

## Passing the Time in Pastimes, Professionalism and Politics

Knights, David

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**Passing the Time in Pastimes,  
Professionalism and Politics**  
**Reflecting on the ethics and epistemology of  
time studies**

**David Knights**

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**ABSTRACT.** This article may be seen as in search of time but with no 'real' prospect of finding it since it is believed that time reflects and reinforces the relations in which it is embedded. The article will focus on pastimes, professionalism, and politics, arguing that while these diverse activities would appear to have no more than their alliteration in common, they share a similar orientation to time that is informed by a phenomenological consciousness of intentionality. This involves a linear sense of time as representing the gap that can only be bridged by intentions being realized instrumentally in specific results through means-end chains. Time then becomes filled up with activities that leave little space for reflection. This raises some issues regarding time that, outside of philosophy and even there only occasionally, would not ordinarily be aired. Some of these issues will be ethical, epistemological and methodological. The ethics will be drawn through an examination of Levinas's misgivings about the phenomenology of Heidegger, the epistemology and methodology from some deliberations on time in relation to Foucault's discourse on epistemic regimes, and methodology as one possible implication of those deliberations. **KEY WORDS** • ethics • power/knowledge • representation • subjectivity • securing the self in social identity

## Introduction

Once upon a time as most children's stories begin, time and space seemed fixed in the localized reality of their everyday lives. In discovering that the earth revolves around the sun, Gallileo in the 17th century indicated that nothing was fixed in space or time, thus supplanting localization with extension (Foucault, 1994: 176). Place and time no longer had their fixed point as in medieval life but were seen as in perpetual motion, opened up, shifting or extending into an unknown and unknowable infinity. Today emplacement or the identification of particular ensembles or networks of relations that are privileged for this or that purpose supplant this simple extension of time and space (p. 176). Yet was time and space ever so open and is it today simply an assemblage of more or less useful relations? It is useful perhaps in the sense of sustaining a coherent sense of self against continuous threats to its stability, partly due to the unpredictability of time and space. In extending ourselves in a potentially infinite time and space, today as in the 17th century we invariably seek to close it down. Calendars and diaries, rituals and routines, organizations and institutions are attempted closures on the time and space that potentially run into infinity and plenitude. Even though we know these interventions to be artificial and temporary, the idea of unstructured time and empty space is troublesome to us in modern society and was probably equally so in the long distant past.

The article will focus on a series of activities that, it has to be admitted, were initially chosen for little other reason than their alliteration.<sup>1</sup> Following Derrida (1993, cited in Jones, 2003: 10), I want to argue that the topics or targets of study are often *undecidable* in the sense that we can easily find as many reasons for studying them as not.<sup>2</sup> Consequently this focus on pastimes, professionalism, and politics is arbitrary although each does seem to relate significantly to time. What I want to explore in this article could have been accomplished equally as well by focusing on any of a number of topics. The arbitrariness of the topics, however, means that the analysis conforms to a version of the *critical case* approach where selection is designed to provide an equal if not strong probability of the argument being contradicted by the evidence. While these diverse activities would appear to have no more than their alliteration in common, and indeed may display diametrically opposed views of time, their differences are superficial compared to what they fundamentally share – a sense of time as that which has to be brought under control.

Pastimes, professional work, and politics seem very different in the sense that we think of the latter two as time spent working largely to provide economic sustenance whereas pastimes are simply seen as pleasant ways of spending time. Because of this, their orientation to time appears in stark contrast. The professional worker invariably treats time as precious because there never seems enough of it to distribute around the diversity of tasks, commitments, and pro-

jects on hand. Pastimes, by contrast, link more closely to the mere passing of time; they are activities that seem to say more about how we pass time than the significance of what is being done. It may be argued that anything that takes up time outside of work could be classified as a pastime such that both politics and professional work could readily start out as pastimes only to become more than a pastime when they take on the character of work. Politics invariably begins as an unpaid voluntary activity as do many professional activities in sport, entertainment, and the arts. Insofar as they remain unpaid and voluntary activities, they usually attract the designation – amateur. Unfortunately, this label has connotations of comparatively low levels of competence, and pre-professional training or apprenticeship. In this sense, the term pastime seems to have a more neutral flavour yet it can also be seen as just filling in time and therefore quite trivial.

While all these differences have significance for subjects in the sense of how they think about time in relation to their activities, not least in terms of a gendered orientation to time, I shall be arguing that the similarities in orientation are more revealing theoretically. However, in addition to this discussion of pastimes, professionalism and politics, I want also to raise some epistemological and ethical issues that may be relevant to the study of time. In discourses on time, we are invariably involved in describing the ways in which people construct or relate to time and, in so doing, we objectify some parts of their behaviour in a series of representations that depend for their possibility on a number of sometimes explicit but often implicit assumptions about their subjectivity. When our representations are accepted as a form of knowledge they can then be drawn upon in the exercise of power having the effect of transforming our assumptions about their subjectivity into reality. In short, subjectivity is constituted or, to be more precise, reproduced by the knowledge that presumes it in the first place. I reflect on the epistemological space and method for conducting studies of time in a way that has ethical implications in the latter part of the article.

The article begins with a brief examination of the literature that has theorized time before, in the second section, relating this to pastimes, professionalism, and politics with a view to identifying the differences and similarities in their orientation to time. Within this section, there is an attempt to link the analysis to a discussion of ethics inspired by the work of Levinas (1986, 1989). In the third section, the article turns to the examination of an *alternative* to the epistemological and methodological mainstream that I believe would be more conducive to studying time as an ethical rather than as a scientific concept. Finally, in a summary and conclusion, there is some reflection on this alternative possibility in a return to Levinas and the ethics of time.

### Studying Time<sup>3</sup>

Broadly, the literature adopts either an objective, subjective or social approach, all three of which tend to give precedence to time as having a linear characteristic. The objective approach conceptualizes 'time' as a linear object existing external to the individual, in fixed immutable units (Becker, 1965). It is perceived as an abstract entity, homogeneous in form, but easily divided into discrete elements that can be quantified. Because time is understood outside of the context of its use, it is unaffected by the 'transformations it charts' (Adam, 1993: 166). This conception of 'time' as a quantifiable, compartmentalized, objective entity constituted by uniform parts linked in a linear and sequential fashion to one another contrasts with the subjective notion of time.

