

POL S 404: The Politics of Sleep

Today: Time

- Sharma opens chapter one with an anecdote about a young software developer she meets in an airport. He cites the work of Zygmunt Bauman, the famous social theorist who died in 2017. If you want to know more about "liquid modernity" (a concept that relates to our discussion of modernity and Rosa), you can [check out this interview](#).
- Sharma introduces her account of speed and time through three case studies of frequent business travellers (or "road warriors"): Claire, Darryl, and Ken. What do these examples show?
- Sharma is interested in "technologies of time maintenance" and "temporal architecture." What are they, what do they do, and what is their relation to sleep?
- Chapter two is an ethnographic study of taxi drivers. Sharma introduces an alternative account of speed and time through three case studies: Abraham, Judy, and Billie. What do these examples show?
- This population also thinks about social acceleration and time, but Sharma deliberately contrasts their experience with the "road warriors." What are the differences, and what do they show about speed, time, and work?
- Taxi drivers also have a relationship to rest and sleep. What is it, and, again, how is it different from more privileged temporal subjects?
- "The suppression of embodied temporal conflicts is part of the postmodern condition" (217), says Birth. What do you think he means?
- What is "time-space compression"?

Recap: Why do we periodize history?

Organizes our knowledge of the past
Captures changes in the nature of historical sources or evidence
Provides over-arching framework for making sense of historical change
Implicated in narratives of historical development ("the Enlightenment," Marx's "historical materialism" etc.)
Helps us represent and understand the present
Provides (multi-)generational meaning and identity

Two important concepts:
neoliberalism
biopower/biopolitics

What is neoliberalism?

A practice of governance
Enacted in the major western democracies (and hence globally) since the 1980s

Economic

- Support for free markets, which are increasingly global markets.
- Unfettered capital accumulation; lower taxes
- Defence of minimal state, especially “austerity” and roll-back of welfare state and social programs
- Sees economic growth as end: “a rising tide floats all boats.”

Political

- Minimizes structurally motivated public policy or social programs.
- Minimizes public services.
- Expansion of corporate power and employer prerogative; diminishing power and authority of elected representatives or public bureaucracies.
- May grow parts of government aimed at national security, surveillance, and management of crime.

Philosophical

- Social ontology: individual as basic unit of society; minimal states; ambiguous status of family.
- Cultivates ideology of individual self-sufficiency and responsibility.
- Rejects structural analysis.
- Principles of economics become “values” for non-economic spheres.

What is biopower (and biopolitics)?

A practice of governance over life—over physiological processes, bodily experiences, life and death
A feature of late modernity and complex societies

Sarah Sharma is Associate Professor and Director of the [McLaughlin Centre for Ethics and Biopolitics](#) at the University of Toronto.

- Her monograph *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* published by Duke University Press was awarded the “2014 National Communication Critical Cultural Division Book of the Year.” *In the Meantime* intervenes in the popular sentiment that the world is speeding and argues the explanatory power of speed-up is less an accurate depiction of the contemporary moment than it is an ideological discourse itself. Working against this myopic focus on speedup the book introduces a new approach to time and locates how temporality operates as a key relation of power structured at the intersection of a range of social differences.

- Sarah is currently working on a new project that explores the gendered politics of exit and refusal, or what she terms “the (s)Exit”, within contemporary techno-culture.



Worksheet

What did we learn about sleep from Sharma?

Asking a good critical question...

Take 15 minutes and write out a motivation and a question.
Let's refine the questions and discuss them!

Kevin Birth, "Time and the Biological Consequences of Globalization"

Time-space compression

Technological change makes physical space quicker to traverse, so that space is perceived as shorter. As we perceive the world to be getting faster, we also perceive it to be getting smaller.

What is Birth's thesis?

- Participation in global processes of commodity circulation is a major dimension of the experience of globalization, and such participation has its own rhythms and cycles that are not homologous to local biological rhythms. This does not make biology and local solar cycles irrelevant, however. Instead, it makes human social activity a site of embodied encounter between local times and global desires.

What is Birth's thesis?

- The relationship of place and time, then, is psychologically, socially, and biologically encoded. Flows of goods, services, people, and capital across time zones should make apparent the temporal differences between places, and, in fact, many people exhibit a great deal of practical knowledge of how to deal with such temporal obstacles, yet this issue is theoretically underappreciated. This is, in part, because of the history of cultural concepts of time-reckoning that have tended to bring different cycles and processes into the single, homogeneous representation of clock time.

The contradictions of space-time compression:

- Divides nature from society; ignores the biology of social relations
- Requirements of global time inequitable
- The demands of capital accumulation undermine bodily needs
- Local control of information and time affords global power

Second short papers on social acceleration thesis or time readings due next Wednesday

Next week:

- TOPIC: WORK
- Read Weeks on contemporary political analysis of work (her intro and chapter one and chapter four), and Baxter and Kroll-Smith on the workplace nap. Reading questions will be posted by Friday.