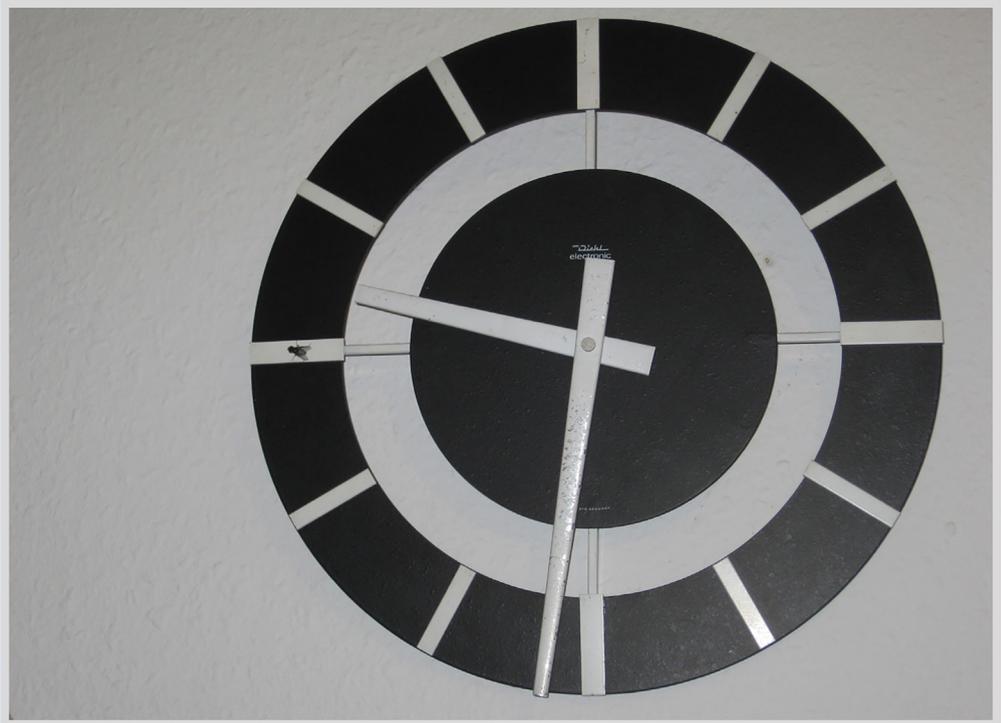


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Edited by S. Berg, S. Grub, I. Habermann, L. Krämer and D. Wiemann



British Temporalities: The Times of Culture and the Cultures of Time

edited by Ralf Schneider

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Time and the Study of British Cultures: An Introduction

Ralf Schneider (Bielefeld)

Whenever one operates with ‘time’, people within their ‘environment,’ within social and physical processes, are always involved. (Elias 1991: 36)

1. Turning ‘Temporal’? British Cultural Studies and Time

While investigations of the phenomenological, social, cultural and political implications of space have enjoyed prominence in the humanities for some decades, ‘time’ and ‘temporality’ have no place among the canonical concepts that define contemporary British Cultural Studies. True, Raymond Williams’s (1977) model of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures does involve an acute awareness of the temporal dimensions of cultural change; still, scholars generally interested in the cultural relevance of time and the temporal aspects of culture will search in vain for related entries in the relevant sources, as for instance Williams’s own *Keywords* ([1976] 1985), where “Progressive” and “Tradition” are lemmas, but ‘temporality’ and ‘time’ are not; nor will they find chapters on the concepts of time or temporality in introductions to, or surveys of, the field (not even in the massive Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler 1992, and not in, e.g., Storey 2009, Turner 2003, or Tönnies & Viol 2007, either). Surely this does not mean that time and temporality are irrelevant for the study of British cultures?

Time may appear to be a self-evident and seemingly objective category, universal and given. But, as Russell Pavlov-West writes in his fine introduction to the philosophical, cultural and literary relevance of time, while time “underpins virtually all aspects of everyday life, as even the term ‘everyday’ reveals”, it “is also riddled with issues of power and hegemony and is at stake in much political struggle” (2013: 3). It is not merely calendars, which “were always the creations of political elites” (*ibid.*) that regulate, order and standardise the flow of human activities: every culture has always been heavily influenced not only by some neutral passing of time throughout history, which can then be retrospectively narrated and refigured *as* history (Ricoeur 1988), but also by the way society, or groups in society, have conceived of, dealt with, and regulated time in the different periods of cultural history. As the seminal study by Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* ([1983] 2014), has shown, time concepts have also been used by Western science in the construction of cul-

tural difference, in an attempt to naturalise inequalities of power. Convictions about time and temporality will affect the way people live their lives, how they react to others and to both the material and the spiritual world – in short: the way they think. The cultures of Great Britain have been no exception in that respect.