Here, instead of focusing on time as an object, attention is given to how individuals perceive or comprehend time (Hirschman, 1987). While time is subjectively interpreted, it is still, within the parameters of a linear scale. Theorists draw upon a linear conception of time to evaluate the ways in which subjects perceive it. In prioritizing linear time, the subjective model fails to understand how time may not just be perceived but also constructed. This limitation is partly overcome in the social approach where time is seen as a reflection of social practices and is socially constituted through the routines of social life such as meals, sleep, work, leisure, and so on. Social time is a cultural phenomenon that is both a condition and consequence of the actions and interactions engaged in by individuals and groups in their everyday social relations. The phenomenological 'event' is the focus since this is where time anticipates the always embedded subjectivity in social (and temporal) processes. The subject is no longer discrete or separate from events that constitute it through the opportunities and limitations of time and space (Ermarth, 1992).

Although social conceptions of time are less mechanistic and technically rational than previous approaches, they appear still to remain bound to an unproblematic understanding of time as essentially linear. Because they do not theorize the social mechanisms that serve to constitute linear time, social models are equally unable to recognize the inextricable link between linear time, power, and knowledge. Consequently, they are unable to appreciate the social processes through which alternative conceptions such as circular or relational time are subjugated or obscured by the dominance of linear time. Moreover, by failing to engage theoretically with the discursively constituted existence of linear time, these approaches reproduce many of the everyday assumptions of linear time whereby it is taken for granted as an inevitable and exhaustive part of our social existence. Although the social approach refuses to accept that time is independent of the social relations in which it is embedded, it still does not question linear time, the hegemony of which remains supreme.

In an attempt to 'bridge the gap between objective and subjective perspec-

tives', Orlikowski and Yates (2002: 686) speak about temporal structures constraining and enabling human activities. They argue that people routinely draw on temporal structures as if they existed independently of their practice but in the process of their enactment, of course, these structures are reproduced. While studying time in use and thus seeing time as a function of human activities, these authors still do not escape the hegemony of linear time since every example they provide to confirm their bridging of objective and subjective time reproduces its linearity. In their practice-based alternative model, actors enact new or modified temporal structures in their practices but these are assumed to be different start dates such as a new fiscal year or dressing down on one day in the working week (p. 689). Linear time is taken for granted as an overarching structure irrespective of minor modifications in previous practices within it. It also privileges an individual orientation as if time is an 'equally distributed resource where each individual receives his/her allotted share' (Gunnarsson and Ressner, 1985: 109–10, quoted in Davies, 1990). A necessary condition of this individualistic notion of time is its linearity such that it can readily be broken down into measurable units and allocated to individuals.

### **A gendered conception of time**

Compared to the allocation of time as an individual resource, especially where they are bringing up families, many women and some men experience a very different conception of time. Building on this observation, an extensive literature (e.g. Wadel and Wallman, 1979; Gunnarsson and Ressner, 1985; Forman and Sowton, 1989; Kahn, 1989; O'Brien, 1989; Davies, 1990, 1996) has challenged not only the objective and subjective approaches but also the linear hegemony to which they, and it seems this new practice-based approach, subscribe. This gender research suggests that men and women use time differently owing to their distinct life situations. Common to these literatures is the understanding that, when discussing the everyday lives of women and especially mothers, for example, we cannot focus solely on individual linear time. In caring for children, mothers are embedded within a set of relations that are demanding on their time in ways that are often not the case for fathers. The cyclical and repetitive demands associated with feminine time are in some conflict with a linear perspective, which separates work from leisure, the public from the private, and task from clock-based orientations to time. While various conceptions of time co-exist in practice, degrees of incompatibility can generate tensions within social relations. Although linear temporal structures such as meal times and the school day, and formal work timetables are accepted, the major pressures on parents are much more relational and spontaneous as children and others place demands on them for their attention.

The common colloquialism – 'a woman's time is never her own' reveals the

sense in which time for women with families is more collective than individual since it is linked to the demands or claims of other members of the family. This is not merely a modification of the temporal structure but its deconstruction, to recognize that it contains an almost infinite variability and multiplicity. Part of this variability is a cyclical notion where time is perceived in terms of the endless cycle of routine demands and expectations of children, partners, extended family and what needs to be done (e.g. budgeting, shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.). The existence of cyclical time does not displace linear time so much as challenge its hegemony. For within the cyclical demands on a person there may well be linear sequences such as meal times, children's bed times, school attendance, and so on that operate simultaneously with, and as constraints on, non-linear conceptions of time. Relational demands or obligations may 'free' us from or leave us oblivious to, without necessarily displacing, the hegemonic constraints of linear or clock time. The concept of 'temporal embeddedness' (Lewis and Weigart, 1990: 92) suggests that human life and the social actions which constitute it are a complex overlap of actions and meanings at various stages of enactment. Each action, in turn, is embedded within a perceived or prescribed duration. Temporal embeddedness contrasts sharply with the dominant notion of linearity, where events are assumed to transpire in a sequential, chronological and discrete manner such that there is a progression whereby the beginning of one event signals the end of a previous event. Cyclical or circular time involves the simultaneous overlapping of multiple events and temporalities.

There was a tendency at first in this literature to tie this distinction of linear and cyclical time to the differences between the lives of men and women. While often this is the fundamental source of difference, it could be argued that linearity is predominantly a condition and consequence not of gender distinctions *per se* but of hegemonic masculine discourses deriving particularly from mainstream science, the industrial workplace, management, media, and politics. Masculine discourses privilege instrumental rationalities that reflect and reinforce an effective attainment of ends through an 'efficient' application of means. These rationalities reflect and reinforce masculine preoccupations with success that are compulsive in their refusal to accept any limits, including those relating to time. Lyotard (1984) described the preoccupation with instrumental reason or what he calls 'performativity' as that which is directed towards 'efficiency' and a concern with outcomes irrespective of the means to their achievement. In this sense, instrumentality is amoral, having no concern with the ethical means to, or outcomes of, its achievement. Time becomes a mere linear function of the project of achieving instrumental ends in the most 'efficient' way possible.<sup>4</sup>

By linking linear time to masculinity we avoid the limits of assigning different notions of time exclusively on the basis of biological sex. While it is the case

that men feel compelled to display masculine behaviour, in our society a discursive masculinity extends well beyond a division between the sexes. In their imposition of a single-minded, linear and instrumentally rational pursuit of objectives, masculine discourses are prevalent not just in the workplace but in most institutions including sometimes the family. In the UK, middle-class parents, especially, seek even to bring up their children as a rationally designed project or programme to the point of contracting the tasks out to nannies, nurseries, childminders and boarding and/or public schools.

