What is Zeitgeist? Examining period-specific cultural patterns☆

Monika Krause

Department of Sociology, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK

ABSTRACT

Current research on culture rarely differentiates explicitly between period-specific and other kinds of cultural patterns. This paper develops the concept of "zeitgeist" as a tool for sociological analysis. I propose we understand zeitgeist as a hypothesis for a pattern in meaningful practices that is specific to a particular historical time-period, links different realms of social life and social groups, and extends across geographical contexts. As such zeitgeist sensitises us to a phenomenon that can be described independently of and alongside other cultural phenomena such as trans-historical schemas or binaries or group-specific patterns. Dissociated from an idealist tradition in historiography, which makes strong assumptions about periods as coherent entities, tends to allocate one zeitgeist to one period, and assumes that zeitgeist is held together by the coherence of a set of ideas, zeitgeists can be described and compared according to their formal properties: We can ask how zeitgeists extend in time and social space and by what media and socio-material carriers the patterns of zeitgeists are held together.

1. Introduction

When we encounter discussions about the "post-truth era" or the "age of me-too", we encounter claims about epochal trends or period-specific cultural patterns. Such claims are quite common in public debate, the media, and in some traditions of cultural analysis; yet, as I shall argue, we currently lack the conceptual tools to frame such claims as accountable sociological hypothesis and subject them to systematic investigation in the context of other sociological concepts.

Some sociologists have participated in diagnosing epochal trends using labels such as "post-modern society" or "neoliberalism". These accounts usually focus selectively on what they claim is new in the present era - a tendency that Mike Savage and Fran Osrecki have criticised as sociological "epochalism" (Calhoun, 1993; Osrecki, 2011, 2015; Savage, 2009). Research in cultural sociology on the other hand, rarely differentiates explicitly between historically specific and other kinds of cultural patterns.

This paper develops the concept of "zeitgeist" - literally "spirit of the times" - as a tool for sociological analysis. I propose we understand zeitgeist as a hypothesis for a pattern in meaningful practices that is specific to a particular historical time-period, links different realms of social life and social groups, and extends across geographical contexts. As such, the concept of zeitgeist sensitises us to a set of phenomena, which can be described independently of and alongside other cultural phenomena such as trans-historical schemas, binaries, or group-specific patterns. By developing zeitgeist as an analytically specified concept among other concepts, I want to contribute to a more fine-tuned vocabulary for social and cultural analysis. I also want to "provincialize" the patterns that the

concept highlights by departing from the historicist tradition, which makes strong assumptions about periods as coherent entities, tends to allocate one zeitgeist to one period, and assumes that zeitgeist is held together by the coherence of a set of ideas

Three examples, which are somewhat removed from the more charged debates concerning labels for the contemporary moment, can illustrate the questions that the term uniquely raises: The culture of the baroque, the discovery of the unconscious, and the phenomenon of "1968" are candidates for cases of period-specific cultural patterns, which we can seek to describe or explain and which we can try to use to explain other phenomena: The first example would invite us to theorise the fascination with luxury and death in the 17th and 18th century across geographic contexts across Europe. Associated with the term "baroque" by later historians concerned with "high art", it is also present in the popular culture of the period (Maravall, 1986).

Second, we can try to make sociological sense of the emergence of the idea of the unconscious in the middle-to-late nineteenth century among novelists, spirit-healers, and doctors. Accounts of the discovery of the unconscious often focus on the individual "Sigmund Freud" but a focus on this individual or on any one of these groups of "professionals" does not seem to do justice to the way this idea was born and spread.

Third, we might ask what exactly was "1968" as a social, political, and cultural phenomenon? In a number of Western European countries the year 1968 is established as a shorthand for a broader political and cultural phenomenon, which includes the left, counter-cultural and youth movements of the 1960s, a phenomenon that is related to what US Americans call "the sixties", and to the challenges to authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe in the same period. I would suggest we explore the possibility that to capture in sociological terms what "1968" stands for it is not enough to describe a set of events, an explicit political ideology, or a social movement. Nor is it enough to point to a style of music or a set of clothes. Rather, the hypothesis would be that "1968" describes a set of practices that combine meanings and objects in certain ways - combinations, which we can recognise when we are confronted with material from that period even if we may debate the boundaries of the phenomenon and the relative importance of different components of it.