While Time Studies as a field of theory and research (cf. Burges & Elias 2016) may not have reached the status of a research paradigm as that accorded to the spatial turn, many thinkers have studied the temporalities that affect cultures. Currently the major preoccupation appears to be with the perceived scarcity of time. Much ink has been spilled about the speeding up of time in the context of globalised flows of traffic, information, and money, about what time does to different forms of labour and the experience of everyday life (Crow & Heath 2002, Wajcman 2015), and about how counter-movements have emerged that offer resistance to the phenomena of acceleration (cf. Sharma 2014). The Department of Sociology of the University of Oxford hosts a Centre of Time Use Research, where scholars investigate, on a broad empirical basis, how people actually spend their days, and how they perceive and evaluate the relationship between available time and the activities that fill it (see <https://www.timeuse.org>).

Taking a more diachronic perspective, cultural history has seen a number of broad changes in ‘temporal mentalities’, which have affected cultures in different ways across the globe (cf. Rösen 2007). Britain’s historical and cultural development was continually affected by particular uses of time, and every period has a recognisable temporal signature. Just consider the importance of time measurement for navigation to the New World in the Early Modern period, which significantly points to the fact that concepts of both space and time, crucially interrelated as they are, affect the mentalities of a period.¹ The wide-ranging effects of the relationship between work time and leisure time in the industrialised world, which emerged in England around the end of the eighteenth century, is another key example that comes easily to mind.² Just like space, then, time is never simply a given in any society. While the ‘spatial turn’ in cul-

¹ Considerations of time and space in their interrelation underlie much analytical thought. To name only two different major representatives of such approaches, Mikhail Bakhtin’s ([1937] 1981) notion of the chronotope has been a leading concept connecting the temporal and spatial aspects of aesthetic production, and it continues to be used in literary and cultural studies (see, e.g., Detmers & Osterhammer 2016); Reinhart Koselleck’s (e.g., 2000, 2004) approach to history also makes use of spatio-temporal models of thought to capture the varying, co-existing conceptions of temporalities.

² See Glennie & Thrift (2009) for a historical account of time-measurement in England and Wales.

tural studies has done much to position the awareness in the mind of scholars that space and place are far from neutral conditions of human life, 'time' has never served as a unifying concept for a broad field of enquiry. As the articles in this volume will demonstrate, however, it is fruitful to investigate how concepts of time, just like space, are invented, constructed, charged with meaning, and active in maintaining or subverting social distinctions across (British) cultural history. The contributions collected here will also illustrate that there is never only one single time conception in any given period, but that the meanings and uses of time are as much subject to negotiation, areas of conflict or the mere co-presence of various interpretations and appropriations as are other areas of culture.

2. Examples: From the Greenwich Time Lady to Modernism

David Rooney (2008) has studied a phenomenon and a period that can serve here as an illustration of the topics and aims of the present issue: the time-selling business of the Greenwich Time Lady, Elizabeth Belville. Her father, John Henry Belville, had begun selling people in London the time in 1836, going to Greenwich Observatory every morning with his watch, setting it to the time of the large clock outside the institute, and then journeying to the city to set the clocks correctly for some 200 clients who had subscribed to his service. Elizabeth's mother took over the business when her husband died in 1856, and Elizabeth followed suit in 1892 when her mother retired. Elizabeth Belville kept travelling to and fro between Greenwich and her customers in London until the outbreak of World War two, when she retired, aged 86. The Standard Time Company had tried to push her out of business, and the BBC had introduced the Greenwich Time Signal – the 'pips' – in 1924, but Belville kept on. For 103 years, the Belville business demonstrated that time, whatever else it had become, had also been turned into a marketable commodity. While this comes as no surprise, seeing that the development of modern consumer society in Britain dates back to the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century was the period in which Britain probably saw the most wide-ranging transformations of temporality so far.