Here we can see that time is not just gendered but very much linked to social class since in employing a service class in child-rearing activities, the middle classes are simply emulating the aristocrats of an earlier age. However, it is a conception of time far removed from what the gender literature defined as that relational, continuous, processual, and cyclical time associated with femininity. Mediated through significant others, feminine time is shared rather than personal, and relational rather than linear (Adam, 1993: 172). It is fundamentally moral rather than instrumental but whether and in what degree it is related to men or women is a research question not an *a priori* analytical decision. Also we need to acknowledge that while outside of gender analysis linear time is dominant in many theoretical perspectives, in everyday practice time is diverse, incorporating relational, cyclical, processual as well as individual and linear aspects. The hegemony of linear time is then primarily a perceptual matter, but one reinforced by the dominance of masculine and scientific discourses. Informed by this analysis, the article turns now to examine pastimes, professions and politics in terms of passing time.

### Reflecting on Pas(t) Times and Passed Time

I have already made a suggestion that the selected exemplars of passing time – pastimes, professionalism and politics share a common orientation. In each, time becomes synonymous with a space that can be filled by activity and then accounted for as time passed, in the past, or as a pastime. Anything will pass for a pastime as long as it is seen as voluntary, unforced, or self-determined and, in this sense, ‘*uchronic*’ or a perfect and highly valued time (Nowotny, 1994: 137).<sup>5</sup> Pastimes refer to a self-generated filling-up of the space of that time not taken up by the routines of nature (e.g. sleeping, eating, and nurturing offspring) or of the economy (e.g. work). They are how human beings spend their time when they are not busy producing for their own survival, or reproducing the species. Nowotny pays particular attention to the term *Eigenzeit* as literally meaning time belonging to the self, but is translated in her book as ‘proper time’ (pp. 2, 13). She sees proper time or time for the self only emerging with the rise of the bourgeoisie. Before this, collective rituals and routines would render



everyone subject to a common, social time where virtually every moment of the day was accounted for in terms of collective obligations. A modern society had to 'distinguish between one's own time (proper time) and that of others' (p. 13) such that a notion of private time and space was separated out from public time and space.

While private time and space is elevated above public time and space in Nowotny's discourse, there has been a feminist literature that has sought to reverse this or eradicate the distinction altogether by showing that there is a multiplicity of time horizons that may occur simultaneously in the lives of individuals. Private time is associated with domestic work and women whereas public time is linked to men and more prestigious paid work, it argues. Women need either to disrupt assumptions that associate them predominantly with the private sphere or to disrupt the distinction by demonstrating that the private and the public are not so readily polarized. The polarization is part of a liberal politics that claims to protect one's private intimate time and space from intrusion by the state or public institutions but this is highly gendered (Jagger, 1994: 473). Within it women remain on the margins of malestream society by virtue of their location in, or association with, private space and time as mothers, childrearsers, carers, housewives, temporary and part-time workers, and so on.

As Jagger (1994) points out, this liberal rationale rarely includes fathers as part of the so-called private sphere and it follows a gendered conception of work in which men have jobs or careers and women work primarily for pin money to supplement the family income (Feldberg and Glenn, 1984). Radical feminists have continually sought to reverse this liberal reasoning by insisting that the 'personal is political',<sup>6</sup> thus refusing an important aspect of the gendered separation of private and public time and space. Not only do public and private notions of time coincide but also linear and non-linear conceptions of time may occur simultaneously. Cyclical (e.g. daily routines) or relational (e.g. demands of children or partners) time, for example, does not eradicate so much as modify linear clock time, but often to such an extent that alternative conceptions of time become hardly recognizable let alone acknowledged as a source of constraint.

Of more recent time, it is not only feminism that has challenged the separation of private and public boundaries but also technological and other economic developments. Through new micro-electronic media and an influx of entrepreneurial ideology, a number of transitions such as the compression of time in cyberspace communications, internet-based home working, and entrepreneurial professionalism have led to a further problematization of the boundaries and distinctions between private and public time and space. The hyperbole around the 24/7 any-time, any-place internet shopping helped to bring about the dotcom crash that prefaced the collapse of stock markets at the beginning of this century. In the rush to get rich quick, investors and entrepreneurs forgot some basic

fundamentals such as the dependence of the 'new' virtual economy on supplements from the 'old' physical economy (Woolgar, 2002). They also neglected to ensure that consumers were fully enrolled and mobilized into the network of a 'virtual dream' alongside producers, distributors, consultants, gurus, and government (Knights et al., 2001). While the novelty of shopping or trading on the internet at first sustained its growth and development, the reality of the experience where the practice often proved frustrating and time-consuming not least because of poorly designed websites and security problems, soon eroded the initial enthusiasm.

Labour time is also a factor here since what internet retailing demands is the ultimate perfection of self-service where the consumer performs much of the work ordinarily carried out by the retailer as a part of customer service. However, the erosion of the distinction between private and public time and space may be welcomed when it enhances a person's life experience. Nevertheless, it may be resisted when it means appropriating the consumer's own personal time – a double whammy for most people since it is not only their labour but also their consumption that is expropriated in pursuit of surplus value or commercial profit. It would seem that the compression of time and space through internet shopping has been limited and only fully successful, as in internet banking, when price discounts have made the sacrifice of personal time also profitable for the consumer. The dot.com bubble burst eventually highlighted the gap between the theoretically anticipated collapse of time and space and their obstinacy and irascibility to such dissolution in commercial practice. At the same time, the internet has been incredibly important in compressing time and space in non-commercial spheres of self-help websites, leisure chatrooms, paedophile hustling, and general education. It will probably continue at some pace to disrupt the boundaries between what might be seen as personal and public time and the blurring of the time and space between work and non-work.

