# Multitemporality: 1

This entry is part 1 of 4 in the series Multitemporality

Today I officially start my fellowship at the Berggruen Institute, working on my multitemporality project. At the moment the plan for the project is to write a book, but who knows. It might morph into a comic book or an interpretive dance, as I've been telling people who seem inclined to form oppressively burdensome presumptions about what I'm up to. I don't want to ruin this pleasant snowflake buzz I have going on here by committing firmly to a particular output form too early. But it's probably going to be a book.

What, you ask, is multitemporality? YOU HAD TO ASK HUH? YOU COULDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE?? Well, you asked for it.
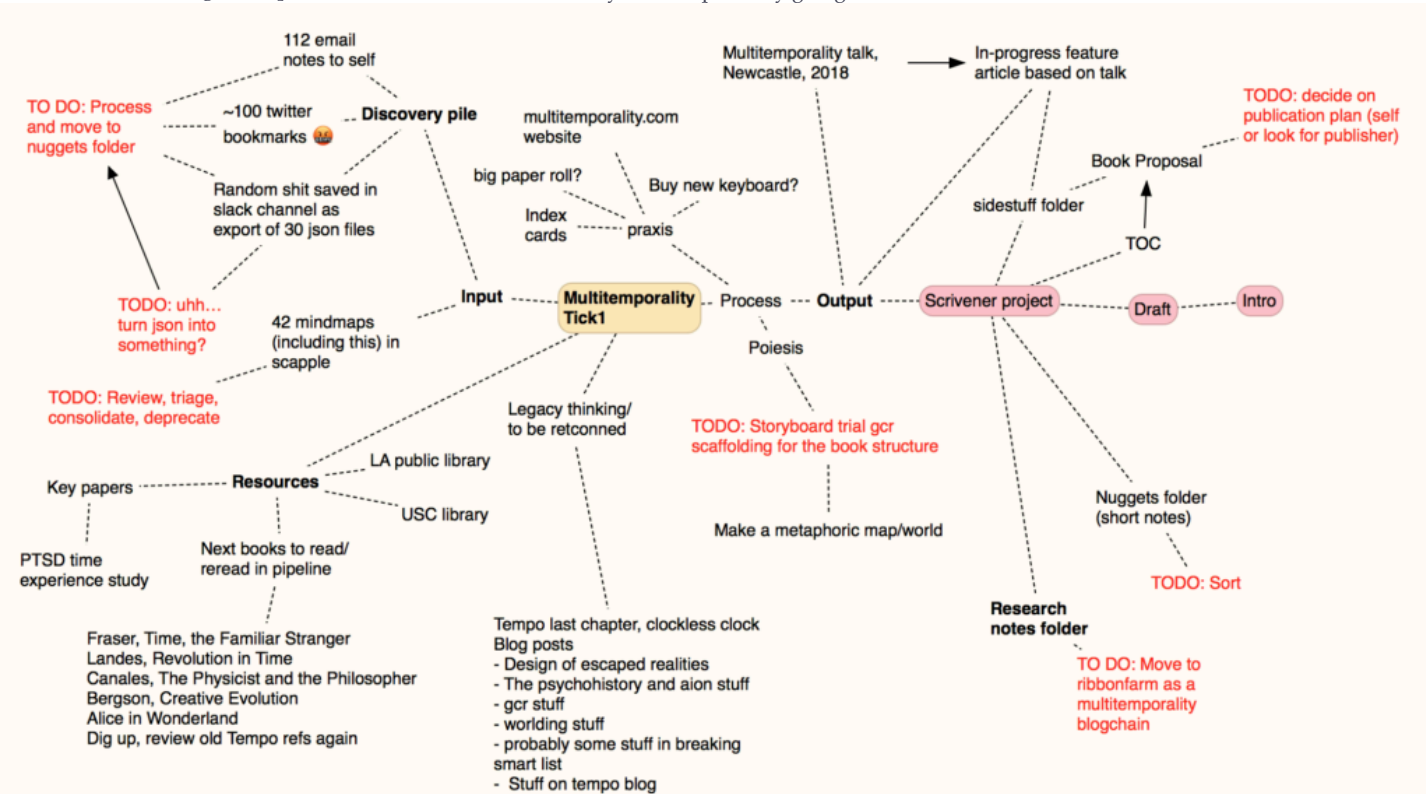
This mind map represents the actual state of the project in all its inglorious messiness, after two years of back-burner nudging along in stolen moments here and there. It now needs to go front-burner. Since some of you have, in the past, expressed curiosity about my Certified Creative Genius™ working methods, I figured I'd start a blogchain as a way to track my progress on this project, as well as to put some social pressure on myself to stay disciplined and moving along.

For starters, lemme share my plan to tame this mess I've made.

Frankly, there is no plan.

I'm sort of making it up as I go along. The last time I did a structured, longer-term research project in an institutional setting was 2004-06 (that was my postdoctoral research, which eventually ended up as *Tempo* in pop-science-philosophy form), and I've basically forgotten how to do such things, and gotten used to essay-length work. Plus I am 15 years older and slower. Plus I also had a few students to help that time. Significant retooling and cognitive refurbishment necessary in this aging factory.

Plus, this is not like an academic research project driven by grant funding and expectations of journal papers and peer review and such anyway. Thanks to the enlightened people at Berggruen, I've received the blessing+curse of loose expectations.

I made the mind map today to take stock, bootstrap the project into consciousness, start the clock, and start imposing some authoritah on it. As you can see, I'm using a computer metaphor for the project, with input on the left and output on the right to model the state of the project.

On the input side, there is a slum-like sprawl of discovery material waiting to be triaged, a prioritized bunch of books queued up, and a bunch of my own old writing (where this project took shape) scoped-in for review (madelines not included).