Scholars have argued that the new temporality that characterises that century comprised at least four aspects (Conrad 2015: 55-59). First, time became *standardised*. The railways showed people quite plainly that the tradition of taking and maintaining local time was not very helpful once you intended to leave your closer surroundings; the official Railway time, based on Greenwich Mean Time, was adopted in 1847. Also, the work schedules in the factories and the utilisation of machines in shifts created an awareness for the measurement of time beyond, and different from, the local factors of daytime and night time and more task-based ideas of working time. Second, measurement of time was *globalised*. International

trade, imperialism, and colonisation were factors that contributed to the introduction of time measurement on a global scale, coinciding with, and supported by, the growth of networks of communication. It took seven years, incredible sums of money and a number of failures to put a telegraph cable on the transatlantic ocean bed that connected North America and the British Isles first in 1858. Yet, when it was in place, telegraph communication between the continents threw the differences in time zones into relief. Although Queen Victoria's congratulatory message reached the American President (James Buchanan) only after a full 16 hours, the idea that you could jump over such distances almost 'online' enthused many contemporaries and must have created a new quality of perception of the relationship between time and space.³ Other submarine cables followed suit and spread that effect. World Time was eventually introduced following the Prime Meridian Conference held in Washington in 1884. The new time standard was partly forced onto the regions colonised by imperialist powers, but partly it also coincided with new time conceptions that were already under way in those areas. Third, many areas of life were increasingly regarded with a view to their stage of development. This kind of temporalisation was *comparative and competitive*, and it followed a teleological and evaluative tendency, measuring the degree of civilisation of a country in terms of the progress it had made. As Fabian ([1983] 2014) has shown, the discipline of anthropology worked on the basis of a secularized understanding of time which allowed different cultures to be compared in the first place, obviously to the disadvantage of the colonised peoples. Edward Burnett Tylor's two-volume work of evolutionist anthropology, *Primitive Culture* ([1872] 2010), is a prominent example of that kind of thinking. Fourth, the discovery of the immense *historical depth of time* shook some Victorian convictions at their roots, since it meant that the biblical chronology of the world had to be abandoned. Against the couple of thousand years that calculations following the book of Genesis came up with, Charles Darwin posited some 300 million years of natural history. The discovery of geological time through the fossils that amateur geologists brought to light – with what John Ruskin called “those dreadful Hammers!” (cf. Landow 2005, n.p.) – could only cast doubt on many Victorians' belief in the Bible. In his *Origin of the Species*, Darwin comments on Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (published in 1830) by saying that his own work on evolution can only be understood if one acknowledges, with Lyell, “how incomprehensively vast have been the past periods of time” (1862, 3rd ed.: 111 [qtd. in Fabian ([1983] 2014: 13]). The very concept of the past had to be utterly re-thought.

³ See Russell (2011 [1866]) for a contemporary account, and Cookson (2012) for a history of the cable.

The last three decades of Elizabeth Belville's time-adjusting trips into the city coincided not only with new inventions in mobility and communication that would change the experience of the spatio-temporal positioning of humans – the aeroplane and the automobile, the radio and the telephone, for instance – but also with a broader cultural movement that conceived of temporality in new and significantly different ways. Heavily psychologised and individualised, this new time conception focused on the subjectivity and flux of time, rather than its ontological and material – measurable – qualities, on time as perceived by the mind rather than that indicated on the clock. The new view of temporality manifested itself in both academic theories and cultural production. It is no coincidence that the works of many modernist writers, including Henry James, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot, appeared at about the same time as major new philosophical, psychological, and scientific conceptions of time. These writings are characterised by giving precedence to intuition in grasping the experience of temporal flux, as conceptualised by Henri Bergson in *Time and Free Will* (1910), Alfred Einstein's questioning of the fixity of the temporal dimension in *Relativity* (1910), and Edmund Husserl's emphasis on the individual's experience of the temporal relatedness of events, states and processes in the past, present and future in his lectures on the *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* ([1893-1917] 1991). The time of Modernist culture differed substantially from that of the Victorian period, though Victorian uses of time, as in the Belville business, were apparently perpetuated.

The examples of the way time was conceived and conceptualised through a period change that I have just sketched briefly point to three basic assumptions on which the present volume is based. First, concepts of time and temporality are always contingently connected to their particular contexts, whether in the periods just sketched, in previous centuries, or today. Second, changes in conceptions of temporality in a culture are made by a complex array of ideological, economic, political, scientific, technological, and social factors. Third, there is no reason to assume that one period has only one monolithic conception of time; rather, while there may be dominant notions that influence the temporal mentality of a culture most perceptibly, previous, conflicting and innovative time conceptions can coexist at any given point. Cultural discourses and artefacts contribute to the negotiations that occur between these conceptions.

3. Case Studies in British Temporalities from the Restoration to Today: The Contributions to the Present Volume

While it would be presumptuous to demand that a 'temporal turn' occur in British Cultural Studies, the articles collected here give an impression of what Cultural Studies might gain from a fresh consideration of time

and temporality. The lack of any one established approach to the times of culture and the cultures of time need not be regarded as a disadvantage. On the contrary, the contributions selected for the present volume will demonstrate that the ways of tackling topics that concern time and temporality are as diverse as British Cultural Studies have been for a number of decades. The variety of aspects of time and temporality in British Cultural History warrants a broad range of approaches anyway.