Outside of professional and creative work, time sold as labour for the purposes of economic survival is still often given reluctantly or viewed as *dischronic* – time labourers or employees<sup>7</sup> would prefer to have to themselves as what might be seen as 'free' or self-determined time. This is why in western culture work is often despised and seen as drudgery to the point at which many cannot wait for their retirement – a time that can, however, be less fulfilling because of the huge expectations that it has to bear. Passing the time through activity that is voluntarily engaged in is generally preferred to that which is imposed through strategies of power in work regimes or other hierarchical (e.g. education, medical, family) institutions. This is what links pastimes, politics, and it may be added, professionalism. Although often beginning as part-time, unpaid leisure activities, pastimes, and politics may, like professionalism, become sources of economic sustenance. So, for example, playing football could be seen as a pastime but it is clearly a lot more than that for the likes of

David Beckham. Also many full-time politicians begin their careers through voluntary political activity either for a party, local government, or a pressure group.

Interestingly, it is when the time taken up by pastimes or politics becomes more intensive and exhaustive of what is available that the activity is turned into a profession. This is then the modern equivalent of a traditional amateur involvement in public life that was engaged in by those with independent financial means in a more classical age. Even when the main source of economic sustenance, however, these activities share in common a certain style since they continue to arouse precisely the kinds of enthusiasm and dedication that are evident in non-economic voluntary pastimes. Politics and professional work are clearly activities that attract a commitment that frequently has the effect of blurring the distinction between personal and public time and space. The phrase 'it is not just a job but a vocation' is often applied to politics for the politician usually identifies so closely with the political ideology and programme that his or her commitment extends well beyond any time-space boundary. Professional academia is also a case where its practitioners frequently see their work not just as a job that provides economic sustenance but also as an opportunity to engage in creative research and writing that many might do independently of the occupational position.<sup>8</sup> Here we can see politics, profession and pastime merging such that work and leisure time are rarely distinguished much from one another.

So far I have tended to draw a sharp distinction between activities such as labour that is primarily a means to an end from that which is an end in itself. When time is used in activity that is a means to an end such as work, it is often seen as unpleasant, disciplinary and something from which to escape. Work is a means to an end in two senses of economic exchange – wages and production. Employees seek to exchange their time for an economic return and the employer is concerned to secure the maximum productive output both quantitatively and qualitatively from that exchange so that its value in the market is greater than the cost of production. As Marx (1887/1976) continually stressed, there is a built-in antagonism in the capitalist workplace insofar as workers seek to maximize their rewards for the minimum of time and effort expended whereas employers attempt to minimize the labour costs. Employees frequently sought to escape time controls by restrictions of output whereas employers seek to regulate the time-reward ratio in their favour through work intensification and labour efficiency programmes of technological innovation, 'just-in-time' stock controls, quality management, business reengineering, culture control, and so on. Time is at a premium in all of these programmes.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, time is not only being controlled in these activities but it is also used as a mechanism of control over subjects. Because of this, work is often seen as a necessary evil.

For a majority of those who treat work as just a job, it is often seen as

drudgery and the time spent on it unending. Marx (1887/1976) identified this by speaking of the labour contract as primarily about giving up time in which the potential to labour could be seen to reside. His concern was with what he saw as the exploitation of labour since it is not rewarded adequately in terms of the time it sacrifices to the employer. Sacrificed time is 'bad' time and generally is thought to drag or be expended slowly. Our concern is less with this presumed exploitation as with the contradiction that comes from treating time with the employer as a sacrifice. For then escape from this time is idealized, romanticized, or elevated to a status that, in so called free or leisure time, can rarely be realized (Palm, 1970).

Where activity and the time that it involves is an end in itself, it is seen as desirable, precious and to be preserved. This can be seen to have both positive and negative aspects. It is seen as positive in that time simply dissolves in the aesthetic absorption of the subject in the activity. In pastimes, politics and professional work, demarcations of personal and public time are blurred, as the activity becomes synonymous with the very being of the person – an extension of self. It can be seen as negative, however, insofar as the activity becomes compulsively addictive and all-consuming. In such circumstances, any time not engaged in pursuing the objectives of the pastime, politics, or profession is experienced as equivalent to the withdrawal symptoms of drug addiction that can be relieved only through another 'fix'. Workaholics are probably more prevalent within pastimes, politics and professionalism than other drug abusers. But this addiction to activity is specific to a particular culture and historical period where identity is closely linked to success in achieving goals in socially constructed and sanctioned projects.

The growth and intensification of professionalization at work have tended to result in time being pressured and scarce, passing too quickly and leaving its victims often feeling stressed. However, professionalization also demands time/space autonomy and flexibility to facilitate the creative and innovative aspects of the work. Of course, the managerialization of professional work (Gleeson and Knights, 2004) has resulted in numerous technologies of management control – targets, deadlines, management by objectives, time management, and so on. However, the degree of autonomy traditionally enjoyed by professional occupations means that such controls might be readily resisted. An example is my own doctor's surgery, where there are strict time limits of a maximum of 10 minutes that doctors are expected to spend with each patient. This is justified in terms of service to the patient since it cuts down the waiting times in the surgery. While many of the doctors comply, there are some that routinely ignore the time constraint in favour of providing a more intensive and qualitative patient care service. They follow a more relational conception of time, spending almost as much time as patients appear to find appropriate. Rather than seek to sanction these doctors, they are simply accommodated into

the system and patients are told when booking appointments that if choosing such doctors they will probably have a long wait. Ironically, the wait is often even longer because these doctors are more popular but patients will vary their choice of doctor, and therefore the time expenditure, depending on the severity of their ailment.

