itself in routines of historiography, but rather be perceived as a problem and theoretical task of its own.

PROGRAM

7.12.2023 (Meerscheinschlössl, Festsaal, Mozartgasse 3, 8010 Graz)

15:00-15:30: Welcome

PANEL 1: Rethinking the Canon/Modernism Revisited (Moderation: Katrin Nahidi)

15:30-16:00: Kristopher Holland: Machines, Engines, Velocities, and Noir: The Strangest of Tools

16:00-16:30: Julia Allerstorfer: Primitivism and Austrian Expressionism

16:30-17:00 Sabine Flach: Internationality and Ethnicity. Geographical networks and art between Black Atlantic and Black Mediterranean

17:00-17:30 Discussion

17:30-18:00 Coffee break

18:00-18:15: Kristopher Holland Introduction to Keynote

17:15-18:00: Keynote – Alva Noë: Art and Entanglement

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8.12.2023 (Meerscheinschlössl, Festsaal, Mozartgasse 3, 8010 Graz)

PANEL 2: Colonialism and Diasporic Aesthetics (Moderation: Elisabeth Župarić-Bernhard)

10:00-10:30: Peju Layiwola: Revisiting Questions of Ownership of Benin Looted Artifacts

10:30-11:00: Katharina Wiedlack: Entangled Colonialities: 'conjunctual' Russian and American imperialism in early 20th Century Alaska

11:00-11:20 Discussion

11:20-11:50: Coffee break

11:50-12:20: Simone Wille: Postwar print culture in Central Europe: South Asian artists' mobility across dividing lines

12:20-12:50: Katrin Nahidi: Landscapes of Petromodernity in Iranian Art

12:50-13:10: Discussion

13:10-14:30 Lunch break

PANEL 3: Mediterranean Trading Zones (Moderation: Julia Robin)

14:30-15:00 Robert Felfe: Trade, ravages, curiosity and the exchange of sensations in 17th century painting

15:00-15:30 Steffen Schneider: Entangles (his)stories: Two novels about Tangier-Barcelona and their reflections on Mediterranean modernities.

15:30-16:00: Florian Bieber: Island Life. Perspectives on Modernity from Hvar

16:00-16:30 Discussion

16:30-17:00 Coffee break

17:00-17:15: Katrin Nahidi: Introduction to Keynote

17:15-18:00: Keynote – Monica Juneja: Shared horizons and resonant microhistories – Unravelling the relational geographies of artistic modernism

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9.12.2023 (Meerscheinschlössl, Festsaal, Mozartgasse 3, 8010 Graz)

9:30-10:00 Viewing of Elisabeth Schmirl's "Because There Are So Many," Location: Unicorn, Conference Deck, Schubertstraße 6a, Startup Centre of the University of Graz (Unicorn)

10:30-11:00: Judith Laister und Gerald Lamprecht: „Because there are so many“. An Art and Memory Project of the University of Graz

Panel 4: Queer/Gender Self-Conceptions (Moderation: Laura Koblischek)

11:00-11:30: Jacqueline Francis: The Essence of Things

11:30-11:50 Discussion

11:50-13:00 Lunch break

13:00-13:30: Charlotte Bank: Undoing Modernity? Queer Subjectivities as a Cross-Temporal Dialogue in Contemporary Art from the MENASA Region

13:30-14:00: Renate Hansen-Kokoruš: Entangled self-projections and traumata in Croatian playwrights today: Espi Tomićić

14:00-14:20: Discussion

14:20-14:50 Closing Remarks

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With the friendly support of:

- University of Graz: Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans Office of the Faculty of Humanities, International Relations Office, PostDoc Office
- Land Steiermark: Economy, Tourism, Science and Research; Referat Protokoll und Auszeichnungen
- Stadt Graz
- Federal Ministry Republic of Austria: European and International Affairs
- ÖFG Österreichische Forschungsgemeinschaft

Reference:

CONF: Entangled Histories Alternative Descriptions (Graz, 7-9 Dec 23). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 28, 2023 (accessed Jun 17, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40715>>.