

The Changing Shape of Time: The Crisis of Exteriorization and the Chronotope

Zeigam Azizov

This text addresses the question of time in relation to the idea of liberation. The notion that modernism, which gave rise to the comprehension of time as liberation, should not be obliterated as a misunderstanding of this problem but needs to be supplemented by new ideas. These ideas derive from the current process of decolonization demands to revise the question of time. The process of decolonization also has its beginning in the work of Frederick Douglass, who despite his critique of Enlightenment's individualism appreciated its orientation towards freedom.¹ Decolonization continues the demand for exteriorization, since in our times most questions related to liberation are recognized yet they are not completely exteriorized. It is due to the fear of the recognition of indeterminacy which produces the crisis of exteriorization. The term exteriorization means bringing forward, concretising, making visible and giving the name to things or events by making them visible- the crisis we experience today is the crisis of exteriorisation -there are many talks about different levels of crisis, but no proper name of what it is. It is also taking into account the exterior world, which cannot be perceived fully, nevertheless is articulated through the experience. Exteriorization in this sense is a visualization of exteriority and art is one of the main techniques of bringing into view elements of the exterior world in objects of the world. Exteriority is also closely connected with the notion of technicality (perception, speaking, visualizing, etc.) understood differently from the more confusing term of 'subjectivity'. I will address only one aspect of this crisis, which resides in indeterminacy and the dialogical nature of art as the passage of time where liberation can take place.

“Apart from time there is one other means to bring about important change—force,” said the eighteenth-century German physicist and writer Lichtenberg, concluding that if time works too slowly, the force will do it faster.² We are in the age of understanding and recognizing this pattern in the exteriorization crisis taking place on different levels. This crisis is inseparable from the question of time since “time has always put the notion of truth into crisis.”³ It is not a situation of restraint but is instead one of proliferation without boundaries

and excessive accumulation. The crisis of exteriorization is also accompanied by the deepening conflict of autonomy with automation. The roots of this crisis stem from the industrialization, which includes colonialism, which started in the late eighteenth century, and the ensuing intensification of automation. Within the paradigm of exteriorization, automation takes place when time is spatialized by technologies. Gadgets and devices, controlling time are in excess, whereas aesthetic exteriorization is in decline and is reduced to familiar representations. Automation should be understood—in connection to autonomy—as time-space compression and the conscious recognition of time alongside the unconscious imitation. This time-space compression, which holds together sensibility and intelligibility as an experience, is called “the chronotope” (from the Greek *chronos*, time, and *topos*, place) by Bakhtin, and it is a phenomenon that I will discuss below in more detail. The chronotope, as the event of the connection between autonomous and internally not finalized consciousness is the possibility of assembling. This conflict between automatic spatialization and the autonomous consciousness of time-space compression opens up another way of assembling in order to provide a different understanding of the real. This “real” is a fiction as a production of time, which produces further exteriorizations. These exteriorizations amount to a spatiotemporal actuality consisting of fuzzy objects, objects that are not fully determined. The reality of the world is absolutely non-determined and our knowledge of the world is always partial.

The real, understood as the spatiotemporal actuality, is “an impasse of formalization.”⁴ The only way of giving shape to time is exteriorization, which is stimulated by a lack, or the excess, produced by the crisis. The impossibility of the real is meant to evoke the notion that although the actuality exists, we are not happy with this actuality, because what is exteriorized today by automation disorients this actuality and brings even more confusion. This confusion is due to the loss of exteriorization’s meaning in relation to the actuality. The real resides in time, and the boundaries of time made by earlier exteriorizations are lost. This loss also leads to a constant indeterminacy, and yet, since time is never determined, it is either pre-determined or over-determined, and this indeterminacy produces the further constellation of sets of fuzzy objects. These objects cannot be reduced to laws of change but exist with their own internal dynamic outside of precision and perfection. What is changing is “the shape of time”⁵ exteriorized in objects. These objects contain traces of time as signs, and the force of assembling these signs temporarily shapes time.