However, technologies of management control can have the effect simultaneously of relieving and exacerbating anxiety about our relationship to time. On the one hand, for example, targets may relieve the tensions that derive from the vacuum of unstructured time or empty space while, on the other hand they generate anxiety about the possibility of having insufficient time to meet them. Anxiety relating to a scarcity of time is exacerbated when targets, objectives and deadlines proliferate to the point at which prioritizing one or another becomes impossible. This anxiety can result in the continuous deflection of completing any project whereupon it generates even more anxiety about the scarcity of time. This relationship to time is disturbing for the subject partly because the linearity that is one of the conditions that make it possible to complete projects is eclipsed by a whole range of other (e.g. circular, relational, cyclical, processual) times. A relief from this feeling that there is insufficient time can be managed simply by working all the time so that deadlines and targets are always met. This strategy is adopted by, for example, that discursively produced subject – the masculine workaholic. Here, at least at a conscious level, a linear and individualized sense of time tends to eclipse other conceptions of time even though, in practice, cyclical and relational senses of time may well be implicit in the work. What happens is that workaholics are so preoccupied by their work that they see only the unilinear means–ends chains and simply discount both the existence and value of the ‘messy’, circular and unstructured developments of any work project.

For such subjects, an awareness of time is predominantly clock based, linear, and individualized. That is to say, time is treated as if there were a logic of continuity from one period to another and with no reflection either of its social construction or of the disruptions to such linear sequencing. While unaware of any alternative understanding of time, work tasks could never be completed unless a diverse range of orientations to time were present in practice. Even tunnel vision and intensively focused masculine subjects depend on others to achieve their aims yet social relations not only often disrupt linear sequenced plans but also make demands on individuals’ time. Consequently, the workaholic cannot escape different aspects of time – process, relational, cyclical – but these are rarely recognized, much less valued partly because of masculine imbued preoccupations with instrumental rationality, scientific method and positivist epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Also rarely do such workers reflect historically on the uniqueness of their orientation to work. Only in modern times has work been a central life interest either as a means to an end or an end in itself. Because of this, our orientation to time often involves a reduction of the past (and possibly the

future) to the present and, in particular, a preoccupation with the solitary ego or self. Arguably denying time and space constraints can be highly liberating and probably creative in a way similar to that which we observed above with respect to the doctors' surgery.

Whenever I complain to my son Jamie that he is wasting his time away he responds by saying that 'time is an abstract concept so don't expect me to be a slave to it'. Of course, I acknowledge his alternative response to time – refusing to see it as a space to fill up with activity and then acting back on the subject to constrain other ways of behaving. His is a rejection of the 'busy busy' world of his father and other middle-class professionals who fill their time permanently with activity – either work or leisure – and seem never to do just nothing. He refuses to fill every moment of the day with a compulsive busyness. 'Chilling out' is the language of this subculture but is this celebration of inactivity that different from the hyperactivity that it poses itself against?

'Dossing around' may well be an expression of youth rebellion and a resistance to the disciplinary effects of time. However, it could be seen as a response that reflects precisely the same episteme as the orientation to time that is reproduced in the 'fast pace' of middle-class professionals. Inactivity may appear as in sharp contrast to the hyperactivity of professionals but idleness is no less a preoccupation with self as the world it stands against. Time is a resource for the hyperactive person to avoid the vacuum of an empty space or wasted time whereas the culture of chilling out is only meaningful insofar as it can secure itself through negating its opposite. The very stereotypes to describe each activity – workaholic and dosser – reveal how each tend to be scathing of the other, largely as a way of confirming their own 'correct' ways of relating to time. I therefore have to recognize that my suggestion that Jamie uses his time more 'productively' could be seen not as a sign of my responsibility to him (an interpretation that I would obviously prefer) but is simply a means of solidifying the correctness of my own relation to time and a way of securing my own meaning, identity and reality. Worse still, it could be a preoccupation with taming his 'Otherness' (Levinas, 1986) in an attempt to turn him into an image of my self and thus security for me at his expense but, of course, behind a claim to be concerned about his future welfare. His condemnation of over-activity performs the same function but his is rarely a claim to be really working in my interest. The theoretical point being made here will be examined further later in the discussion of Levinas (1986, 1989) but, on reflection, there can be no ultimate 'truth' in either of these accounts since they are inextricably interconnected with each other to the point at which they are almost indistinguishable. It is this kind of ambivalence and unknowability that makes an exploration of time just that – an unending exploration.

### **Time, intentionality and the self**

I now want to return to the discussion of voluntary and involuntary relationships to time, arguing that the distinction between them is quite superficial since they both share more in common than that which divides them. The similarity is a shared orientation to time that stands over and above any point on a continuum between the voluntary and involuntary nature of the activity that is filling the time. This, it may be suggested, is closely related to an everyday implicit subscription to a phenomenological conception of intentionality (Husserl, 2003) – that all consciousness is consciousness of something – and that consciousness always therefore acts with intention towards objects in the world. Through intentionality, consciousness is always future oriented – collapsing time into the objects of its intentions.

As Levinas (1989) puts it, ‘Anticipation of the future and projection of the future . . . are but the *present* of the future, not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped’ (pp. 43–4). He ‘criticises intentionality because it cannot account for the absolute transcendence that infinity requires’ (Reed, 1986: 77). Infinity is clearly a time and space that cannot be brought under the control of intentionality and in this sense intentionality cannot make sense of absolute transcendence from projects that seek to tame an unknowable future so as to bring it into the realm of the present and self-presence. Does not intentionality have to suffer an irruption in order for it no longer to be a constraint on transcendence that infinity requires? Such transcendence is possibly what occurs in pastimes, politics and professional work when there is an aesthetic dissolution of time as subjects and their projects are no longer instrumental resources for one another. Neither ruled by the project nor a slave to its time constraints, the subject might no longer simply use the project as a vehicle for asserting, securing or solidifying the self. Perhaps all too often this dissolution of time or the transcendence that infinity requires is fleeting and transitory, and the solitary ego or self is always ready to re-assert itself as the time and place to which everything must return. Time is then reduced to the objects of the subject’s intentions and hence, pressured, scarce, and finite.

