

What Comes After? The Making and Unmaking of the “Post-Age”

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Abstracts of the Papers

Philipp Felsch

The Post-Traumatic Age: Reflections on an Emerging Paradigm

Since the 1980s, the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has gained astounding proliferation – applying to ever more cases of “traumatic” experience while transforming from a narrow psychiatric into a general cultural currency. Today, trauma has become an omnipresent phenomenon – whether as political claim in contemporary culture wars, as paradigm of human rights policies, or as the predominant narrative model in contemporary fiction. In my talk, I will focus on the inherent temporality of trauma. By inscribing posteriority on the level of individual – or collective – experience, trauma seems to be the symptomatic pathology of posthistoric societies.

Eva Geulen

The Post-Digital

Until recently, the self-image of modernity was marked by powerful concepts emphasizing processuality (modernization, acceleration, aestheticization, scientification, or digitalization). Most of these concepts have been put out of service. Meanwhile, we embrace notions like the “post-digital” and have gotten used to the fact that we live in a post-digital society, even though its implementation is still pending in certain areas (for instance in the German health care system). This paper addresses the question of what is unique about the prefix “post” in “post-digital” and what it has in common with its other occurrences (like in “postmodernity” or “poststructuralism”).

Boris Groys

After Dialectics: Alexandre Kojève on the Human Form

In his “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Hegel,” Alexandre Kojève claims that after the end of the history of liberation the work of negativity will still continue. The human individuals will subject their life to certain self-invented forms while pursuing the goal of defining themselves in their relationship to the others. The production of equality will be substituted by the production of differences. One can see this work of negativity operating in contemporary identity politics.

Bonnie Honig

„We are gathered here today“ – On the paradoxical temporalities of J. L. Austin's Performatives, or: Coming Full Circle

This paper adopts the nearly lost perspective of the concept of performativity as inaugural speech-action (J.L Austin, *How to do Things with Words*) and returns to Eve Sedgwick’s contribution to it: deformativity. “Deformativity” is a specific kind of speech act that is sexually shaming, one whose aim it is to control the spread of gender-queerness lest it catch on. Sedgwick refers to “deformatives” as “uniquely contagious.” If so, we may have something to learn from them. Might contagion also be a democratic concept? A way to think about how and why and how people are drawn in to join others in actions in concert that are performatively mobilizing, but not deformatively minoritizing? We know from Nietzsche,

Austin, Derrida, and Arendt that performativity must come full circle before it can be secure. The “we” that anchors the performative sentence is actually birthed by it, coming full circle. Might this mean that for democracy to spread further and take hold, it will need a certain virality?

Axel Honneth

Hegel's End of Art

The central question that Hegel's thesis on the “end of art” poses is whether we can imagine a further progress of art that can be derived from Hegel's own account of true art internally. Leaving aside the many queries concerning the eurocentrism and logocentrism of Hegel's theory of art, this paper will therefore focus on the possibilities his account offers on its own terms for developing a perspective on a new, post-Romantic art. I will differentiate between two such possibilities, the first of which I will call “humanist”, the second of which I will call “negativist”. Both alternatives are meant to be not only in agreement with Hegel's own ideas on the tasks of art, but also to be possible descriptions of what happened to art after its proclaimed end. In the last step of my lecture, I will speculate on the question which of the two alternatives might fit better to the historical development of art after Hegel.

Eva Illouz

Do We Live in a Post-romantic Age?

In an interview he gave to the magazine *Le Point*, French writer Michel Houellebecq was asked if he still believed in love. Michel Houellebecq answered: “People believe in it. And I believe in it too (...). In fact, people believe in it today much more than during my childhood.” For Houellebecq, love is a matter of belief and such belief remained intact, unchanged and unaffected by the profound technological and political changes undergone by the romantic bond. Whence the question raised by this paper: Have we moved or not to a post-romantic era? If yes, what is the nature of the “post”? When do we know we have moved from one era to another?

