

BOOK REVIEWS

Time and Culture/Temps et culture. Selected papers presented at the International Society for Cultural History (ISCH) Conference organised in September 2015 at the University of Bucharest, eds. Ecaterina Lung, Étienne Bourdon, Christopher Heath, Laurence Shee, Cecile Vallée, Editura Universității din București, 2017, 488 pp.

Vladimir Crețulescu*

“**T**ime and Culture/Temps et culture” is a collective work on the cultural construction of time which comprises a selection of articles presented at the International Society for Cultural History (ISCH) International Conference organized in the fall of 2015 at the University of Bucharest.

The overarching theme of the volume in question coincides with that of the conference talks: namely, the tome is concerned with the socio-cultural construction and construction of time and of temporality. As outlined in Étienne Bourdon’s introductory study, this collective work pleads against the reification of time as an objective, unitary, homogeneous, measurable reality, emphasizing instead its rootedness in individual consciousness. According to this view time, in fact, has no objective existence. It only exists within our individual minds. *In extremis*, one can say that we each have, and make, our own, subjective, private regime of temporality. Consequently, it is only by way of shared cultural convention that individuals reach a common understanding of the flow of time, within a given society. In this sense, time *is*, effectively, a component of culture. This fundamental assumption underpins the thirty-four case studies assembled in this bilingual, English / French-language tome.

The case studies comprised in the volume are grouped under four thematic headings. Under the first heading, entitled “Time, Past and the Writing of History”, are gathered several case studies on the cultural construction of historical time in various societies. In her paper on the “Time of the King” Daniela Zaharia examines the way in which the mythical past was construed as historical in ancient China. Ecaterina Lung looks at how chronology was used as a vector of political interests in the historical writings of late European antiquity and of the early Middle Ages. In a similar vein, Christopher Heath explores the shifting boundary between history, memory and myth in his case study on the origins of the

* PhD, Associate Researcher CEREFREA Villa Noël; e-mail: vladimir_cretulescu@yahoo.com

Lombards, as featured in medieval historical writings. Rosa María Spinoso Arcocha's paper on the chronicles of the conquest of Mexico brings to the fore the prospective quality of certain historical writings, by demonstrating how the aforementioned chronicles' projections of the future have become self-fulfilling prophecies. Fernanda Núñez Becerra's analysis of the XVIth century *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* highlights the text's dual function: that of controlling and morally regulating the sexual behavior of young Spanish women, and that of erasing any historical memory of the Pre-Colombian Americas. Giorgio Lucaroni examines the Italian fascists' attempt to construct a counter-history which would ground Mussolini's regime in Italy's modern historical mythology (the Roman origins, the *Risorgimento*, etc.), while simultaneously framing the "fascist revolution" as the final, providential destination of Italian history. Finally, María Cristina Álvarez González showcases how contemporary historiography can contribute to the historicization of the present, in her study on Polish historical writing in the waning years of the communist regime (1967-1991).

The second heading of the volume is concerned with the interlocking themes of "Time, Memory and Identity". Ioan Pânzaru uses Aristotle's interpretation of the olfactory sense as a basis for his overview of the cultural understandings and use of incenses, spices and foods from the Middle Ages up to the XIXth century, with a particular emphasis on the complex interplay of societal pressures, politics and religion which shaped the Europeans' perspective on spices during the Reformation. Monica Adriana Ionescu makes use of phenomenological hermeneutics in her comparative analysis of the interplay of memory and time, as featured in Augustine's *Confessions* and in Marcel Proust's novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. Guy Rozat Dupeyron looks at how one might rethink Mexican national identity, so as to adapt the outdated identitary discourse built around the figure of the *Mestizo* to the rough social and political realities of contemporary Mexico. While remaining within the realm of Mexican identity construction, Miriam Hernández Reyna shifts the focus of attention to the Mexican Indian – a figure deprived of any actual historical depth in the official Mexican historical discourse, which instead uses the Indian as a convenient archetypal symbol of Mexican history, situated on a negotiated middle-ground between a supposedly perennial ethno-national identity and today's rhetoric of inter-cultural dialogue and diversity. Next, we "shift gears" from the analysis of written text to that of image-text, as Roxana-Mihaela Coman discusses the significance of paintings as a vector of national identity construction, in the context of the XIXth century emergence of modern Romanian statehood. Tiina Kinnunen and Marianne Junila trace the ever-shifting political focus, and political use, of commemorations of the Finnish Winter War (1939-1940) in contemporary Finland; their analysis of this central theme of Finnish national history constitutes a case-study on the present uses of the past. Nino Chikovani's paper also deals with the politics of memory, namely with the deconstruction of Soviet historical memory in post-Soviet Georgia and with its reconstruction on a new basis, especially as far as *sites of memory* are concerned. Virginia Allen-Terry Sherman takes an altogether different approach to memory: her study is focused on the way in which the authors of culinary memoirs use their personal recollections to anchor their cultural heritage and individual identity within a subjectively reconstructed

temporal framework, specifically through the quasi-Proustian use of taste and smell as a catalyst of emotional memory.