Intentionality can be seen as what makes a subject assert itself or at least its significance with respect to the object and ultimately to another subject. Phenomenology would then seem to provide a philosophical justification for the intentional ego instrumentally transforming the world into a resource for its own stability, security, and ‘success’. If the social world was one where collective virtues and values thrived, this legitimization of instrumentalism would probably not have much significance, but it is both medium and outcome of an individualized society. This may well be why phenomenology has had such an impact in western social science where it seems to encompass few enemies.<sup>11</sup> Here I am drawing upon Levinas (1986, 1989) as a philosopher who does not

reject phenomenology *per se* but subscribes to a version that criticizes both Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophy especially in relation to how their support for intentionality ties time to the self rather than to the Other.

Levinas (1986) suggests that intentionality involves reducing the Other to the Same. In less philosophical language, I interpret this to mean treating the other person or object as an instrumental resource for securing the self through having one's identity socially confirmed. That is to say, the Other is of no more significance than as a mirror for confirming the self. Consequently the 'otherness' of the Other has to be tamed, minimized or controlled if it is to fulfil its requirements of confirming the self. It has to be reduced to being the Same as the self – like me. If we think about it, many of our petty domestic squabbles or rows revolve around being concerned that the Other is like us or resisting pressures from others to be like them. How does this relate to time? Instead of time being that incomprehensible or unknowable mystery, intentionality transforms it to the space that is filled by acts of reducing the Other to the Same or simply to a resource for confirming the self.

Tied to intentionality, then, time invariably assumes a linear mode that cannot be seen as independent of the activity of subjects that are seeking to secure it through projects that are designed to bring about a confirmation of the self and social identity. This is so in the sense that some control of the future is a necessary condition of having the self confirmed by the Other. But, for Levinas (1989) time is an exteriority that cannot be grasped. He argues that 'time is not the achievement of an isolated subject, but the very relationship that the subject has with the other' (p. 37). Like death, this relationship with the Other is the future that cannot be grasped. Through the approach of death 'the subject loses its very mastery as a subject' for 'death is the impossibility of having a project' (pp. 42–3). Consequently, we can liken death, time and the Other to a mystery that defeats our intentionality, mastery, virility and preoccupation with turning everything into a project for generating or reinforcing the self – its security, significance, and status. I turn now to consider an epistemological/methodological framework that may be productive of an analysis of time that would not only avoid turning time into an instrumental resource for securing the self but also might stimulate an alternative ethics.

### **An Alternative Episteme and Methodology for Studying Time**

The relative ease of measurement of linear time is a great facilitator in positivist approaches<sup>12</sup> to social science. It means that they can operationalize their concepts as dependent or independent variables that are then readily transformed into strictly causal accounts of behaviour. Time regulates behaviour or behaviour seeks to regulate time and these relationships are easily quantified as



long as time remains linear or linked to the clock. As the critics of positivism (Douglas, 1970; Rorty, 1980; Benhabib, 1992) argue, this simple representational claim to reality denies the ontological discontinuity between natural phenomena and social subjects where, unlike the former, human beings are inescapably and perpetually in interpretive mode, responding to, changing and producing meaning within and about their lives. Acknowledging and even celebrating this, narrative styles<sup>13</sup> would appear to allow substantial freedom and have fewer repressive consequences for the subjects (i.e. both researchers and researched) of research. However, even in qualitative and narrative accounts of human life, we are engaged in an objectification of behaviour in a series of representations that depend for their possibility on a number of sometimes explicit but often implicit assumptions about the subjectivity of agents. Furthermore, and increasingly as it becomes clearer that positivist and quantitative research often fails to capture important subtleties of human behaviour that can render its causal accounts implausible, qualitative research is also drawn upon in the exercise of power. Of course, this depends a great deal on the extent to which such narrative or qualitative accounts are able to mobilize resources and enrol key actors in building networks (Callon, 1986) that support their representations, thus transforming them into knowledge. Once accepted as knowledge, however, its deployment in the exercise of power frequently has the effect of transforming the narrative assumptions about subjectivity that are a condition of its representations, into reality. In short, subjectivity is constituted or, to be more precise, reproduced by the knowledge that presumes it at the outset. Insofar as our narratives are at least in part representational constructions that serve to secure our own identity, they reflect a 'politics of the self' rather than an ethics of responsibility to the Other. The more these narratives are drawn upon in the exercise of power, the more reality is constituted in the narrator's own self-image.

An alternative is to continually challenge representations/narratives by reflecting on an epistemological space and method for conducting studies of time in a way that is reflective of the ethical potential of resisting a 'politics of the self' in which the preoccupation with identity displaces any concern for the Other. In his early work, Foucault (1973) argued that the humanities occupied the space that lies between the representations of the positive human sciences and the subjectivity that makes them possible (see Table 1). In this diagrammatic interpretation of his epistemic analysis, I have inserted an additional positive representation relating to time.

Before discussing this, however, we need to describe the Foucauldian aspects of the diagram. Examining those discourses claiming the status of science (i.e. biology, linguistics, and economics), Foucault saw that they provided representations of life, language, and labour by objectifying the body, speech, and production respectively. Biology attempts increasingly more secure repre-

**TABLE 1**  
**Epistemological space for the humanities or social science**

Representations of:	Through	Objectification of:	Truth effects in norms of:
1. Life	biology	the body and its functions	health
2. Language	linguistics	speech and writing	communication
3. Labour	economics	production and exchange	wealth
4. Time	social science	past, present and future	finitude

Source: Adapted and elaborated from Knights (2002).

sentations, culminating in particular accounts of the genetic and molecular structure of the body. Linguistics represents the language we speak in terms of semiotic structures in which metaphor and metonymy or semantic and syntactical relations are explored. Economics constructs exchange in terms of a complex market of supply and demand where competition and efficiency are seen to be in a relationship of mutual dependency and reinforcement. None of these disciplines speak openly or routinely about the subjectivity that is the condition of their possibility – it is simply taken for granted.