Albrecht Koschorke

After Liberalism

It all has turned out differently. Instead of an “end-point of mankind's ideological evolution” and the “universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Francis Fukuyama), a post-liberal era is being proclaimed. What is remarkable here is that this announcement is coming from different sides—made by leftist critics of representative democracy as well as by Vladimir Putin in his neo-imperialist rants. My interest, though, is mainly directed at the temporal-logical implications of the term “post-liberal.” Within the climate of post-temporality that increasingly shaped the ideological premises of the 20th and 21st centuries, the discourse of a post-liberal era carries particular weight. As an initially progressive and inclusive worldview, liberalism entails the idea of an open future. The epithet “post-liberal,” in contrast, implies a *retrospective view at the future of European modernity*. My contribution will focus on the narrative elaboration of this analeptic-proleptic figure of speech.

Christoph Menke

Towards a Critique of Posteriority [Nachträglichkeit]

Posteriority [Nachträglichkeit] is the temporal (and logical or modal) property of a present for which it is essential that it comes afterwards (or late: always too late). When it comes afterwards, however, something precedes it. Thus, the present that understands itself as

posterior (as “post-”) presupposes something prior to it. It is presupposing [or pre-supposing: *voraussetzend*] in a strong sense: The present that is posterior posits something as prior to it that, although it is posited, is posited as – if it were – non-positated: irrecoverably prior, always already past, unattainably pre-given.

I want to ask in my talk how this logic is to be understood. My guess is that, on closer examination, two different understandings are to be distinguished (hence the term “critique” in the title). First, a logic of naturalization – the antecedent is like a natural given to whose power we must submit. And secondly a logic of transcendence – the antecedent is a transcending power that liberates us from our given identities. These are two ways of understanding finitude (for posteriority means finitude: that one lags behind oneself, infinitely).

Melanie Möller

Post hominum memoriam, or What Would It Be Like to Live in Post-Antiquity?

The Latin phrase “post hominum memoriam” demonstrates the paradox of any type of post-existence in a nutshell: How can something lie beyond memory, while still being part of it? And what happened before, that is, how and when did it enter the palace of memoria? In the light of such linguistic findings, I will argue that antiquity is its own postmodernity – and ask the question why it is regarded as a period within a teleological trajectory that is deemed to be overcome over and over again (a view even held by Hans Blumenberg). A period whose shadows simply cannot be shaken off – not even with the instruments of moral superiority.

Robert Pippin

The Culmination: Heidegger, Hegel, and the Fate of Philosophy

Throughout his long career, Heidegger frequently claimed that Hegel’s philosophy was the “culmination” (Vollendung) of the Western philosophical tradition begun by Plato and Aristotle. The heart of that tradition was metaphysics, and although the most basic question of that tradition was taken to be “what is the meaning of being qua being,” in reality this question had never been properly addressed; indeed it had been “forgotten.” The consequences of this could be seen in the eventual impossibility of any continuation of the tradition, that the tradition had ended in a dead-end with Hegel. The question posed in this paper is whether Heidegger’s claim has any merit. I argue that, understood properly, it does.

Martin Puchner

Imperfect Timing: On Reading and Writing in a Post-diluvian Age

When the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (685-631 BCE) found clay tablets inscribed with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, he considered this text so old that it must have come “from before the flood.” Thus begins the story of literature, one in which latecomers are confronted with the remnants of earlier civilizations. This history was on my mind during a recent trip to Iraq, where I was able to visit sites associated with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Uruk) and Ashurbanipal (Nineveh/Mosul) and learn how different groups of cultural and political activists use this ancient text for the purpose of rebuilding their war-torn country. I will use this case study for a reflection on timeliness in cultural history.

Jini Kim Watson

Dead Communists and the Making of the Post-Cold War

This paper interrogates the political, historical and ideological makings of the “post-Cold War” era in the Asia Pacific. While many have termed our current moment of heightened geopolitical aggression a “new Cold War,” I am interested in exploring the ways the (old)

Cold War remains congealed in our present via the largely unaddressed legacy of anti-communist violence in U.S.-allied states in Asia—a region where the Cold War violently intersected with decolonization. I approach this question through the temporal logic of transitional justice which, as David Scott observes, attempts to draw a line between an illiberal past and a liberalizing present. Thinking through the interlinked formulations of postcolonialism, post-authoritarianism and post-Cold War, I argue that the figure of dead—or perhaps undead communist—troubles the time of the post-Cold War, allowing the bipolar conflict to leak into and subtend the supposed post-transition, “end-of-history” liberal order.