

EDITORIAL 1

THE GAME OF THE CONCEPTS

An ambitious effort to establish historical concepts that would ‘surpass’ the time and temporal contexts is doomed in the very attempt. As soon as one takes a closer look at the temporal conditions surrounding the concepts, their meanings show the ambiguity in themselves. In this number of *Redescriptions*, the concepts of empire and revolution in particular, analysed in the articles by Helge Jordheim (*Conceptual history between Chronos and Kairos – the case of “empire”*) and Artemy Magun (*The post-Communist Revolution in Russia and the Genesis of Representative Democracy*), are bound together by the questions of temporal ambiguity.

Jordheim approaches the issues of Chronos and Kairos, and more accurately, the question of historical moment, by looking at the temporal conditions of Reinhart’s Koselleck’s conceptual history. When relating the matters to John Pocock’s description of the moment in “Machiavellian moment”, Jordheim notices the historical moment to appear first as a certain temporal consciousness, and secondly, as a rhetorically constituted conception. This background is applied to reading conceptual history with the question whether it is at all possible to look at the history of social and political concepts without the idea of the historical moment.

Jordheim continues by arguing that in fact, we should simultaneously look at both the temporal and the rhetorical perspectives. In a similar manner, we should simultaneously notify the meaning of the temporal figures of chronos and kairos, as they exist in the spheres of real events and history, language and rhetorics, speech and silence.

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As his 'case', Jordheim draws examples from the ways in which political events are referred to in international political discourse in the contemporary debate between Niall Ferguson and Robert Kagan, in the case of 'empire'.

The rhetorics of time and the question of temporality are also apparent in Artemy Magun's article, as he looks into the conception of revolution. He pays attention to the historical concepts of re-revolution and re-representation as something in which the prefix *re* is a sign of an internal turning point of events in societies that are in a process of change. The temporality is here also related to the question of the historical moment posed by Jordheim, bound together in the mixture of real historical events, such as the case of Post-communist transformation process in Russia. The crossing point between utopian future and present rupture forms the puzzle that is apparent in the prefix '*re*'. Magun points out how the Russian soviets, as an attempt to constitute sovereign representative bodies, ended up in a disaster. The formalist ideal of representative democracy tends to forget the legitimacy that is derived from revolution. Simultaneously, it forgets the political subject, and the author points out the claim that democracy and representation do not always go hand in hand.

Till Hanisch's "*Using Relevance and Reception within a Contextualist Approach*" looks at the differences between the present and the past, the historical and the present context – on the linguistic level. The problem between the intended meaning of the text and the reception analysis is also that of the differences of contexts. The intended meaning is always loaded with hypotheses, and the problem of temporal context and historical difference cannot be overcome by a complete understanding of the author's intentions. The question of course is, should it? For Quentin Skinner, the answer is placing any text in the correct argumentative context.

The problem that Hanisch points to here, is not merely a question between temporal differences, it is also a question of whether the author's intentions are in any case fully comprehensible. In most cases the intentions are not even significant, if one wishes to analyse the influences of the texts. In his discussion, Hanisch goes through the relevance theory by Dan Sperber and Deirde Wilson, and takes the emphasis from the textual level to that of the reception and the reader. Hanisch intends to show ways in which the historical meaning of a text is constituted through its reference to concepts and intertexts. In

this, he provides an interesting, yet short analysis on both Spinoza's notion of sovereignty, and a passage from Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* (XI, chapter 6).

Antke Engel does not depart from temporal difference, but from a "queer aporia of difference" as effects of expressing and recognising sexual difference socially. She begins with the Foucauldian perspective, which claims that the regulation of sexuality is a form of normalization and integration. Engel aims at challenging the "*Heteronormativity of Tolerance Pluralism*", and she pays special attention to the concept of articulation. The concept of articulation, as approached by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, produced a term in social transformation. Engel finds a link between the social identities and the social change, and she intends to articulate non-normative sexualities and genders that are not subsumed to the dominances in social order. Engel argues around ways in which different perspectives, such as those of tolerance or projective model of integration, take different turns and portray some of the conceptual sensitivity that is required in articulating the question of difference. The difficulty of self-representation and the representation of the 'other', is connected to the questions of how to argue / speak for the 'others' without the distance of 'othering', and that is, in the end, also a question of political and conceptual struggle.

The rhetorics of and around historical concepts depends strongly on the side of the game one takes. To find a conception of history that would take into account all the paradoxes of time would be *most innovative in a political and historical sense*. Is it possible to establish an understanding of history that takes into account the temporal *and* spatial turning points, and looks at historical time that is constituted by its diachronies as well as its synchronies? Some of the articles in this volume are notable in pointing out the temporal knots that are embedded in every concept. The game reminds me of the game of the concept of history pointed out by Walter Benjamin in his first Thesis on the concept of history (1940).¹ Benjamin shows how the theological idea of time, especially the Christian eschatological variation, is dressed in the capes of numerous philosophies. When the capes are removed, the one which remains on stage is the solvent of the game.

The move towards historical contingency has been happening for some time already. According to Benjamin's view, the 'dwarf' under the chess table is supposed to assure that the materialist puppet will

win the game (1940: I). This dwarf brings contingency and potential disruptions into history, like the mirror that can be turned around a countless number of times. The primus motor here is apparent in the guise of theology. The game and the intertexts in this metaphor Benjamin poses, confuse the positions between the writer and the reader, intention and the reception, and make it possible to rename the opponents in future games. In other words, he brings the ironic figure of Kairos into the scene of the struggle for the true concept of history.

Today, historical materialism is not the first, nor the possible option to win the game. Instead, liberalist democracy is more and more often put into the scene as a puppet of being the apparent leader of the contemporary politics. However, who is the dwarf under the table, what is the matter that counts in the final scene providing the leading candidate of political history? The struggle for the 'truth' between the factual historical events and their interpretations appears as differences in understanding the conceptual changes. The theological conception of history, which separates the divine and the eternal from the human and the finite time is not that far away from the picture nowadays, it appears as ever, in the forms of determinism. Those on stage in this game are the politicians, whether they are considered professional or academic, orthodox, or unorthodox actors. The debate on the meaning of political and historical concepts is 'on'. The solver of the game is not that important, the struggle is, and the game should go on.

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NOTES

1. This reference emerged from Benjamin's daily chess parties with Bertolt Brecht in Denmark. Each time, the game interrupted his daily writing praxis. The original idea of the game, however, stems from Edgar Allan Poe's *Maelzel's Chess Player*.