There are two issues surrounding this representational knowledge. First, insofar as those (e.g. politicians, civil servants, the media, managers, consultants, teachers, etc.) exercising power in society appropriate representational knowledge, it will tend to have certain ‘truth’ effects. So, for example, drawing on representations from biology, linguistics, and economics, governments consistently exercise power to produce norms of health, communication, and wealth to transform individuals into subjects that identify with what it is to be healthy, communicative and wealthy. In other words, subjects are constituted through the power/knowledge regimes that are a condition and consequence of positive representations. Thus knowledge already presupposes certain senses of subjectivity, albeit often latent, tacit and unspoken.

Second, there is the issue of how conceptions of the subject or subjectivity remain hidden from, and yet taken for granted in, these representations of life, language, and labour. Such assumptions about the subject provide the conditions that make such representations possible in the first place. We are all familiar with rational choice theory in economics where unless the subject is seen as an economically rational individual who maximizes utility, representations about labour, production, and exchange would be less precise and plausible. These assumptions are not highly visible in economics, but the subjectivity that is a condition of possibility for the representations of life and language in biology and linguistics is even less transparent. In both, it is a subject that is seen to coincide unproblematically with the biological organism and the speaking indi-

vidual. We are aware that these assumptions about the subject are far from exhaustive and indeed could never be exhaustive since any confinement would stimulate transgression. Human subjects are wilful in their refusal to be pigeon-holed as this or that. But hidden beneath the manifestations of knowledge and drawn upon in the exercise of power, these conceptions of subjectivity become self-fulfilling and therefore comparatively uncontested.

There are some clear ethical implications of this process of the production of representational knowledge since it is an accomplice to authoritative<sup>14</sup> controls over subjectivity. For the hidden or partly explicit assumptions about subjectivity are not only the conditions that make representational knowledge possible but also are reproduced precisely by such knowledge once it informs the exercise of power. This is why Foucault presumably advocates occupying the space that lies between these representations and the subjectivity that makes them possible for any other position involves an endorsement of, rather than a resistance to, the subjectivity that is the condition and consequence of positive knowledge. A question that needs to be asked of social science, then, is whether it can be a legitimate ethical position for knowledge to merely reproduce self-fulfilling prophecies of its own assumptions and, in the process, collaborate in the social control of subjects?

While, as has been argued, a conception of time as linear is already built into the positive representations so far discussed, it is also possible to analyse time directly in this representational manner. Linear time tends to produce knowledge that has 'truth effects' in norms of finitude – an end point that stimulates a race against time. It sustains subjects in their preoccupation with treating time as a finite vehicle within which to pursue projects competitively as a way of securing the self if not now, at least in posterity. It does not produce the transcendence of self that infinity requires. As was argued earlier, the future is not opened out into infinity but closed down and reduced to an object of prediction and control so that it is consistent with, rather than contradictory of, projects for securing the self in the present. Both the future and the past are brought into the service of the present as time is reduced to an object of control and service to the preoccupations of the self.

### **Conclusion**

This article began by discussing the theorization of time first through a critical review of the literature. Broadly, there are three types of approaches – an objective, a subjective, and a social approach that seeks to reconcile the two. All three seem ultimately to remain tied to a linear conception of time that refuses to contemplate alternatives even when confronted by inescapable disruptions as, for example, when children and others demand attention irrespective of deadlines,

targets, and so on. It has been left largely to feminist writers to challenge the hegemony of linear time and to point to alternative contextual, cyclical, processual or relational notions that are less likely to reinforce an amoral masculine instrumental approach to, and use of, time. For, feminine relational time, it was concluded, is often steeped in moral responsibility to others.

We then turned to examine the issues of pastimes, politics, and professionalism with a view to identifying the differences and similarities in their orientation to time. It was argued that the various differences are relatively superficial compared to what these activities share in common. While the choice of these activities for analysis was quite arbitrary, it was argued that participants within them nonetheless tend to reduce time to a vehicle for securing their own sense of self, stability, and security. Regardless of the existence of diverse temporal frames, a linear and instrumental relationship to time tends to be privileged eclipsing all other (e.g. relational, cyclical, etc.) senses of time. Time does not appear to extend into an unknown and unknowable infinity nor to be primarily linked to an ethical responsibility to the Other. This comes about, it was argued, through a subscription to a phenomenological worldview in which objects only enter consciousness when they become a part of a subject's intentions. Consequently time is that which stands between subjects and the objects of their intentions and thus is reduced to a vehicle for securing the self. This was contrasted with Levinas's view that time and ethics is the Other. Here time *cannot* be reduced to that which stands between subjects and the objects of their intentions, the control or ordering of which is a project for securing the self.

The article then examined an alternative to the epistemological and methodological mainstream that was thought to be more conducive to studying time as an ethical rather than as a scientific concept. What was argued here was that by subscribing to a representational mode of theorizing, researchers seem to deny what they take for granted – namely, the subjectivity of organizational members and their methods of accomplishment. Locked into representations of what may be seen as 'causes' and their 'effects', researchers are unable to recognize the conditions that make such representations possible in the first place. Representations would seem to depend for their possibility on various assumptions that are difficult to examine from within a representational framework. This is because to admit such dependence is to undermine, or at least acknowledge the fragility of, the representations and their objectifications. Our suggestion is to remain epistemologically in the space that lies between these representations and the conditions that make them possible. This is to reflect on the subjectivity that is both presumed and constituted by representational knowledge. It is a subjectivity that encompasses not only those who are researched by social science but also those who are researchers whose representations reproduce the subjectivity of others while often denying their own.

What then are the conditions of subjectivity that make possible representa-

tions of individuals, groups, structures, processes and so on, or life, language, labour and time that are objectified and are deemed to have the intent, if not always the effect, of producing health, communication, wealth, and finitude? It could be argued that while advocating that social science remain within the space lying between representations and the subjectivity that makes them possible, we have already produced a representation of representational knowledge. So the condition that makes it possible to occupy the space between representations and the subjectivity that makes them possible is another representation, ad infinitum. This, of course, is a *reductio absurdum* where we can never escape the status quo. However, our representation of representational knowledge refuses to put closure on the subjectivity that is the condition that makes it possible since it encourages representational theorists to reflect on the subjectivity they ordinarily take for granted. This way perhaps they will begin to feel more ethically comfortable also in the space that lies between representations and their conditions of possibility. But this might then lead to the demise of representational knowledge altogether and then there would be no space between representations and subjectivity to occupy except those of a historical past. In this sense, an ethical space for social science is either parasitically dependent on the continued reproduction of non-ethical social science or anticipates its own demise. A parasitical role may not be to everyone's taste yet it could be argued that, despite recent elevations of knowledge into a 'real' productive power, academics are used to such marginalization. Yet the demise of social science would seem somewhat utopian, though not be dismissed as absurd since it simply means that by such time, social science would have exported 'openness' to the population as a whole. This might find its expression in ethical responsibility to others rather than a continued reproduction of security for the self.

