Call for Papers: Cornell University German Studies Graduate Conference

Jetzt: Contemporary and Historical Figurations
March 31/April 1, 2012
Keynote Speaker: Peter Fenves (Northwestern University)

“Now: it has already ceased to be since it was pointed out; the now that is is an other than that pointed out to us, it is what has been.”

(Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit)

The now, by virtue of its ephemerality, presents a series of problems for attempts to define it. Along with its deictic counterpart the here, it resists the fixity of any determinate content. Yet this very quality of now simultaneously includes a generative power—as demonstrated by ongoing attempts to conceptualize, interpret, produce or poeticize the now.

While the notion of the now is one of perpetual interest and difficulty, something to which one always returns, it is also important to historicize those moments in which the now reasserts itself against a fixation on the past or future. Recent attempts to do so can be seen, for example, in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s emphasis on presence in its temporal dimension as a “breite Gegenwart” and Fredric Jameson’s assertions of the primacy of the present in late capitalism.

But if we can historicize the discourse of nowness, is theorizing the now not a more problematic task? How are we to conceive of something situated at the very horizon of the historical? Are we to understand the now, as Hal Foster has suggested, not as a “simple now” but as a present, which is “nonsynchronous, a mix of different times?” To what extent does the now signal a break with the chronological linearity of past and future? Can we say that recent theorizations of messianic temporalities demonstrate this, as, for instance, in the discourse on the event, which Alain Badiou has called a “new present . . . neither past nor future,” but that which “presents us with the present?”

And how has the now’s position at the cusp of history influenced its aesthetic figuration? The twentieth century alone repeatedly turned towards the now in art. Elevated to the privileged experiential mode of the postmodern, the a-historicity of the present seems to have been concretized in pop art’s temporality (for instance, in the literature of Röggla, Kracht or Goetz or the multime dial works of Brinkmann). Photography has long served as a medium to capture the present and avant-garde movements of various temporalities have complicated our understanding of the ease with which the now can be aesthetically rendered. Finally, new media or technologies such as the Internet have transformed temporal experience with an emphasis on real time or simultaneity. What possibilities for an aesthetic figuration of the now does art present, and how can we bring these into dialogue with theory’s conceptualization of the now?

This conference seeks to address the vicissitudes of now’s history and figuration, if indeed either of these are possible. We welcome submissions on a wide array of topics related to aesthetic, theoretical, historical or contemporary figurations of the now that originate in the field of German Studies but extend to other disciplines as well. Submissions may include the following lines of inquiry:
Deictic or textual figurations of nowness and their hermeneutics
The temporality of reading/writing
Narratological questions of nowness
Spatiotemporality/the chronotope of the hic et nunc, architecture and the now
Presence, the present, presentation (Gumbrecht, Badiou, Heidegger)
The presence or aura of the work of art
(Post)modernism and the (a-)historicity of the present (Jameson)
Theological temporalities, kairos vs. chronos
The ecstatic moment and other conceptualizations of now
Now’s position in history
Jetztzeit in Benjamin
The phenomenology of nowness, the historicity/temporality of experience
Revolution and rupture
Nowness as event
Messianicity
Zeitgeist and contemporaneity
The temporality of trauma, repetition compulsion, memoire involuntaire, spectrality or the omnipresence of now
The temporalities of multimedial art: photography, sound, new media
The nowness of the avant-garde(s), the aesthetic category of the new, art’s techne and time, technical innovation
Pop forms of newness
Gegenwartsliteratur and the now
Theater, performance, presence

Please submit abstracts of 300 words or less by January 15, 2012 to conference organizers Hannah Müller, Nathan Taylor, Anna Horakova and Matteo Calla at now.cornell2012@gmail.com. Abstracts must include a cover letter with the author’s name, paper title, affiliation, telephone number and email address, and be in the form of *.doc or *.docx files. Presentations are to last 20 minutes and must be in English. Submissions are accepted from graduate students only. Submissions from all fields relevant to the topic are welcome.