From this angle, I would like to stress the question of time and its emergence in modernism through the deterministic approach of Immanuel Kant that paradoxically has led to an understanding of time as a non-linear entity by his critics. Kant's determinism, which has been criticized ever since its initial exposition and which also opened up the way to the non-deterministic approach, and its relevance, is strongly felt in today's thought and images as a different concept of time. The difference that emerged here gave rise to an intercultural dialogue consisting of refuting Kant's definition of comprehension. Kant insisted that because any comprehension is determined by experience, it is impossible to comprehend what is outside of one's experience, as well as that which has not been given by intuition. This determinacy as the exclusion of the exterior world has to be understood as the breaking point in modern philosophical thought. The main point of my argument is that the exclusion of the exterior from the experience of temporality itself is the condition of the possibility of exteriorization. Any exclusion is repressing the potential of inclusion, which persists as the missing indeterminate dimension of time, which resides in the aforementioned fuzzy objects. In Western philosophy, "time" is questioned from early on, sometimes as a "known unknown,"⁶ and mostly understood in relation to the exterior world. Nevertheless, this short text addresses the current crisis of exteriorization and the critique of modernism heavily influenced by Kantian philosophy. Ergo, Kant!

Kant's cosmological argument of whether the universe had a beginning in time or not is crucial to the entire project of critical philosophy in connection with his call of dare to be free: "Have courage to use your own understanding!" "Sapere Aude!"⁷ It emerged after the awakening from the "dogmatic slumber"⁸ he had undergone, triggered by Hume's skepticism. Hume argued that exterior reality cannot be fully grasped by the human mind, since the mind itself is not capable of perceiving the world fully and cannot represent the exterior world absolutely. On the one hand, Kant followed Descartes's view of knowledge based on representation; on the other hand, he followed Hume's skepticism. Kant understood Hume's view of indeterminacy very well; nevertheless, he decided to go on to find a solution for this problem by adopting the Newtonian understanding of space-time as intuition. Space and time as a form of external reality exist as intuition, but understanding comes through experience, and from experience knowledge emerges. "There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience," says the opening line of Kant's First Critique.⁹ Kant adopted the Newtonian vision of time as a universal variable in equations describing time as nature in motion, the idea derived from Aristotle's claim that time is the measure of motion. Kant came

to the conclusion that intuition (time and space) is a substance which gives rise to experience. The question that emerged was how one can grasp the truth of seeing things as they are, if either the subject or the truth changes. Kant understood time as it resides in the very form of sensibility and thus not as a property of objects of the world. Therefore, time can be manipulated and categorized as an imperative just as much as the sensible can be categorized, rather than being accepted in its irreducibility and indeterminacy. What is missing from Kant's doctrine is the question of what I call the missing dimension of time: the fictional "origin." There is no such thing as the origin, be it intuition or experience; there is only process and contingent circulation of fuzzy objects of time.

Because Kant restricted his research to the limits of human reason, he completely forgot about time as a main feature of the world outside of reason, and this radical refusal turned his philosophy into an inward-looking discipline. Before going on to explore this problem, a brief historical excursion is needed to see what has emerged following this vision. The culture of industrialized modernity, which started during the prominence of Kantian philosophy, has "naturally" reflected its limits; modernism is both an enormous progression in having invented novelties in relation to oneself, yet it is an equally enormous regression regarding others and the outside world. Historically, there are some conditions which also have to be taken into account. The Industrial Revolution engendered a vast array of technologies that have brought about fundamental changes to our understanding of time. The classical approach, which concluded that time is just movement in space seemed obsolete and unconvincing. The question of time started to receive a new shape, touching upon such variations as temporality, speed, and velocity, with the persistence of both automation and autonomy. Subsequently, scientific and artistic attitudes dramatically altered and gave rise to a rapid classification of the knowledge of things and a completely new use of images. While witnessing these changes, Marx liked to repeat the Shakespearean sentiment "The time is out of joint."¹⁰ This meant to evoke two novelties: that time is, first, disjoined and, second, out of joy, which was an unprecedented event disrupting those who practiced slow and ascetic lifestyles. Stiegler characterizes this time as follows:

