

InSync: How Synchronization and Mediation Produce Collective Times, Then and Now

Programme and abstracts,
Opening colloquium
Ingeniørenes Hus, August 28-29, 2018

Framework

This interdisciplinary colloquium introduces and discusses the core concerns of the InSync research project: the multiple natures of temporality and their synchronisation by media to form collectivities, historically and presently. The colloquium serves as a starting point for the discussions and joint activities of the project's research team, which will be ongoing from August 2018 to June 2019. It is also the first of a string of academic seminars hosted by InSync and the Norwegian Academy of Sciences (CAS).

Rather than the presentation of finished work, the colloquium prioritises discussion of works in process. The colloquium itself will be audio-recorded and the presentations made available via the project website.

Final programme

August 28

9.00 – 9.10 Welcome, CAS Scientific Director Camilla Serck-Hanssen

9.10 – 9.30: Introductory remarks, Helge Jordheim and Espen Ytreberg

9.30 – 10.15 Geoffrey Bowker: **Life at the Femtosecond**

10.30 – 11.15 Rana Issa: **Synchronic Bibles**

11.15 – 12.00: Lunch

12.00 – 12.45 Thomas Hylland Eriksen: **The eternal and the ephemeral: Temporalities on the Internet**

13.00-13.45 Anne Jerslev: **David Lynch's sense of temporality**

14.00-14.45 Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay: **Syncing Futures**

15.00-15.45 Stefan Tanaka: **Meiji 17 (1884): a Digital History, without Chronology**

16.00-16.45 Helge Jordheim: **Synchronization - A Research Framework**

19.00: Dinner at restaurant Olympen

August 29

9.00 – 09.45 Lucian Hölscher: **Empty and Embodied Time in modern Historiography**

10.00 – 11.45 Leonoor Zuiderveen Borgesius: **Engineering Natures: the Temporalities of Land Reclamation Practices in the Netherlands**

12.00 – 12.45 Staffan Ericson: **The lecture room, 1962 (dark room, antennas, and synchronized space)**

12.45 – 13.45 Lunch

13.45 – 14.30 Jon Inge Faldalen: **Times in and out of sync: How the MPEG compression codec produces collective times of then, now, and soon**

14.45 – 15.30 Einar Wigen: **Epidemic Synchronisations and Turkish Anti-Vaccination Campaigns**

15.45 – 16.30 Espen Ytreberg: **Three arguments on the mediation of historical events**

Abstracts

Leonoor Zuiderveen Borgesius (Oslo):

Engineering Natures: the Temporalities of Land Reclamation Practices in the Netherlands

My PhD-research investigates the enterprises of 20th and 21st century land-reclamation in the Netherlands. Its goal is to identify different orders, experiences and imaginations of time that play a role in the creation of new land from water and particularly in the design and function of those lands. During the first year, I will attempt to explore in what ways the practice of *rewilding*, and the concepts of the 'wild' and 'nature', are mobilized as political arguments and policy measures in the Dutch nature reserve Oostvaardersplassen (OVP). Created in 1968 on reclaimed land, paleo-ecologist and conservationists designed this landscape to mirror Western European ecological circumstances around the Pleistocene (11.700 BC). I argue that the role of temporal organizations within projects of this is fundamental, albeit hardly investigated. I aim to identify how actors within this rewilding project appeal to notions such as 'rhythm', 'lifespan', 'balance', and 'restoration' of the ecosystem.

Geoffrey Bowker (Irvine):

Life at the Femtosecond

Braudel's tripartite temporality (long, medium and short *durée*) has been complemented since the mid 1950s with an accelerated set of events I call life at the femtosecond: this occurs both in business (algorithmic trading on the stock market) and in physics (attempts to understand the world at the Planck length). I argue that this is a genuinely new ontological layer we have inserted into our ways of being in the world: for example, machines collect, sort and feedback data about me at speeds hitherto unimaginable – changing who I am and what it means to be social. During this year, I will explore the origins from the Enlightenment era and the nature of this layer.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (Oslo):

Syncing Futures

How are literary genres from different cultural contexts that deal with futures synced (or in sync) with each other? This talk explores what kind of comparative dialogues may be initiated between different futurisms. It focuses on afrofuturism and kalpavigyan as two modes of processing futures, and their relation with science fiction as genre and science fictionality as mode.