## Notes

An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 'In Search of Time: A Conference on Methodologies and Recent Developments of Time Research in Management and in the Social Sciences', ISIDA, Palermo, Italy, 8–10 May 2003. I thank participants and especially Ida Sabelis along with the reviewers (including Karen Davies) and the editors for their constructive comments.

1. Indeed, in the initial abstract for this article, I let my alliteration run wild by including pop, pulp, and poetry in the subtitle. This was because I felt that they all had a distinctive relationship to time. Popular songs have often romanticized time by linking it with a love story. Just think of the theme song – 'As Time Goes By' from the classic romantic film *Casablanca*. Pulp fiction is of our time and generally involves a lurid subject matter that is somewhat shapeless or unfinished in form. It could be seen as reflecting the collapse of the boundaries of space and time, or order and chaos

but in an ironic manner. Poetry perhaps captures a past time for it appeals too insufficient of our senses to secure our attention and yet, as in the T. S. Elliott's, *The Wasteland*, it echoes the arbitrary boundaries between past, present, and future that, in our electronic age, we perhaps take for granted. It was perhaps equally arbitrary that I eventually abandoned these vehicles for discussing time but a better explanation would be my own claim to a professional academic status, specializing in organization and management. While pop, pulp and poetry are all managed and organized activities, I didn't feel I had sufficient knowledge of their organization to discuss them from that point of view.

2. Derrida (1993) describes this as an *aporia* – an irresolvable contradiction, a tension that pull us in two directions (Jones, 2003: 10).
3. Parts of this section draw on Knights and Odih (1995).
4. It was pointed out to me by Ida Sabelis that 'efficient' is not just material in the sense of selecting appropriate means to given ends but also symbolic in acting as a claim to legitimacy. It, like the time we are theorizing, is also ambiguous and unknowable.
5. Although Nowotny does not discuss this, it may be argued that there is a semantic confusion around the term 'uchronic' as is the case with its parallel in space – utopia. The word utopia is often associated with a good place rather than its correct meaning as no place or nowhere (Carey, 1999), in the sense that utopias are and must remain fanciful places. They can fire the imagination and inspire practical endeavours but they can never be realized and, in this sense, they exist nowhere. 'To count as utopia, an imaginary place must be an expression of desire. To count as dystopia, it must be an expression of fear' (Carey, 1999: xi). Likewise, it may be argued that uchronias may inspire through the commonsense belief that they represent a good or perfect time but are probably unrealizable or, more realistically, non-existent.
6. 'The personal is political' implied that the experiences, feelings, and possibilities of women's personal lives were not just a matter of personal preferences and choices but were limited, moulded, and defined by the broader political and social setting. It is not clear who first coined the phrase but it has been in common usage since the 1960s, although some have argued it can be traced back to the 1940s.
7. This includes most employees since even managers sell their labour time at ever intensifying levels. However, insofar as managers subscribe to professional values, they may exclude themselves from this negative view of work.
8. Examples of academics that have retired yet continue to research, write and sometimes teach are numerous.
9. As the US President Theodore Roosevelt famously claimed, 'time is money'.
10. I am indebted to one of the reviewers, Karen Davies, for this insight (see also Davies, 1990, 1996).
11. One highly significant opponent of phenomenology is Michel Foucault who, according to Danaher et al. (2000), regarded it as an essentializing theory 'which relied on an absolute and ahistorical quality or "truth"' (p. 11). This is seen to derive from the 'ability of human beings to understand the world and their own involvement in the world' (p. 11). This total rejection of phenomenology could also be seen as having its downside in Foucault not being able to elaborate the vulnerability of subjects to discipline and power as having its condition in insecurity (Knights, 1990: 321; see also McNay, 1994).
12. Positivist approaches rest on the belief that there is little discontinuity of the subject matter of the social sciences from that of the natural sciences. The former can simply

- emulate the epistemology and methodology of the latter. No allowance is made or thought to be necessary for the fact that human thought processes and interpretations mediate social scientists and their subjects of study whereas that is not the case generally in relation to the objects of natural science.
13. For more detail on narrative styles in social science and studies of organizations see Czarniawska (1997, 2000).
  14. Authoritative is taken to mean produced by an author whose knowledge is unquestioned because of scientific or other sources of legitimacy.

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DR DAVID KNIGHTS is Professor of Organisational Analysis in the School of Economic and Management Studies at Keele University. He previously held chairs in Manchester, Nottingham and Exeter Universities. He is a founding and continuing editor of the journal *Gender, Work and Organisation* and his most recent books include: *Management Lives: Power and Identity in Work Organisation*, Sage Publications, 1999 and *Organization and Innovation: Gurus Schemes and American Dreams*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2003, and *Introduction to Organization and Management*, Thompson International Press, Forthcoming, 2007. Recent refereed journal articles include: Knights, D. and Yakhlef, A., 'Time, Self and Reified Artefacts', *Time and Society*, 14(2/3), pp. 283–302, 2005; and Gleeson, D. and Knights, D., 'Challenging Dualism: Public Professionalism in "Troubled Times"', *Sociology*, 40(2) April 2006; Bergström, O. and Knights, D., 'Organizational Discourse and Subjectivity: Subjectification during Processes of Recruitment', *Human Relations*, Forthcoming, 2006; and Knights, D. 'Authority at Work: Reflections and Recollections', *Organization Studies*, 27(5), 2006. pp. 723–44. ADDRESS: School of Economics and Management Studies, Darwin Building, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK. [email: d.knights@mngt.keele.ac.uk]