In order to develop the term zeitgeist as a tool for sociological analysis that can capture these and other phenomena in analytically accountable ways, I will first offer a specification of zeitgeist and make the case that it can capture a distinctive set of phenomena by contrasting phenomena of zeitgeist with other cultural phenomena. I will then discuss the term's heritage in the historicist tradition. In contrast to historicist uses of the term, which are carried forward in contemporary analysis of the "current moment" in sociology, media studies, and cultural studies, I will question the assumption that one zeitgeist corresponds to one period of history. In discussing the relationship between zeitgeist and historicism, I will build on and depart from the work of Mannheim (1952) [1928]), whose discussion of zeitgeist in the essay on "The Problem of Generations" is the classic reference point for modern sociological discussions of the concept. I will suggest that Mannheim did not go far enough in dissociating the term from its heritage by suggesting that two opposing zeitgeists define a period. He further limited the analytical potential of the term by reducing zeitgeists to social groups; by doing so, he precluded questions about the wide range of social and material carriers of cultural phenomena. I will argue that, dissociated from some aspects of the heritage of the term in the idealist philosophy of history, zeitgeists can be a conceptual variable among others and can become a research object, which can be examined with regard to different sets of properties: We can ask how zeitgeists extend in time and social space and by what media and socio-material carriers the patterns of a zeitgeist are held together.

Throughout the paper, I will return to the examples of "1968", the baroque, and the discovery of the unconscious. Space does not permit me to do justice to these examples as empirical cases but they allow me to illustrate my argument in two directions. Firstly, they allow me to illustrate the distinction between period-specific cultural patterns on the one hand and enduring cultural patterns or group-specific patterns on the other hand. Secondly, they allow me to show the limits of historicist assumptions: The examples have been selected because, as a set, they illustrate the range of different ways in which cultural phenomena with a distinctive historical location relate to strong notions of periods as integrated cultural wholes on the one hand and to generations as presumed carriers of cultural forms on the other hand.

2. Zeitgeist as a cultural phenomenon sui generis

Cultural sociology, on the one hand, entails a specific approach, which it brings to all objects of analysis: It understands culture as a constitutive aspect of all social phenomena and demands a sensitivity towards meanings and meaningful practices for the analysis of all aspects of social life (Alexander & Reed, 2009; Alexander, 2003; Calhoun & Sennett, 2007; Sewell, 1999). On the other hand, cultural sociology has generated a set of hypotheses about different kinds of cultural patterns, which can be examined empirically for specific cases using a range of qualitative but also quantitative methods (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Mohr, 1998; Edelmann & Mohr, 2018).

Current scholarly discussions about culture do not distinguish explicitly between hypothesis about period-specific and other kinds of cultural patterns. More generally, efforts to develop a vocabulary to describe different dimensions of the hypothesis that talking about culture implies have been stymied by an emphasis on establishing *that* culture matters vis-à-vis other, non-cultural, factors. Establishing culture as a causal factor has been important for the development of the field and continues to be important in debates with some competing approaches. However, this emphasis has made the fact that the term has different meanings appear as a weakness to be corrected through "standardization" (Smith, 2016) rather than as an opportunity for conceptual development (Krause, 2016a).

It is worth noting that Max Weber's "Protestant Ethic" (Weber, 2002,1905; Weber, 2002 [1905]) has often been received as making a point about the role of "culture" versus the "economy" or as showing how cultural and economic phenomena interact. Little attention has been paid to the fact that the cultural phenomenon Weber focuses on - the reformation- is clearly a specific kind of

cultural phenomenon - a cultural phenomenon that is tied to a particular historical location.[1] Similarly, Robert Merton's "Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England" (Merton, 1973 [1938; Merton, 1973 [1938]]), a work, which, following Weber, also discusses the reformation has become a reference point for discussing the relationship between "culture" in general on the one hand and "science" on the other hand (e.g. Kuhn, 1977).

In what follows, I will develop the argument that hypothesis about period-specific patterns can usefully be distinguished from hypothesis about trans-historical elements of culture and hypothesis about group-specific patterns. In specifying the concept of zeitgeist and making the case that it can be used to describe a phenomenon sui generis I will also explain the difference of zeitgeist to patterns highlighted by the terms "fashion", "style" and "ideology". In each of these cases I focus on how we can best capture the cultural form under investigation relatively independently of particular contents.

Culture is sometimes hypothesized as patterns in meanings, which are constant across time, or which are at least relatively enduring. In this tradition much attention has been paid to the power of binaries such as sacred/profane (Durkheim, 1965 [1915; Durkheim, 1965 [1915]]) or cooked/raw, male/ female/, or death and life (Levi Strauss, 1962, 1963, 1969, Douglas, 1966; Bourdieu, 1998). This is taken up in more recent investigations into recurring symbolic structures (Alexander & Smith, 2001; Alexander, 2003). Enduring cultural binaries have been shown to feature in discussions of war (Smith, 2010), in mourning (Simko, 2012), and in civil society (Alexander, 2006, 2011).

This work provides strong evidence for patterns that are more durable than zeitgeist and that exert influence across historical and to some extent across geographical contexts. But cultural dynamics can also take other forms: The fascination with death in the 17th and 18th century, for example, surely can be analyzed with regard to enduring cultural binaries such as the sacred or eternal, on the one hand, and the profane or transient, on the other hand. But if the phenomenon was fully reducible to such binaries or even just to long-standing features of "Christian" or "western" culture, we would not notice anything particular about the baroque period. In emphasizing enduring binaries, we would in this case render the object of investigation invisible.