Staffan Ericson (Södertörn)

The lecture room, 1962 (dark room, antennas, and synchronized space) The focal point of this paper is a spatial plan for integrating media technologies in Swedish schools in 1962. This year usually counts as the origin of the national school system, introducing its first curriculum for the education of "active citizens in the society of tomorrow". Its section on "aims and guidelines" declares the need for a reevaluation of the notion of *Bildung*, directed "towards the

future”, acknowledging the acceleration of social change, and the presence of the mass media.

As a follow-up, the Royal Board of Education published a set of guidelines for the spatial and infrastructural arrangement of Swedish classrooms: *The lecture room: design and equipment with regard to the use of audiovisual aids*. This paper will suggest that these plans go beyond supplying educational tools for some predetermined content: the lecture room may be understood as a “logistical media” (cf. Peters 2015); i.e. an ordering of space, time, and people, which displays the imagined conditions of social learning. More specifically, the example illustrates not only the “synchronizing” of modern, future-oriented time with the practices of learning (as in “progressive” pedagogics), but the spatial and technological practices engaged in this process.

The 1962 instructions got particularly detailed when it came to two measures, necessary for realizing the curricula’s aim and method: each lecture room should, first, be equipped for artificial darkening, and, second, provide real-time access to the ethereal networks of broadcasting. The paper relates the stakes of such measures to three academic works, also published during 1962: Marshall McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (on the global village, and the shift between print and electronic culture), Raymond Williams’ *Communications* (on society’s base in processes of communication and learning), and Jürgen Habermas’ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (on the public sphere, as a realm for exercising citizenship). In brief, the proposed “audiovisual aids” seem directed at extending the human sensorium (beyond restrictions of place, time, and scale), and at synchronizing social experience through de-spatialized networks (connecting the school, the family home, the television public).

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Oslo):

The eternal and the ephemeral: Temporalities on the Internet

Paradoxically, the information on the Internet is simultaneously ephemeral and eternal. The former aspect is familiar and often commented upon; in order to remain relevant and to avoid instant oblivion, information on the Web must be updated regularly, and new posts have to be made available frequently, since the competition for time and attention is fierce. The latter aspect, the longevity of information placed on the Web, is less widely known, but felt in unpleasant ways by people who try to leave past errors, insidious rumours or bad publicity behind. Indeed, companies specialising in purging the Web of specific information now exist, and carry out their business with varying degrees of success. This talk will explore this strange duality of the Internet temporal regime, between the instantaneous and the glacial.

Jon Inge Faldalen (Oslo):

Times in and out of sync: How the MPEG compression codec produces collective times of then, now, and soon

How does the digital think and differentiate the still and the moving? In order to describe the increased (compared to film and video) processuality of digital imagenesis, I examine infrastructural similarities between the technical thinking inherent in the digital MPEG compression codec’s *bidirectional predictive (B-*

frame), *intra (I-frame)*, and *predictive (P-frame)* frames, and the tangential thoughts found in the time philosophy and phenomenology of St. Augustine and Edmund Husserl, developing their triads *the present of things past/retention*, *the present of things present/primal impression*, and *the present of things to come/protention* within the framework of Michel Serres' understanding of nonlinear time as *percolation*.

In the digital still *Einstellung*, time passes and doesn't pass. Compression is percolation, where "one flux passes through, while another does not" (Serres). In the digital still *Einstellung*, the past does not necessarily pass in the present. Stillness remains stuck in the filter, while movement passes through. Time itself seems compressed. Repetition through retentive, predictive frames (in MPEG compression) or the refreshing of the same pixels (on all digital screens) are like the wings of a hummingbird: ultra-rapid, invisible movements in order to keep a body still in suspension. These microtemporal, still parts of digital culture – *repeated* and/or *refreshed* – are literally and technologically "updating to remain the same" (Wendy Chun).