From the nineteenth century phenomena sketched above, we might look back. The watch used by the Belvilles, for instance, was a John Arnold pocket chronometer (No. 485/786), nicknamed 'Arnold'. When Ruth Belville died, the watch was left to the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. The origins of that Livery Company of the City of London date back to a Royal Charter of 1631, which leads us to the 17th century. The founding date of the Company looks astonishingly early, and Dorothea Flothow, in her contribution on Restoration uses of time and time measurement ("Time and the Restoration Period: 'Chronotypes' and 'Temporal Communities'"), demonstrates the wide-spread but significantly varying relevance that clock time had for different communities and across social strata as early as the second half of the 17th century. Clock time had become increasingly accessible not only via the pendulum clocks that so enthused Charles II, but via watches, too. From her analysis of diaries from the period it emerges that different approaches to time coexisted, with some people displaying a 'modern', clock-oriented temporal awareness, while for others, more 'natural' parameters (morning, noon, afternoon, etc.) are more relevant, and that different ways of dealing with time also co-existed in individual ego-documents.

In her article "The Dominant Conceptualisation of Time: The Clock begins to Tick in Industrial Capitalist England", Ellen Grünkemeier investigates the extent to which the regulation of time may turn into a point of contention and a socio-political issue. Studying the 19th-century discourse around working class leisure time, she points out that the middle classes were continually fretting about workers not devoting their time to modes of recreation that would be considered 'rational', 'useful', 'harmless' or 'innocent' – from a middle class viewpoint. Not only does this remind us that the roots of contemporary ideologies of profitable time-use and self-improvement lie in that period; the letters, pamphlets and poems published in middle-class journals at the time also betray deep-rooted anxieties that the lower classes, if left to their own devices, might spend their time in pursuits that relate to drink, unruly or violent behaviour or even too much political thought, thereby jeopardising the health workers needed to return to their work-places and the social hierarchies that guaranteed the middle classes their comfortable economic position. Safely con-

taining this threat of subversion, the middle classes ended up opening the sphere of their own leisure activities to the workers.

The present offers no less interesting and conflicting temporality concepts for scholarly analysis, as the remaining contributions to this volume show. Georgia Christinidis, in her article “The Temporality of Neoliberal Coming-of-Age Narratives”, argues that the notions of passing time that shape the way we perceive our lives are heavily invested with ideologies. The very term ‘adulthood’ implies much more than a simple temporal dimension, as a state that must be reached by overcoming the previous phases of childhood and adolescence. It also carries an important value judgment about what is considered the ‘normal’ state of fully-developed subjectivity, which nowadays is heavily fraught with neoliberal notions of agency and self-optimisation in a world allegedly full of choices. Such assumptions underlie judgments of ‘maturity’, which is eventually reached through ‘normal’ development. Reading Monica Ali’s novel *Brick Lane* (2007) as an account of the formation of such a neoliberal subject, and showing that Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2010) denies the reader that type of closure which consists in establishing a fully developed, self-improved self with all the agency and choice, the article points to the role of the novel in exploring the spectrum of cultural ideologies of temporality.

Christoph Singer’s contribution, “The Temporalities of British Detention: Chronic Waiting at the Colnbrook Detention Centre”, discusses a temporality that is the antithesis of modern ideas of mobility and acceleration: the time of waiting that immigrants, refugees in particular, have to spend in detention while their legal status is clarified. His analysis of the photo-series *No Man’s Land* by Nana Varveropoulou (2015) shows that the experience of potentially unlimited waiting, which is forced upon asylum seekers as a punitive measure by a state demonstrating its dominance, finds an unexpected expression in photography: the seemingly static medium of the photo, with its tendency to freeze time in snapshots, can also evoke larger time frames by pointing both to the detainees’ past experiences and their future aspirations. It is therefore an oddly adequate medium for capturing the position of individuals taken out of the surrounding, dominant temporalities that are characterised by purpose-orientation and speed.

To what extent the political thought that dominates our culture is shaped by fundamental temporality conceptions becomes apparent in Mark Schmitt’s analysis of the current critical discourse on capitalism (“Beyond the Future: Crisis and Precarious Temporality in Post-Capitalist Discourse”). His contribution discusses the crisis of modernity that critics of Eurocentric, neoliberal capitalism have diagnosed as a crisis of the particular temporality of the project of modernity. This project was