An ordinary person of two centuries ago could expect to die in the bed in which he had been born. He lived on a virtually changeless diet, eaten from a bowl that would have passed on to his grandchildren. Through seasons, years, generations, his surroundings, possessions, and daily routines were close to identical. The world

appeared to be absolutely stable, change was such an exception that it seemed to be an illusion.¹¹

Terms like “the change” and “the new” entered into the vocabulary of modernism, announcing the work of modern art as “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent.”¹² The nineteenth century saw events that led to many changes; these changes continue to affect us today: the shift to the capitalist formation, the triumph of colonialism, the striking domination of technologies. These historical disruptions became a theme of modern paintings, like crowds rushing in the streets depicted in Impressionist paintings and the image of steam engines as in Turner’s work; such themes have dominated art. It is not surprising that the notion of “entropy” was developed in this conjecture. Philosophy of this time was very much influenced by Kant. Through this influence, the question of time became more crucial than ever before. The impulsive energy of modernism “forced” time to accelerate, simultaneously excluding its multiple dimensions together with its subjects.

Kant’s followers started their critique from this particular point. For example, among the followers of Kant, there was the poet and playwright Heinrich von Kleist, also a philosopher and mathematician, who in his text on speaking insisted that thought comes into existence while speaking, where speech is a form of the exteriorization of time.¹³ Speech as a technique of exteriorization brings into existence secrecy, speed, and affect, “and in Kleist, the secret is no longer a content held within the form of interiority; rather, it becomes a form, identified with the form of exteriority that is always external to itself.”¹⁴ The technique of exteriorization precedes the internal thought and later becomes the condition of transforming thought, where thought is the dialogue between the exterior and the interior. The dialogue further exteriorizes the intrinsic relationship between time and images without any closure. The dialogue occurs in time, because it is only time that can tell in which conjecture we are. The conjecture is the passage of time and the possibility of articulation.¹⁵ This articulation doesn’t separate the intuition from the experience in a way as it doesn’t separate time from space. It was the main idea challenging Kant’s view of “time-space” as an intuition separated from the experience, and this critique was made by Mikhail Bakhtin. This was also the view of the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen, whose work had a huge influence on Bakhtin. Bakhtin accepted Cohen’s view while rejecting his notion of “an all-encompassing oneness, or Allheit.”¹⁶ Bakhtin instead insisted on the recognition of experience itself as a time-space compression, a chronotope. The chronotope doesn’t exclude intuition and also doesn’t strictly separate intuition from experience but offers a view of the compression,

which amounts to articulation. Bakhtin regarded time and space as forms of the most immediate reality rather than transcendental pre-conditions of experience. Kant was right in saying that time is evident in the experience, but he was not clear by excluding what is not experienced by the self simply as a matter of the transcendental. Bakhtin also understood that any experience has its limits and has to be understood not only as chronological but also as dialogical, polyphonic. Bakhtin's dialogue evokes the conversation of what is experienced with what is not experienced—what is outside of experience—the dialogue which alters the experience, making it experience of neither the self nor the other. The experience is dialogical, multiple, and never-ending, not finalized consciousness; it is indeterminate. For his theory of “dialogism” it is the relationship between the exterior world and the interior world that created the dialogue while moving away from the essentialism of the substance and understanding of time as an intrinsic relationship between images and thought. From this point, my own theorizing of the question of the lack of the real in time, and the question of assemblage as the shape of time, is developed.¹⁷

The chronotope or “the fourth dimension of space” problematizes signs not simply as semiotic elements but also as remnants of time. Combining Einstein's theory of relativity with neo-Kantian critique, Bakhtin demonstrated that the notion of dialogue as a heteroglossia produces multiple meanings which emerge from signs, which may in fact lose their meanings as remnants of time, varying depending on the context. Einstein, like Kant, was also influenced by Hume. But differently from Kant, he took more seriously Hume's idea that time is a fiction; it is a construct, and identity is in the notion of time, or duration and has to be understood “through a variation in time.”¹⁸ Einstein's famous thought experiment about the observer and train is derived from his interest in Hume's challenge. For Einstein, this challenge is his own critical rejection of Newton's claims about simultaneity.¹⁹ His positing the priority not of things but of relations among things is the historical event which demonstrated that the relation between time and space are not static, isolated objects but active, simultaneous events.