In some scholarly conversations culture has been associated with group-specific patterns in meanings. This notion of culture has its origins in romanticism and nationalism (Herder, 2010 [1772; Herder, 2010 [1772], see Williams, 1985]), has been central to the tradition of anthropology (Benedict, 1934) and continues to be used in cross-cultural and cross-national comparative research (e.g. D'Andrade, 1995; Heine, 2002; Hofstede, 2003). While some have heavily criticised this notion of culture as "essentialist" among other things (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), it can be linked with historical, institutional, and also with critical analysis (Anderson, 2006; Elias, 1996; Gellner, 2008; Nash, 2009). What matters in the context of this paper is that the analysis of culture in terms of large groups of people - "different cultures" - hypothesizes a pattern that is both more long-term than zeitgeist and more geographically bounded: I would suggest that we would not do justice to the "1960s" in the US, for example, by reducing it to the context of "American culture: Some aspects of this cultural phenomenon did not coincide with national boundaries (Suri, 2005; Fink et al., 1999) even if it may have taken nationally specific forms (Heale, 2005; Rossinow, 1998). We would expect an analysis of "American culture", on the other hand, to go beyond the time span of a few decades.

Research on subcultures (Hebdige, 1979), social movements, or particular religious groups or milieus (Fantasia, 1988; Gorski, 2017; Johnston, 1989; Kane, 1997; Snow, 1988) takes the discussion on culture as a pattern specific to a particular group beyond ethnic or national groupings. It is clear that if the terms "subculture" or "social movement" adequately capture a cultural phenomenon, we should describe them as such in the interest of parsimony. However, I would argue that we should keep open the possibility that some cultural patterns cannot be reduced to any particular groups - a point I shall come back to at greater length below.

Zeitgeists may be associated with certain aesthetic properties or a certain "style "but they can be distinguished from the way "style" is understood in art history. According to the French art historian Focillon (1989) the concept of style is a descriptor of specified properties of objects independent of historical location. As a style, baroque is a set of properties of cultural objects or buildings such as ornate details and exaggerated movements. In that sense we can find baroque buildings or baroque furniture originating in many different periods of history, including the present. By contrast, the concept of zeitgeist locates a phenomenon in a specific historical period. To examine the baroque as zeitgeist means to investigate how it links elements of everyday life with aspects of art in different disciplines in the 17th and 18th century. A zeitgeist can thus have an afterlife as a style.

For a trend or phenomenon to qualify as zeitgeist rather than as a fashion (or a paradigm) we would expect it to cross several areas of social life, or fields. Fashions may be linked to zeitgeist, but the term zeitgeist becomes necessary only if a fashion can be linked to patterns of meaning production in several distinct realms (see Godard, 2018).

Lastly, I will make two points concerning the relationship of the term zeitgeist and the term ideology. The term ideology is complex and its many different meanings in some ways mirror the different meanings of the term culture (see Eagleton, 1991). Because of this, the term zeitgeist relates to ideology roughly in the same way as it relates to culture: zeitgeist, in the way I propose to understand it here, is one of the meanings of ideology but one that is often obscured by a lack of analytical specification.

Two issues are worth highlighting at this stage occasioned by discussions about ideology: Firstly, to the extent that ideology is still sometimes conceptualized as a set of explicit ideas, it is worth emphasizing that zeitgeist is inseparable from a broader set of unspoken assumptions, practices and material arrangements (see the debate between Sewell, 1984 and Skocpol, 1979, 1985). It is one project to analyze the ideology of "1968", for example, perhaps drawing out the historical origins of some of its elements, investigating tensions within it, and analyzing who believed what, and why. It is another project to trace the feel of the time, the unspoken assumptions that relate to lifestyle, to practices, and to designed objects as well as to politics.

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[1] Weber himself does not use the term zeitgeist in his work according to an electronic search of his completed works in German (Weber, n.d).

Table 1
Zeitgeist among other cultural phenomena.

	zeitgeist
culture 1	group-specific/ period-specific
culture 2	trans-historical/ period-specific
fashion, paradigm	one field/ several fields
style	described through formal properties, can be observed at different times/ period-specific
ideology 1	explicit ideas/ diffuse set of meanings and practices
ideology 2	always linked to an analysis of power/ analysis of power relations a second step

Secondly, the term "ideology" is often used to link an analysis of "culture" to an analysis of "power". I would think it likely that power can be used to explain phenomena of zeitgeist, but I would suggest we should diagnose and describe a pattern first, before we consider explanations, one of which may then be power in its various forms. Table 1 below illustrates the way the concept of zeitgeist is situated among concepts describing other cultural phenomena.