The third heading of the volume deals with the connected issues of “Time, Society and Power”. Luiza-Maria Filimon mobilizes a discourse analysis approach in her case-study on the instrumentalization of a chronopolitical concept – namely, *state of imminence* – to legitimate political action; more specifically, the study focuses on the invocation of a state of imminence by the US in September 2014, to justify military intervention in Syria. Oana Șerban seeks to develop a new aesthetic paradigm for the genealogy of artistic representations, by elaborating, on the one hand, a critique of representation based on Michel Foucault’s concept of *relations of emplacement*, while, on the other hand, deriving from this a modern, Foucauldian museum project, where the museum is understood as a type of *heterotopia*. Graveyards can also be considered as a kind of *heterotopia*, and Anton Carl van Vollenhoven tackles the complex interplay of social temporalities at work in the case of the exhumation of several historical graves in South Africa; the adequacy of the specialized legislation, the importance of safeguarding the deceased’s dignity and the question of the preservation of heritage are all discussed, to the end of proposing a specialized checklist and a reporting format tailor-made for handling similar cases of exhumation. Mervi Löfgren enquires into the matter of elapsed time changing our perspectives on those who had held power, in her study on the life and deeds of A. E. Järvinen, a post-World War Two Finnish artist and leading cultural figure. Beyond the issue of time changing perceptions lies the matter of time itself, of how it can be made tangible and visible. This is the theme of Eva Reme’s foray into turn-of-the-century photography, with her case-study on Norwegian-born Frederick Monsen’s photography of Native Americans from the South-Western United States. Going deep down the conceptual rabbit-hole, Rodica Ivan-Haintz delves into the intricacies of the classical historical definition of art, while also outlining its inherent limitations, in particular its inability to definitively answer that timeless question: what is art? Mihaela Pop’s study takes things further, dealing with the paradigm shift in the artistic conception and representation of time having occurred at the turn of the XXth century, under the influence of such thinkers as Hegel, Einstein, Freud and Henri Bergson; this fundamental conceptual shift is brought into focus by means of a case-study of Brâncuși’s “Avenue of the Heroes” sculptural installation, in Târgu Jiu, Romania. Marina-Cristiana Rotaru shows, in her analysis of Queen Elizabeth II’s portraits, how the evolving public representation of a monarch can become deeply enmeshed with the history and identity of a nation. The article of Frédéric Amao explores the traditional Irish understanding of calendar-time, through an analysis of the four Irish seasonal festivals; Amao’s study takes into account varied factors, such as the possible mythical Celtic connections of the festivals, or the yearly fluctuation in the number of hours of daylight. Finally, we shift our attention from ancient to modern yearly cycles, with Jean-Yves Mollier’s paper on the calendar of the French literary prizes: an annual seasonality built around a complex editors’ marketing strategy with roots dating back to the XIXth century.

The fourth and final heading of the collective work being presented concerns the interplay between “Time, Temporalities and Regimes of Historicity”. Ionuț-Valentin Cucu focuses his attention on several early-modern and modern interpretations and political-

religious uses of Zurvan, the Zoroastrian god of time. Also in the realm of religious conceptions of time, Mihnea Alexandru Mihail deals with the medieval, Christian understanding of time as a synchronicity of several layers of past, present and future, as inferred from a corpus of Central European fresco representations of the Last Judgement, dating from the XIVth and XVth centuries. In the XIXth century, regimes of historicity shift dramatically, from history being oriented by religious mythology to it being driven by the myth of modern progress; this shift is highlighted in Melina Rokai's account of how British travelers in the Balkans constructed time in their travel writings, with a particular focus on their portrayal of Balkan women. The issue of varying temporalities associated with travel is also the heart of Marina Matintytär Bergström's account of the complex associations of timeflow, landscape and collective identity mobilized in the advertisements of the Finnish Railways' 1930s "Ring Tours". Cécile Vallée's article analyses a particular regime of historicity, namely the ideologically mediated fusion of historical past, heroic present and glorious future orchestrated by J.B. Priestly in his weekly "Sunday Postscripts", broadcast by the BBC during the German "Blitz" of 1940. Jonathan Martineau's study approaches temporality from a philosophical angle, by showing how Martin Heidegger's and Henri Bergson's interpretations of time and temporality, though substantially different, both draw their premises from the modern emergence of clock-time as the principal regime of public time. In a similar vein, Emil Potec proposes a phenomenological analysis of how sacred, transcendental time and profane, historical time, which were once merged in a *coincidentia oppositorum*, have come to diverge and even clash in recent times, depriving modern man of any sense of spiritual purpose. Raluca Oancea explores the similarities between sacred time and the regime of temporality expressed in contemporary art and cinematography, starting from a more general definition of artistic time, as engrained in the Time-Based Arts. Andrés González Novoa, Víctor Quintero León and Natalia Pais Álvarez conclude the volume with their critique of linear, uni-dimensional time, seen as nothing more than a virtual social construct inculcated in peoples' minds from an early age, notably through educational policies; the authors outline a counter-proposal for a different, more open educational system: one built around a nonlinear, multi-dimensional understanding of time and based on the pupils' educational demand, not on the educational system's offer.

The collection of articles comprising the volume "Time and Culture / Temps et culture" deals with extremely varied and diverse aspects of the culturally based, socially mediated construal of time and temporality, at different historical moments and in distinct artistic, national or geopolitical contexts. Even though each article touches upon a different facet of this very complex issue, this only serves to underscore the overarching unity of the volume as a whole. The puzzle assembled from the thirty-four individual contributions brings to light a composite, global picture of time in all its unexpected complexity, as a non-linear, polymorphous entity, being ceaselessly molded by individual and collective human experience, always permeable to subjectivity, ever sensitive to context and open to interpretation.

This collection of studies is a valuable asset to any specialist of the social sciences interested in matters pertaining to historical narratives, relative chronology or temporality. That is to say, it would most certainly prove useful to *any social scientist*, full stop.