Lucian Hölscher (Bochum):

Empty and Embodied Time in modern Historiography

Starting from the concepts of 'empty' and 'embodied' time the idea of my research project is to focus on the concepts of time in modern historiography: how historiographical concepts like 'age' and 'epoch', 'sequence' and 'duration', 'class' and 'nation', 'renaissance' and 'humanism' adopted an internal extension of time, implying a broad variety of synchronicities; how they 'lived together' forming a historiographical cosmos; how historians managed to switch from one structure of historical time to another in the discourse of historical narration and how they established the relation between past, present and future in their works. In the end I hope to present an analysis of representative works of history and their network of structures of time. My main concern will be to find out how much of the essential features of historical works can be understood by uncovering the structures of time employed in them.

Rana Issa (Beirut):

Synchronic Bibles

Whether in the Arab *nahda*, or the other renaissances in India, China or New Zealand, Bible translation has been the paradigmatic global text that has had a tremendous impact on the synchronization of the world's languages. This work of synchronization was not new for the Bible. In the polyglots of the seventeenth century, but also earlier, the Bible was used as the standard measure for interlingual concordances across vastly different linguistic systems. In the nineteenth century, and with the tireless efforts of Protestant missionaries, this role of the Bible as a linguistic synchronizer expanded to many of the world's languages. The missionaries did not translate to synchronize languages. Their intent was the synchronization of religious and moral values, but they did so through following linguistic and translation standards set in Boston or London regardless of the language they worked in and its history. In Arabic, a language that is considered to be one of the secondary languages of the Bible after Latin, Hebrew and Greek, the Protestant lack of serious interest, and erasure of the

language's biblical history, came in tension with the minoritarian position of Christians and Jews amongst Arabs. This tension was productive in how modernity was constituted in language and literature, and how it was experienced by the Christian writers and translators who worked with the missionaries. The local scholars became the first Christians to acquire a general foundational relevance as arbiters of fine literary tastes and linguistic knowledge in Arabic. This tension is the prism that frames my interest in analyzing how translation entangled the world and produced a culture of writing that was deemed modern. The entanglements were comprised of processes of synchronization that constituted modernity as a temporal relation that worked to align the experience not only across a religious, biblical axis, but more lastingly, across a synchronizing linguistic Mean Time. The worldwide adoption of the Gregorian calendar, that organized chronological world time according to the biographical details of Christ's life, signifies a much more pervasive process of synchronization that not only converted the calendar and hoped to convert souls, but also aligned words and concepts into multilingual synonyms and deployed translation as a synchronic vehicle for morality programs and fine prose, but also transformed the value of writing and the discourses that it spawned in Arabic about the world.

Anne Jerslev (Copenhagen):

David Lynch's sense of temporality

By going into a few examples of David Lynch's works in different media, I intend to illuminate the plurality of temporalities which characterizes his total artwork. An analysis of the painting *This Man Was Shot 0.9502 Second Ago* (2004) illuminates the construction of a sense of real-time immersion and the collapse of continuous time in Lynch. The following discussion of *The Straight Story* (1999) and Lynch's recurrent use of the same actors and actresses addresses what I call *textures of ageing* in Lynch's work: the ways in which time inscribes itself on the surface of the human body and calls forth a different temporality. Finally, I turn to the ending of *Twin Peaks - the Return* (2017) in order to argue that even though we definitely reunite with actress Sheryl Lee - firmly grounded in her 25 years older body - the series leaves us in some undefinable collapsed time, which is different from the complete dissolution of time in the painting but also different from the unfolding of time performed aesthetically in textures of ageing.