3. Two problems with the historicist heritage: with and beyond Karl Mannheim

The term zeitgeist has its origins in the historicist philosophy of history, which emerged at the end of the 18th century in Western Europe (Konersmann, 2004, 2006). Historicism was an innovation that has enabled the development of the modern social sciences and humanities in many ways: We owe to historicism the rise of a particularly modern understanding of time, which distinguishes between a past, a present, and a future, which most social sciences now rely on (Koselleck, 2002, 2004).[2] Literally translated as "spirit of the times", the term zeitgeist challenged platonic and neo-platonic assumptions that ideas are reflections of timeless, unchanging essences and has thus enabled attention to culture as something that is variable and can be studied empirically. Yet the heritage of the term in the historicist tradition burdens the term with some assumptions, which need to be examined critically in terms of current sociological understandings. Firstly, we need to examine the link between the concept of zeitgeist and an emphatic understanding of periods as unified cultural wholes. Secondly, we need to discuss the relationship of phenomena of zeitgeist to generations as supposed carriers of historical processes.

Regarding the first point, it is worth noting that the historical disciplines have tended to allocate one zeitgeist to any one particular time period. This has to be understood partly as a result of the normative baggage imposed on the concept of zeitgeist in the context of its birth: Arising out of the tension between historicism and platonic and neo-platonic Christian forms of authority that were justified with reference to timeless truths, the diagnosis of zeitgeist was implicitly tasked to make sense of social change in a way that responded to political and pastoral concerns as well as analytical ones. It was sometimes explicitly tasked to find a historical but consistent answer to questions of truth and value. With the rise of evolutionary thinking and the notion of progress,[3] it became possible to see new and current ideas as good and true *because* they were new and current. The celebration of zeitgeist was opposed by cultural critics, both on the left and on the conservative right, who played on the tension between the currency of ideas and other sources of authority to diagnose zeitgeist and dismiss it as *merely* zeitgeist, a temporary digression of timeless values (Jung, 2009, 2012a, 2012b).

Some aspects of this heritage are carried forward in analyses of the "current moment", which are often in some way associated with Marxism or post-marxism. Within sociology, the best-known examples are perhaps the accounts of "reflexive" modernity by Beck (1992), Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1994) and the diagnosis of "liquid modernity" by Bauman (2013). Many analysis of neoliberalism also fit this mold. These works flirt with the practice of cultural criticism, oscillating between celebration and denunciation in a manner that might be defended as "dialectical", highlighting aspects of the present that are new at the expense of actual comparison that would be required to fully place the highlighted aspects into context (Calhoun, 1993; Osrecki, 2011, 2015; Savage, 2009).

This work also largely reproduces an analytical grid that analyzes capitalism, on the one hand, and cultural phenomena, on the other hand, with little attention to national or regional variation or the full range of social forms that produce patterns in social life at any given moment. Even in disciplines like history or art history, the tendency to explain objects by contextualizing it in a specific historical moment without considering the distinctions between period-specific cultural context and other dynamics has been criticised by writers who want to explore the role of specific groups of actors or of institutions (Boas, 1952; Forland, 2008; Gombrich, 1974; Nathaus & Childress, 2013).

If we ask about cultural patterns including patterns that are specific to certain periods separately from the normative task to find truth or denounce transgression from truth, there is no need to assume that there is only one zeitgeist at any given time. Zeitgeists are not necessarily shared by all: it is clear, for example, that "1968" was experienced by significant groups of people at the time as a project, which they did not belong to.

In his essay on generations Karl Mannheim has made the point that several zeitgeists may coexist at the same time. He wrote: "If

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[2] But see Jordheim (2012) for a review of the critical discussion on periodization, including Kosellecks'.
[3] See Hegel, 1977[1807; Hegel, 1977[1807], Marx & Engels, 1967 [1848; Marx & Engels, 1967 [1848], Spencer, 2004 [1895; Spencer, 2004 [1895], Darwin, 1909 [1872; Darwin, 1909 [1872]).

we are speaking of the 'spirit of an epoch', for example, we must realize, as in the case of other factors, too, that this Zeitgeist, the mentality of a period, does not pervade the whole society at a given time " (Mannheim, 1952: 313). But he still sees each epoch as unified by the opposing cultural forces that it plays host to, seeking to analyse the "social currents giving polar tensions to each period of history" (Mannheim, 1952: 313).

I would argue that we should go further in severing the link between zeitgeist as a unit of analysis and a strong notion of "period" or "epoch" than Mannheim does here. A period may be closely integrated by opposing period-specific forces but it may not be. To begin to analyse phenomena of zeitgeist in the plural, we should not assume that zeitgeists play a central function in a specific time-period. To take the example of "1960s", we have to allow for the possibility that some people, even in France, the US or Germany may not only have been opposed to the countercultural movements of the time, but may have been entirely unaffected by the cultural phenomena associated with the term.

Mannheim's assertion that social currents give "polar tensions to each period of history" (Mannheim, 1952: 313) suggests that zeitgeists change over in pairs of opposing cultural forms. Starting from the insight that zeitgeists coexist with other zeitgeists, we can also imagine them to co-exist in more complex ways. Starting from an interest in period-specific cultural patterns rather than periods, we might be able to describe more than two zeitgeists at any given time and we might find them relatively unrelated and we might find them to be overlapping in complex ways.

