

Temporal Autoethnography

CMNS 304W Communications in Everyday Life

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THE STORY

Spending a day without looking at the clock is a very difficult task. Everything turned into a blur; I had no understanding of the area around me. The only way that I could really tell what time it was, was either looking at the clock, or how many tasks in a particular game that I was playing. Even so, I played without looking at the clock. What these games can be broken down into are the tasks which I complete within them. Perhaps the time that I perceived within these games was task oriented, with my understanding and feeling being changed into how many tasks I did. Locked away in my room, the only connection that I had to the outside world was the window into the townhouse complex I live in. I could hear the wind blowing against my outside wall, the horns of the cars as they passed by on the streets, and the occasional sirens blaring in the middle of the day. I cannot underscore the immense difficulty of trying your absolute hardest not to look at the clock. Even during these gaming escapades I am constantly plagued by the instinct of looking at my second monitor or picking up my phone just to see what time it is. The basis behind these actions is because I do not want to waste my time doing nonsense, so knowing how much time I spend in-game is extremely important. It was the looming anxiety and danger that plagued my mind because of how precious time is to human life. There lies the paradox that I was living in those moments: I wanted to spend as much time as possible relaxing and escaping from my responsibilities, but yet I was chained by these same responsibilities that tie me to the real world.

My experience of time was marred by the anxieties that made me want to look at the time. It was a constant panic, but these moments of panic were always extremely important in understanding how time affects our daily lives. In these moments, everything was a blur; time became somewhat of a hindrance to my activities, with the past and present becoming nothing

but mere fleeting moments that served as obstacles in my path. In those moments, my school deadlines and other responsibilities caught up to me. Given this feeling, I looked at the clock.

I felt as though I had no choice BUT to look at the clock; it was out of my control. Certain power relations have overwhelming control over our daily lives, many of which vary from person to person. In my case, the hard deadlines of school assignments mixed with my responsibilities to my family and to church infected my anxiety because neglecting those responsibilities would spell disastrous consequences. By looking at the clock, my sense of obligation was lost. The need to complete my assignments for school and upcoming familial and church activities became a distant, meaningless object. I will admit that there are many things that I choose to do in my day that, most likely, do not need to be done. I don't really need to do my school assignments, but school, a power beyond my control, directs me to complete them. I don't have to go to church, or attend family gatherings or do chores, but I understand that doing these things gives me a sense of an accomplished lifestyle. Having tasks to fill my day allows me to remain organized despite knowing the time on the clock. These adult tasks are more suited for creating and maintaining time because without them society becomes disorganized.

THE TIME

Organizing time has not always been about counting down the seconds until the next minute, or minutes until the next hour; tasks were the de facto mode of tracking the passing of time in our lives. E. P. Thompson writes about how tasks were used to define passing of time, being that all our lives revolved around the tasks that we completed within a given time frame: tasks are easier to track; work and life become meshed together; and clock-timed work is meaningless (1967). Because of time being tracked by the tasks that one completes throughout the day, it becomes moulded and shaped by the responsibilities that we take on. Thompson's

third characteristic of task-oriented time is that the clock makes our labour wasteful (1967). We look at the clock as a means of knowing not *how much* we did, but how much time has passed *between* what we did. In an age where work has become incredibly important in the everyday, we are chained and shackled to the responsibilities and tasks that we must complete.

When I decided not to look at the clock, I was filled with constant anxiety from the tasks that I needed to complete. While not looking at the clock was difficult, what made it difficult was knowing that time was passing and I was *not* completing any tasks--that's what made me scared. Sure, I was using the time not looking at the clock for leisure and break times, but what loomed over me was the incompleteness and neglect of my responsibilities. Being compelled to look at the clock was a habit because I wanted to make sure that I wasn't spending too much time not doing my tasks. The time of day became irrelevant, but relevancy came from knowing how much time I had left to complete my tasks. Ranging from school to church, having tasks that help to define how my day would go is much more effective than looking at a standardized clock. I wake up every morning thinking about what I have to do today, rather than what time it will be when I start and complete those tasks. The tasks which we complete keep us grounded, in the sense that tasks help us to organize the time we have throughout the day.