Bakhtin reverted Einstein's famous thought experiment of the observer looking at two lightning bolts simultaneously hitting a train into the observer looking at the observer. It is the case when one observer can see things behind another observer who cannot see them. Although they both are participating in the same event, that event is different for each of them. Their places are different only because their bodies occupy different positions in exterior space, and also because they regard the world and each other from different centers

in “cognitive time/space.”²⁰ In this cognitive space all perception unfolds. Bakhtin insisted on the combination of time and space and their inseparability, even if we are always forced to separate things. The problem is that if we need to separate things for the reason of analyzing, we should not forget to connect them again, albeit differently. This difference includes the connection between intuition and experience. The chronotope as the time-space compression is itself already experience, and, differently from Kantian understanding, experience doesn’t derive from the intuition as the basis of space and time but is the very beginning of understanding, since it already contains the intuition. If further difference occurs by repetition, it is because the repetition unfolds the difference, which is compressed in the chronotope and not visible until the dialogue makes exteriorization possible. The dialogue is the exteriorization of this experience through signs, which contain the traces of time, and therefore any experience is already residing in the difference produced by signs, which exists as “signs taken for wonders.”²¹ Time floats in the exterior world, but after the internalization it needs to be exteriorized again. *Exteriorization–interiorization–exteriorization* is the process made possible by signs produced by time.

The chronotope underlines the contingent nature of the world, which is reflected in images. In images, time exists as a pure convention, and its laws don’t coincide with the laws of real-time. There is no distinction between “conventional” and “real” as two different times because time in real life is no less organized than it is in images. The chronotope is grounded simultaneously at all levels, including those of real time and images of time. The chronotope is a fictional constitution of time, and time is a fiction, whereas we experience time in the real world or in images. There is no purely chronological sequence inside or outside of the artwork. Bakhtin’s interest in the theory of relativity’s postulation of the inseparability of time and events has to be understood from this angle of contingency.

Time is non-linear; it is trans-historical and “transmodern.”²² Time is exteriorized in the dialogue, and the dialogue translates time into the image. This image is the assemblage, is extra-temporal, and is an effect of both time and space. This is the condition of the irreducibility, which resides in signs of time and is assembled as the image of time. The image of time creates the passage of time, a form of exteriority, external to itself. A dialogical passing through this passage is the only time one can experience. Liberation, including but not exclusively decolonization, is such a dialogical experience.

Notes

- ¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Norton, 1997).
- ² Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 46.
- ³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 126.
- ⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Seminars XI* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).
- ⁵ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
- ⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961).
- ⁷ Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment” (1784), accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant_whatisenlightenment.pdf.
- ⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1950), p. 8.
- ⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 41.
- ¹⁰ Ernesto Laclau, “The Time Is out of Joint,” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995), p. 85.
- ¹¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 1.
- ¹² Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 17.
- ¹³ Heinrich von Kleist, “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden” (1805–06), accessed January 12, 2023, https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_2352284_4/component/file_2352283/content.
- ¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext (e), 1986), p. 9.
- ¹⁵ Stuart Hall, “On Articulation and Postmodernism,” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 131–151.
- ¹⁶ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 6.
- ¹⁷ Zeigam Azizov, *The Time of the Image* (Cologne: Herbert von Halem, 2020).
- ¹⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 253.
- ¹⁹ Albert Einstein, “The Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” (1905), accessed January 12, 2023, <https://users.physics.ox.ac.uk/~rtaylor/teaching/specrel.pdf>.
- ²⁰ Holquist, p. 22.
- ²¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 145.
- ²² Christian Kravagna, *Transmodern: An Art History of Contact, 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).