If Mannheim in some ways does not go far enough in freeing the concept of zeitgeist from the burdens placed on it by idealist philosophy of history, in other ways he goes too far: Mannheim sought to link cultural and historical forces, which had been endowed with mysterious forces of their own by previous commentators, to social groups. He writes: "The mentality, which is commonly attributed to an epoch has its proper seat in one (homogeneous or heterogeneous) social group which acquires special significance at a particular time, and is thus able to put its own intellectual stamp on all the other groups without either destroying or absorbing them" (Mannheim, 1952: 313). Mannheim seeks to provide a sociological perspective on zeitgeist by linking it to the concept of "generations". The concept of generation theorises how groups of people vary according to the timing of their birth. Mannheim distinguished an "actualised generation" from just any group of people born around the same time, already establishing a link between a group of people and a set of ideas and experiences. According to Mannheim, it is the shared experience of significant historical events in a group's formative years that may produce such actualised generations. For Mannheim actualised generations carry elements of zeitgeist, which are often opposed to other cultural currents during the same time period.

The link between generations and phenomena of zeitgeist is important but I would argue that it is important to not reduce one to the other in order to not risk obscuring important questions about the relationship between the two as potentially distinct phenomena: For some cases such as "1968" "zeitgeist" and "generation" seem to map on to each other quite well. In Germany, versions of the term "generation 68" are widely used. Many discussions of the US-American version of "the sixties" make reference to the "baby boomers", a group of people growing up in the 1950s as part of an unusually large cohort, amid relative prosperity, attending university in large numbers in the context of a recent expansion of higher education (Willis, 1977, Ferguson, 2008). But even in this case a focus on nationally specific generations seems to obscure transnational (Suri, 2005) and technological dimensions of the case (Turner, 2005, 2010).

There are cases where temporal cultural trends can be even less easily mapped onto a generation: A zeitgeist may link several generations, as seems to be the case of the Baroque, for example: there are patterns that hold across the 17th and 18th centuries when compared to earlier or later periods – though of course there are variations across time within that period. If a zeitgeist can extend beyond a generation, a generation can also extend beyond a zeitgeist. The pattern described by zeitgeist may be relatively peripheral to any one generation's consciousness, as might be illustrated with the case of the "discovery" of the unconscious in the 19th century. Themes of the unconscious emerge in hypnosis (Mayer, 2006, 2013), in literature (Rotenberg, 1999), and in medicine at around the same time (Zaretsky, 2004), but this becomes significant mostly when we ask about the history of the idea of the unconscious. It is hardly the defining feature of a "generation 1840s." A historian trying to understand the life world of any particular generation in the 19th century would likely focus on other aspects of their cultural experience and expression.

4. Zeitgeist as a conceptual variable

When I propose zeitgeist as a concept that refers to patterns in meaningful practices that are period-specific, cross over different areas of social life, and extend across geographical contexts, I propose it as part of a broader repertoire of concepts for the analysis of patterns in social life. A sociological understanding of zeitgeist situates zeitgeist within a range of elements of social order that each have a logic of their own. This includes concepts for other kinds of cultural patterns, which I have discussed above, but could in principle also include concepts such as organizations, fields (Bourdieu, 1996; Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) and interactions or occasions (Goffman, 1983; Wynn, 2016).[4] I call zeitgeist a conceptual variable (Nettl, 1968) to convey that zeitgeist like other concepts is a hypothesis for a pattern that may or may not be observable in a specific setting, that zeitgeists can

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[4] Scholars in different traditions have tended to emphasize a particular dimension of culture or social order without engaging others explicitly. Building on evidence that macro-cultural patterns matter as well as patterns on the level of fields, specific organizations, interactions and occasion, we need more theoretical work to begin to analyse how these dynamics coexist and interact. For promising work in this direction see Eliasoph and Lichtermann (2003) on the relationship between macro-cultural patterns and interactions and Dromi (2016). In exploring these questions, we can learn from observing social systems theory, which has begun to pursue related questions some time ago (Kneer, 2001; Tacke, 2001; Kieserling, 1999, 2004, Luhmann, 1987).

take various forms and that zeitgeists can be situated as one pattern among others.

The practice of conceptualization is always in dialogue with concrete cases and empirical observations. It also raises questions of more formal measurement. Using the words of Paul Lazarsfeld, we can understand conceptualization as, first, the development of "an imagery of the concept", and second, "the specification of dimensions". We can in principle distinguish between conceptualization in this sense and measurement, which can be understood as first, "the selection of observable indicators" and, "second" the combination of indicators into indices" (Lazarsfeld, quoted in Cicourel, 1964: 15). Conceptualization tells us what to look for, measurement allows us to make claims about particular cases based on systematic observation.