Thompson's task-oriented time revolves around the understanding that tasks shape time; when we apply this understanding to our daily lives, clock time without tasks becomes disorderly, as people start to look at the passing of seconds rather than looking at what they have done throughout the day. Anxiety and fear starts to fill others, as it did me, because there is no direction. Our mandatory obligations control our sense of time, whether that be our need to go to work, or other needs that have to be fulfilled. I feel as though the clock becomes a hindrance to our everyday life when we have tasks that can track the time for us, as it offers little more than a

means of temporary solace in a fast-paced world. Having a clock to track the time merely serves as a veiled attempt of showing what one has accomplished in a specified timeframe. Why not take this out entirely? I was forced to look at the clock because of growing anxiety and fear that what I wanted to accomplish was not being done, leading to a common feeling of one's time being wasted. But, why look to the clock anyway to feel a sense of accomplishment? We become disorganized when we use the clock to track our time; a day could consist of as little as one task over the course of 24 hours, leading to 'wasted time.' When we track our time using tasks instead of the time that passes, we start to see organization in what we do. We are no longer chained by the units of time that make up the clock, but rather, we become free of it and are led by the organized structure of our time. The powers that we answer to become that which we organize our time around: the school assignments that have hard deadlines become what I have to shape my time around.

Sarah Sharma's writing on the temporality of time gives insight into how time can be tracked without a clock. Though she writes through the perspective of how taxi driver's manage their time, the same discipline can be attributed to task-oriented time. Sharma writes on time recalibration, and how we can learn to be in sync with one another in our sense of time by external relations (2013). Recalibration is obtained through differences of time with other parties through synchronization, while also recognizing the power relations at play which influence our sense of time (Sharma, 2013). In task-oriented time, we tend to attune our body clocks to the tasks which we complete or have during the day. This body clock is also influenced by that which we have no control over: our work calling us to complete a shift, or school assignment deadlines.

Recalibrating ourselves to the tasks that we experience helps us to synchronize time with others. People who are calibrated to clock time versus task-oriented time are at odds with one another, leading to a greater sense of disorganization in society. In my experiment, looking at the clock made me disorganized; I became frantic and anxious because I knew that I wasted my time doing absolutely nothing. I knew that there were things beyond my control that made me anxious. I had a plethora of school assignments that needed attention, with plenty more church events to go to. The clock only served as a hindrance in telling me how much time I spent not working on these tasks. However, when time turned into tasks, it became less of a threat, and more of a well oiled machine intended for organization.

In line with Sharma's writings on recalibration, Andrea Doucet offers a perspective for the need of multiple times. Doucet espouses that differing perspectives and the uniqueness of time are important factors in recognizing multiple social lives (2023). Doucet writes with the perspective of feminist advocacy, but argues that time is the vehicle of understanding social differences within each other. Perhaps disorganization in time can be attributed to the many different lives that people lead, and how time plays a role in those lives. Learning to synchronize with one another through tasks is key in maintaining organization. In my experience, task-oriented time allows me to understand time without the fear the clock gave me, but I know that not everyone can attune themselves to this type of time. Synchronization through tasks is key to maintaining organization within ourselves and the world around us. Understanding the powers that control our time gives us the leeway to coordinate with each other through our tasks.

THE CONCLUSION

The tasks and responsibilities that we have as adults allows us to remain organized in our lifestyles, as opposed to starting at a clock. We have been organized through the tasks that we

complete everyday, as our regular paid work duties call upon us to maintain a set schedule. With a mix of these tasks, we tend to organize ourselves around them. Tasks are what allow us to organize around time; the clock only acts as a vehicle that delivers us over to anxiety because the looming tick, tock, click represents the wasted time that we spend not doing tasks. Organization comes from completing and tracking our tasks, rather than looking at the time and blocking our day through the minutes and seconds that pass. Anxiety and fear that the time we waste no longer becomes salient because tasks can become the de facto way that we track time. Organization then follows because our tasks track the time for us.

Works Cited

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