

Temporalities and Materialities. Introduction to the Thematic Issue on Time and Discourse

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Abstract: Introducing the thematic issue on time and discourse, this paper briefly shows how the problematization of time leads to an understanding of time as a multiplicity of coexisting temporalities rather than a continuous, even stream and suggests "rhythm" as one metaphor to grasp this multiplicity. Further on, the paper shows how by understanding time in discourse in the sense of times, the contributions to this issue, although coming from quite diverse disciplinary backgrounds, meet in methodologies that combine ethnography, science and technology studies, and laboratory studies.

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This thematic issue is the outcome of a (still ongoing) colloquium at the Freie Universität Berlin devoted to the interdisciplinary questions of time and discourse. The colloquium has been initiated and hosted by the Emmy-Noether Group "Comparative Microsociology of Criminal Proceedings" since 2004. The rationale behind its initiation was the interest of the group in how different concepts of time could inform the linkage between social situations, the case, and the procedure in criminal proceedings and how various pasts and futures shape discursive materialities. The colloquium has brought together scholars from different disciplines, such as sociology, linguistics, anthropology, communication, psychology, and history. With this volume selected presentations from the first three semesters are turned into essays. While employing different approaches and methodologies, the contributions are united by two features: the interest in the issue of time when studying discourse and the employment of qualitative methodologies. Through these common interests the supposedly diverse works come to merge and relate to each other. They meet at interesting and rather unexpected intersections: in describing plural times rather than one time, focusing on the anticipation of the futures and the ways this anticipation determines the present, discussing the temporalities of materialities and relating different temporalities that constitute and govern discourse. They meet in exploring discontinuity rather than continuity, looking at overlapping times, the interrelation of event and process, of emergencies breaking into the flow, of *chronos* and *kairos*. [1]

Dating back as far as MEAD's social behaviorism, the challenge for social science is to take time seriously (see FLAHERTY & FINE, 2001, p.158). Contrary to a conception of time as an underlying continuum that structures interaction and discourse, taking time seriously implies to problematize it, shifting the focus from

time to social times. That is, understanding time(s) as being constructed through interaction and discourse. In this sense time has been taken up in different streams of social theory (see for example LUHMANN [1978], GIDDENS [1984] and ADAM [1990]). Making time an issue for discourse, FOUCAULT employs quite different concepts of time, as MICHON (2002) shows persuasively. In taking up BRAUDEL's notion of the plurality of social time and from this developing ever new conceptualizations of time, from disconnected blocks to time as an elastic. Currently one can witness a rising interest in integrating questions of time into theory and methodology, as for example with a special issue on time and discourse focusing on organizational discourse (SABELIS, KEENOY, OSWICK & YBEMA, 2005) in which the authors analyze how conceptions of time are reflected in discourse (FORRAY & WOODILLA, 2005), how discourse produces different temporalities (KEENOY, 2005) and how time as a scarce resource is discursively controlled (KNIGHTS & YAKHLEF, 2005; VAN FENEMA & RÄISÄNEN, 2005). [2]

Problematizing time leads to an understanding of time as a multiplicity of coexisting temporalities rather than a continuous, even stream. This notion of multiplicity of times or modes of temporalizations (see GEIßLER, 2002, p.132) can lead to a different take on discourse and social interaction. For example, employing a musical metaphor, time can be grasped through rhythm. Rhythm does not only refer to the continuous interception of an element in time (heartbeat, breath, strokes when swimming), it is not just meter. Rhythm is the arrangement of elements in time based on (varying) meter. It is the repetition of the similar, not of the same. Although it establishes a recognizable shape of temporality, this shape is flexible. LANGER, in her classic definition, takes the essence of rhythm to be "the preparation of a new event by ending a previous one" (1953, p.126). The different elements and materialities—linguistic as well as non-linguistic—bring in different pasts and direct themselves towards different futures. The experience of time through rhythm is established through anticipation. The concept of different rhythms is often understood as different succeeding rhythms: acceleration followed by pauses, groupings of prolonged and fast entities. In this sense, GEIßLER (2002) talks of different rhythms in different social places in terms of "timescapes" (p.137). But as we will see in the different papers, the analysis of discourse always has to take into account that what is ending and what is being prepared might not be just one thing, but many; hence, different layers, and different coexisting rhythms. For social actors this implies the need to adhere to and feed into different temporalities. [3]

The contributions in this volume all take issue with the taken-for-grantedness of time as a continuous background against which actors engage in interaction. It is not surprising, then, that many authors meet on shared methodological grounds although starting out from the seemingly vague pairing of time and discourse. They meet in methodologies that combine ethnography, science and technology studies, and laboratory studies. They do so in their own creative mixture, reflecting their disciplinary background and material at hand. Two main areas are problematized: the continuity and the singularity of time. [4]