I focus here only on the "imagery of the concept" of zeitgeist as one dimension of culture, specified in contrast to other concepts above, and its own "dimensions" or properties, which I will discuss below (see also Lazarsfeld & Barton, 1951). To adequately capture the range of sociological phenomena it may sometimes be necessary to develop new concepts, or new dimensions of existing concepts even if they are not yet readily measured. Conceptualization cannot itself answer questions of measurement, but it can prepare it: We can very well imagine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to measuring zeitgeist, which have been discussed for culture mostly for across and within group shifts (Mohr, 1998 but see Tilly, 1997). Scholars could use historical- comparative methods or tools associated with quantitative textual analysis or corpus linguistics (see e.g. Bail, 2014; Jockers & Underwood, 2016; Säily, Nurmi, Palander-Collin, & Auer, 2017; Martin & Lee, 2018).

Addressing a historical phenomenon, care needs to be taken to reflect on the possibility of retrospective projection of patterns. It is well established that the term "baroque", for example, is a label invented by art historians in the 19th century with an intent to discredit art labeled as "baroque" (see Hills, 2011); positive projections of the baroque as an alternative to or within modernity (Deleuze, 1992; Law & Ruppert, 2016) can also color the description of historical patterns. Descriptions of "1968", or "the sixties" can be shaped by nostalgia and/or present a sanitized image of the time (see Ross, 2002).

Conceptualization - the practice, which Lazarsfeld describes as specifying "an imagery of the concept" and its "dimensions" - and in particular the development of new concepts is the basis of both qualitative and quantitative approaches; in the case of zeitgeist it brings together "formal" (Edelmann & Mohr, 2018) and "historical" analysis of culture. In light of a certain tension between the "formal" and the "historical", it might be appropriate to address concerns among scholars of history and culture, who associate conceptualization with undue abstraction and generalization.[5] I would note that a carefully specified concept is compatible with a range of ends of scholarly inquiry (Krause, 2016b). Making distinctions among concepts and developing distinctions among dimensions of concepts is compatible with a range of approaches to explanation, including narrative explanation. It can also aid the description of particular and unique cases.

5. Properties of zeitgeist

Interpretative work in historical disciplines and cultural studies can tend to focus on the nuances of the content of zeitgeist (e.g. Israel, 2001; Hutnyk, 2014). This type of analysis could be complemented by a focus on the formal properties of zeitgeist. In the following section I lay groundwork for this project by delineating four properties of zeitgeist, along which cases of zeitgeist can be examined. The properties are *duration*, *scope*, *course*, and *media and carriers*. The first property - duration - builds directly on the idealist traditions, the other three reflect modifications drawn on the three examples discussed in this paper.

The first two properties - duration and scope - each ask about the extension of a zeitgeist. Firstly, duration addresses extension in time. When and for how long can we detect a certain cultural pattern? We can examine the way zeitgeists emerge and change, either gradually or through rupture. We can analyse how zeitgeists end. We should not expect zeitgeists to have very sharp temporal boundaries and any dates that might be used to locate zeitgeists in time should be handled with care so as to avoid the suggestion of false exactitude. But asking about beginnings and end points can still be useful - if only to inform a better diagnosis of zeitgeist by encouraging us to examine meaningful practices at particular points in time more closely.

The second property, which we can use to analyse empirical cases of zeitgeist is *scope*. I have discussed the need to question the historicist assumption that a zeitgeist - or two zeitgeists as Mannheim would suggest- hold a period together as a unified cultural whole. While zeitgeists thus have a certain location in time and are in some ways defined by their period, their scope or reach across social space is an empirical question. At any given time - even during "its time" - a zeitgeist will affect some parts of social and geographical space and not others, and it will extend across social and geographical space to different degrees of intensity. Social space has different dimensions to it: we would expect a zeitgeist to affect some social groups more than others, some interactions more than others, and some fields more than others.

The property of *course* brings together questions about a zeitgeist's duration and questions about its scope: To ask about the course of a zeitgeist is to ask how scope evolves over time. We can try to sketch the development of a zeitgeist as it emerges, expands, or recedes in social space. It can emerge slowly or suddenly, in one place or in several at the same time. It can grow to include the entirety of the social space, or it can remain limited in reach. It can end suddenly or become part of common sense for centuries; it might transmute and live on in different forms.

Lastly, we can ask about the *media and carriers* of zeitgeist. This requires some explication as in some areas of cultural analysis we can find a tendency to assume that ideas hold together, travel easily, establish order, and explain in and through their internal coherence. This tendency has sources in the idealist tradition broadly speaking, which the idea of zeitgeist builds on. In the decades following the second World War references to the "mass media" have been used to lend some plausibility to the suggestion that some

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[5] See Steinmetz (2004).

ideas travel without material resistance and to assumptions about a high level of cultural integration. Today the assumption lives on in some forms of discourse analysis.