Helge Jordheim (Oslo):

Synchronization: A Research Framework

In this talk I'll make an attempt at mapping out what – in my opinion – could be entailed in a research framework for studying social and historical time across centuries and contexts, which centers on synchronization. I will start out by discussing some of the theoretical, or may be even philosophical underpinnings, emerging from the works of authors like Reinhart Koselleck, François Hartog, and Aleida Assmann, but also earlier works by Fernand Braudel, Karl Mannheim, and Ernst Bloch. A key idea shared by all these works is that time is inherently multiple – a shift from time to times, or, in a more phenomenological turn of phrase, to temporalities. Then, I will proceed to discuss how in order to account for social and political effects of synchronization, this theoretical concept needs

to be further developed, specified, and embedded in historical contexts by means of ideas about work, practices, tools, and media. And finally, I will share a few reflections on what I consider to be the politics of synchronization, on conflicting and competing synchronization practices locked in a struggle for power and control. If there is still time, I'll give you a couple of examples how I think synchronization practices from earlier moments in history can be evoked to shed light on some of our current temporal predicaments, often discussed in terms of a 'crisis of historical time'.

Stefan Tanaka (Los Angeles):

Meiji 17 (1884): a Digital History, without Chronology

This project returns me, in a sense, to where I was fifteen years ago when I sought to explore the ways that digital media can alter the ways we think historically. My recently completed draft manuscript, *History without chronology*, is the result of recognition that that inquiry requires an examination of various first principles of history. Without the structure of chronological time, we have an opportunity to reconceive the basic components of history: historical data--"facts» and happenings; groupings and categories; connections of objects, people, events, ideas; and narrative.

Einar Wigen (Oslo):

Epidemic Synchronisations and Turkish Anti-Vaccination Campaigns

Epidemics are inherently temporal phenomena, with effects in individual bodies, in families, in schools, in nations and in the global communities. They run their course at different speeds in all these different entities. Being both social and natural phenomena at the same time, the social meaning of epidemics varies between different cultures, languages and societies. Prevention and counter-measures nevertheless require synchronised international efforts. The multitude of actors involved use different vocabularies and have different audiences vis-à-vis whom they have to legitimise their efforts. These audiences - voters, bureaucrats, or power brokers - are differently constituted with differing cultural and linguistic preconditions for accepting particular arguments. In the case of Turkey, the early Republic used mosque sermons to reduce skepticism against medical doctors, and legitimise the expansion of public health programmes. Since then, medical expertise has only to a limited extent had to legitimise its public health practices to constituents outside the profession. Until the Turkish Constitutional Court ruled it unconstitutional in 2015, Turkey's vaccination programme was compulsory for all children. As a consequence of this, the number of un-vaccinated children has increased dramatically. Curiously, opposition to compulsory vaccination seems not to spring from people who would typically be called conservatives, but from secularists informed by the global circulation of anti-vaccination discourses. With Turkish medical profession and technocratic rule having largely obliterated "locally-emergent" resistance to biomedical practices directed against epidemics, new ideological resistance comes through global circulations of anti-vaccination discourses, synchronising not only the biomedical discourses but also that of its opposition.

Espen Ytreberg (Oslo)

Three arguments on the mediation of historical events

Media studies research and historical research have mostly worked with strikingly different understandings of what events are and why they matter. For the former, media events constitute a recent historical category distinct from previous and non-mediated events. For the latter, events are what history itself is made of, together with structures and processes, and irrespective of mediation aspects. A first comment to this state of affairs might be that media studies' conception of the event is too narrow – and that so is the neglect of media's role by historians. A second and more polemical move could be to argue:

- That there is no event without mediation;
- and that consequently there is no (history of the) "media event" as such,
- so that what we can meaningfully explore is a history of changing forms of mediating the event. This could also be conceived of, at least in part, as a history of changing ways of synchronising the event.

These three arguments are intended as theoretical and conceptual groundwork for a book project on the mediation of historical events.