By taking up the dual conception of time in Greek antiquity, *chronos* and *kairos* in classical rhetorical theory, [SCHWARZE](#) points out how time is used differently as an argumentative resource. She describes the topos of time in her material of conflict talk between mothers and their adolescent daughters as consisting of two topoi: that of *kairos* and that of *chronos*. The distinction between *chronos*, the flow of time, and *kairos*, the (divinely) right moment for action, at the same time interrupting and transforming the *chronos*, reappears in different fashions. [KOZIN](#) analyzes the production of a legal emergency that breaks into the continuum of the attorney's work process. Falling back on the data from ethnographic fieldwork and starting from a phenomenological perspective, he introduces laboratory studies and sociolegal research in order to show how a legal emergency is produced at the law office. He shows that emergency can be simultaneously understood as a temporal product, process, and precondition. In his paper on testimonial interviews [SCHEFFER](#) alerts the reader to the duplicitous side of testimonial interviews, where the juxtaposition of the interviewee's direct experience with the "needs" of the "truth-finding engine" is at stake. The juxtaposition appears as benign, its generative potential directed toward producing truth. However, according to [SCHEFFER](#), in the context of procedural time, discursive certainty turns into "truth" when direct experiences of witnesses gain an appearance of "facts." [5]

The discontinuity of time presents itself not only in terms of rupture but also as simultaneity of different times, the overlap and coexistence of different and even contradictory thematic streams as in [WALL](#)'s analysis of the introduction of experimental medicine into the tradition of medicine as an art. [WALL](#) shows the acceptance of the laboratory by doctors in the beginning of the 20th century using two British hospitals and traces it by following the concepts of "natural" and "normal" in medical case notes. Another piece on health discourse is [MOREIRA](#)'s work on the different calculations of health risks and the thresholds between health, risk, and illness. He addresses the different temporalities that interact in the production of health identities and health risks. Starting from contemporary health research, practice and policy and focusing on categories based on the calculation of a probability of developing a given condition—risk conditions—rather than on the clinical detection of existing signs of such conditions, he analyzes different temporalities that govern "risk identities." [6]

A different form of overlapping temporalities can be witnessed when futures need to be performed in the present. When activating the future in the present strategically, this overlapping can be understood as the construction of an avant-garde—as the existence of something that only hints at the materialization yet to come. This is the point [JENSEN](#) makes when he analyzes the strategies by which managers of a new economy business persuaded business journalists that the former's business was the future. Employing an actor-network approach and relying on ethnographic data he argues that the persuasive endeavor is one of contrasting the future working life with the problematic contemporary working life, thereby enacting a time-world determined by sharp contrasting epochs. The notion of anticipation also gains weight when analyzing activities that are in themselves preparations for a future event. The rhythm of an activity needs to be

adjusted to the frame in which it will later be reproduced. [MOTZKAU](#) emphasizes the role of time in constructing a specific subject, a child witness. By linking the production of a legal record (testimony) to the experienced time, she demonstrates the inherent discrepancy between the legal suppositions of the child witness understood in terms of the limited memory, unpredictability, and reactivity, and the subsequent measures implemented by the UK Crown Court to overcome these apparent deficiencies. The issue of simultaneity can also be treated as different coexisting times or conceptions of time. Here the question after the time of *what* becomes pertinent. On the basis of her field work undertaken in an elementary school, [SØRENSEN](#) demonstrates a perspective on time, space, and materiality as a core trinity. Analyzing the time and materiality of a blackboard, a bed loft and a 3D virtual environment, she shows how materialities differ with respect to their inscribed time. She suggests a relational definition of materiality and notes that this move implies turning the question of the time of materiality into an empirical question. [KONTOPODIS](#) offers a reformulation of pedagogical concepts of identity formation. Leaning in on the results of a long-term ethnography at the experimental school for academically challenged students in the city of Berlin, Germany, KONTOPODIS enriches the thematic thread of this volume with a theoretically dense analysis of "temporal devices of control" exercised at the school in the name of personal self-growth and social integration. [7]

Rather than aiming at the grand answers to the grand questions (What is time? How do we experience time? How is time accessible?), the contributions to this issue use these grand questions as underlying themes that inform their studies. Asking the questions is already part of the solution, formulating problems of social interaction and discourse as questions of time rather than of locality. We hope that this compilation can work as an invitation to direct more attention to time in empirical, discourse-analytical work and to reflect on the concept of time that has been underlying the own research all along. [8]

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