I suggest we accept the challenge issued by the sociologist Garfinkel (1988) that - taking observable settings and interactions as a starting point - all trans-situational or trans-local orders have to be accounted for carefully. We can accept this challenge even if we do not accept Garfinkel's quite radical insistence that social order is always and only locally achieved. On this basis, forms of zeitgeist become a puzzle for further research: we can ask for any specific case: How does the relative order that zeitgeist describes become materially possible? How are the elements of the observed pattern linked in practice? For our examples, this would means asking: what held "1968" together as a recognizable phenomenon that involved a large number of people, in different places and different situations across a number of years? How did the baroque receive whatever relative stability it had across different geographical context, and across several decades? What exactly links discussions of the unconscious in George Elliot's novel "Middlemarch" to Sigmund Freud's later "discoveries"?

In approaching these questions, we need to ask about the whole range of "media" and "carriers" of zeitgeist in light of the wide range of forms media take historically.[6] We can consider the available range of media and carriers at any given moment, the way they vary over time, the way they vary in establishing different kinds of connections across settings, and the ways in which they enable some forms of content over others.

People and groups of people provide one possible answer to Garfinkel's puzzle regarding the possibility of translocal orders, including zeitgeists, and they are one carrier of culture: People last longer than situations and they can move through space. If we allow for dispositions - the concept for schemas, habits and skills that are relatively stable within a person's body, which some micro-sociological approaches are unduly skeptical of - a person can help carry meanings across situations. Max Weber developed the concept of "carrier groups" ("Trägergruppen") originally in his sociology of religions; this is the most general concept also for our purposes (Weber, 1978: 468-517). Weber suggested, for example, that the "carriers of Confucianism … were either officials who received a classical literary education or philosophers with corresponding training" (Weber, 1978: 502), whereas the carriers of Christianity were anti-intellectual itinerant journeymen (Weber, 1978: 512). When Weber writes about carrier groups, he is thinking mostly of cultural phenomena that last longer than zeitgeist but specific social groups may play a role in sustaining zeitgeist as well. The sociological tradition provides different possible specifications for these carrier groups: they can be identified by shared social or class-background, or by shared professional background. We can also return to generations as one of the possible carrier groups of zeitgeist. Other groups such as craftsmen or intellectuals may have an experience shaped by generational context.

It is possible to identify a number of groups of people who played a role in establishing and maintaining the baroque as a trans-local and indeed global phenomenon, for example. Most notable among these groups are artists and craftsmen, feudal patrons, and Jesuit missionaries. Artists and craftsmen started practicing a distinctive style in Rome and Naples beginning in the 1580s; Italian artists and craftsmen were later recruited by sponsors in Spain, France and Gemany (Haskell, 1980). Peter the Great hired French, German and Swiss architects to build his new capital of the Russian Empire, Saint Petersburg, in the early 18th century (Bailey, 2012). Jesuit missionaries took an idea of what churches and monasteries looked like to Latin America and Asia, and realized these ideas by more or less forcibly recruiting local artisans, who also adapted the style to their own traditions (Bailey, 1999). While most Latin American churches are influenced by Iberian churches, some Brazilian churches show central European influences which can be traced to the influence of German architects at the court in Lisbon (Bailey, 2012: 368).

Allowing for social groups as one possible carrier of zeitgeist, does not mean equating the two: Like people and groups of people, objects, media and technologies are also carriers of culture: they too last longer than situations and in many cases travel across geographical context as they change hands, are copied, used, and interpreted. Recent theoretical developments have drawn attention to material culture across the social sciences and humanities including in media studies (Kittler, 1999), art history (Baxandall, 2004), and history (Miller, 2013). Attention to materiality has been most explicitly linked to the ethnomethodological sensibility about micro-contexts of social order discussed above in science and technology studies. Bruno Latour's phrase that "technology is society made durable" alerts us to the carrier-properties of objects - though a discussion of zeitgeist allows us to respond to the point about durability with the question: "for how long exactly?" (Latour, 1991, 1992). There has been renewed interest among sociologists of culture in objects in this sense (Molotch, 2003; Domínguez Rubio, 2014; Griswold, Mangione, & McDonnell, 2013; McDonnell, 2016; Benzecry, 2015), including some interest in how material practice add up to macro-cultural phenomena such as nationalism (Zubrzycki, 2017).

Allow me to highlight the role of objects for the baroque and for "1968". When European monarchs sponsored Italian art in the 17th century, it was sometimes the artists and craftsmen who travelled but sometimes only the artwork as paintings, sculptures and items of interior decoration were traded across Europe. The baroque buildings of Latin America were facilitated not only by Jesuits and architects but also by printed books from Spain, Germany, Flanders and Italy, which circulated in Latin America and featured ornamental details (Bailey, 2012). The 17th and 18th century saw a new phase in the international trade in luxury goods and Baroque culture travelled through chairs produced in France, Christian devotional objects made in the Philippines, and - from the early 18th century - Dutch and German adaptations of the Chinese invention of porcelain (Bailey, 2012; Bermingham & Brewer, 1995; Peck, 2005).

Concerning "1968", we could discuss the role of fashion and music and the way fashion and music objects travelled at a time. In a study that directly addresses period-specific culture and the complex ways, in which cultural content is linked to its carriers, Fred

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[6] Archeologists have asked how different burial rites or ceramic traditions travel in absence of most media technologies we take for granted today (Rebay-Salisbury & Hakenbeck, 2009).

Turner (2005, 2010) points to the role of a specific kind of mass medium to the counter-culture of the 1960s that preceded it. The "whole earth catalogue", a subscription based periodical, was also a sales platform, and materialised and shaped the links between a network of people that came to be central to both the counter-culture and the technological culture that has shaped today's use of digital media.

6. Conclusion

I have tried to show that the concept of zeitgeist alerts us to the possibility of a set of cultural phenomena, which cannot be captured in a precise manner by existing concepts in the sociology of culture. I proposed we understand zeitgeist as a hypothesis for a pattern in meaningful practices that is specific to a particular historical time-period, links different realms of social life, and extends across geographical contexts. For the case of "1968, for example, the claims to be tested empirically include that there is something about "1968" that cannot be reduced to explicit ideologies or a specific group of people, that "1968" ties together political content, lifestyles, biographies, music, art, and everyday design, and that the label has some descriptive power across national boundaries.

I have also argued that if we are to use the term zeitgeist as a sociological concept, we would do well to critically examine some assumptions associated with its historicist heritage. When we discuss period-specific cultural patterns, we need not assume "periods" as coherent wholes. While zeitgeists have a certain location in time and are thus in some ways defined by "their period", they cannot in turn be assumed to define this period. They might define a period in conjunction with a polar opposite, as Mannheim has suggested and as could be argued for the case of "1968", but this would need to be demonstrated with reference to the entirety of the social space for any given moment. The reach of a pattern across social and geographical space is an empirical question. A cultural phenomenon may qualify as a zeitgeist according to my definition without being central to its historical moment, as I have suggested using the example of the discovery of the unconscious.

Understood as a concept among others, the concept of zeitgeist can be used to hold sweeping cultural diagnosis, such as "post-modernism" or "neoliberalism", to account and add nuance to them. It can hold such diagnosis to account historically (via-à-vis other periods) and sociologically (via-à-vis other concepts). Holding a diagnosis of zeitgeist to account historically means to compare patterns in meaningful practices across periods, rather than only focusing on the new. Holding a diagnosis to account sociologically means probing whether the phenomenon could not be captured by using other concepts from the sociology of culture, such as group-specific cultures, enduring binaries, field-specific developments, fashions, or styles. It also means asking empirical questions about the scope of the hypothesized pattern and probe critically, who, where, in what setting partook in the hypothesized zeitgeist. In mapping the scope of a zeitgeist, sociologists can use the full range of concepts they have developed for mapping social space: A zeitgeist may encompass some groups but not others, some organizations, not others, some fields but not others, and some inter-actions or occasions but not others. Inversely, considering zeitgeist as a possible pattern can enrich research, which addresses specific social settings, fields, or geographical areas by inviting scholars to consider contemporaneous developments in other fields or other geographical contexts. It can encourage scholars of organizations, for example, to look for zeitgeist-specific styles of structuring organizations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007).

More research is needed to examine how particular zeitgeists extend across time, across geographical and across social space, and how they are made possible across geographically dispersed settings. A zeitgeist might be facilitated by the experience of a generation, but it could also extend across several generations or be carried by a different social group. It will also be carried by non-human elements, such as cultural objects, technologies and media. Asking about the media or carriers of zeitgeist could further our understanding of how situated practices and human and non-human carriers add up to macro-cultural phenomena and to how they add up to different kinds of macro-cultural phenomena. Further, it could develop our understanding of how they do so differently at different times. Recent work on nations and nationalism has asked how group-specific cultural patterns are made possible by a range of socio-material carriers (e.g. Zubrzycki, 2017). This could be extended by examining the period-specific phenomena discussed in this paper.

The catalogue of formal properties can be the starting point of comparative investigation across cases of zeitgeist. If we were to answer questions about duration, scope, course, and carriers of zeitgeists across a number of cases of zeitgeist, we could address hypothesis about cultural change that go beyond single cases and we could do so in a manner that goes beyond focusing only on changing cultural content and includes the vehicles of cultural change. We can then ask in a systematic manner: How and by what means do cultures change? How quickly do cultures change? How do they change differently at different times?

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Monika Krause teaches sociology at the London School of Economics. She is the author of "The Good Project. Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason" (Chicago University Press, 2014), which has won awards from the British Sociological Association, the American Sociological Association and the Association for Research on Non-profits and the Voluntary Sector. Journal articles in the sociology of expertise and social theory have appeared in the British Journal of Sociology, Public Culture, Poetics, the European Journal of Sociology, Media, Culture and Society, and the European Journal for Social Theory.