There is also a messy output state. The only presentable piece of output so far is a talk from last year (video). Everything else is WIP crud that needs some mix of tender, loving care (TLC) and brutal, hating apathy (BHA) to coerce into some sort of shape that can serve as a beginning. Planning to start is a bitch. It's much harder than planning to finish.

Project Clock

You'll notice I've labeled the core node of this state-snapshot mindmap "Multitemporality Tick1". This is a reference to the tick-tocking of a clock of course, but it is also a specific reference to the old Intel tick-tock model for nudging Moore's Law along (ticks were process shrinks, and tocks were microarchitecture updates).

This points to a nice bit of meta-dogfooding I have going on here. A premise of the project is that it is possible and desirable to construct subjective time "clocks" based on rhythms in your stream of consciousness driven by the information environment of the particular escaped reality you choose to inhabit (Moore's Law is of course the stream-of-consciousness clock of the computing and software industry). So this project should at least fit its own theory. I'd like my work on this project to occur not just in a particular headspace, but a particular *headtime*. A *kairos* for the project, sort of a temporal operating system. It would be nice for this project to be self-exemplifying.

I don't know what my tick-tock unit is yet. I have some vague idea of a rhythmic waxing and waning of project entropy, with perhaps a day/night dynamic created by being relatively in praxis or poiesis modes. I wish I had the stark and simple poetic imagination of T. S. Eliot, who measured out his life in coffee spoons. Eliot, incidentally, was associated with the Bloomsbury Set, the literary circle (including Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes among others) inspired by the subjectivist philosopher of time, Henri Bergson. So there's lots of entanglement here.

Tick 1, incidentally, is not the actual start time for the lifecycle of a project. That's just the moment when the high-concept comes together as an "Aha!" (I think I'm there). It's the tick heard around the project, reverberating through past and future. The period before there is an atemporal zone of liminality and discovery where there is no tick-tock going on. Aion flowing into Kairos, flowing into Chronos. That's what it takes to get to Tick 1. I called this the Double Freytag in *Tempo,* but perhaps I should call it the Snowflake Raga. I'm done with the first atemporal movement in raga music known as the *aalap*. The tabla has kicked in.

I used to play the tabla back in the day, did you know? I was actually pretty decent at it. In another life, I might have been a budget Zakir Hussain playing in an Indian-music dad-band.

My mind map is also a memory map of the last two years as much as it is a map of the current state (words like *current* become interestingly elusive when you're studying time). Proust, another guy in the Greater Bergson Circle, famously reduced his memory cue to a madeline. This mind-map is my madeline.

Maybe I should title the mind-map madeline-spoon. As a poet, I'm very derivative.

Speaking of clocks, it's interesting to reflect on what's actually driving my objective, external clock-time schedule now.

Part of the expectation of this fellowship is that I'll work out of the office 3-4 days a week, so that's a

return to a partial industrial style *chronos* 9-5 expectation after 8 years in an atemporal, feral wilderness where nobody expected me to be anywhere, anytime by default. So returning to an industrial schedule is a bit of trip down memory lane.

Rather aptly for this project, the Berggruen Institute is housed in the historic Bradbury Building, most famous for being a location featured in the original *Blade Runner* movie. So the connection to Philip K. Dick, OG pop-philosopher of time, feels pleasantly apt. Every time I walk up to my office, I walk past tourists in the lobby gawking at the madeline of their own cinematic memories.

PKD once observed that reality is that which does not

go away when you stop believing in it, a definition whose inversion is central to my project. The tourists gawking at the architecture are doing exactly what I hope to provide a satisfying account of: trying to believe more strongly in an escaped reality by approaching its least-escaped elements more closely, as though trying to ground fantasy in reality by entering a temple.

Los Angeles is full of this kind of temple-visiting behavior. I haven't yet been to Disneyland, but Universal Studios is a dozen escaped realities constructed specifically for your PKD-ish reality-escapist pleasure. The closer you get to the inner sanctum of a time temple, the more perfect your escape into an alternate reality.

Studying time constantly has you thinking about weirdness like this. Time, as the title of J. T. Fraser's famous book on the subject proclaims, is a "familiar stranger." As long as you're not thinking *about* it, it seems familiar and boring. The moment you actually take a look, it starts getting very strange and loopy and self-referential.

Like any modern information-work workplace, the Berggruen Institute is pretty easygoing and flex-timey, so what's *actually* driving my schedule today on my first day is my cat. I left him 2 feedings in his automated feeder (driven by countdown mechanical clocks) and he's going to start getting hungry and upset by around 6. So my schedule is partly driven by 2 *chronos* clocks (9-5 office routine and a mechanical cat feeder), and 1 *kairos* clock (a cat's stream of hunger-consciousness). This theme of how loose synchronization of subjectivities — in this case the entangled cat+me system — drives a sense of time, is also front and center for me. Right now, one strand of my stream of consciousness is simulating and mirroring whatever my cat is up to. This is the ordinary kind of entanglement that leads some to believe in the more telepathic varieties.

When I was a kid, we were told that hiccups are a sign that someone is thinking of you somewhere. Increasingly, software makes that sort of idea literal. I'm planning to set up my Dropcam soon to spy on my cat from work. He hiccups, I hiccup.

In the background of this project kickoff, another sad and grim clock is ticking — my wife is away in Michigan, three time zones away, caring for her terminally ill father. Half my attention is on my text-exchanges with her as we discuss his evolving condition. Text message dings have been punctuating my days for the last couple of weeks (this is also the reason I'm temporarily the primary caregiver for our cat).

Though I wish I didn't have this grim reminder in my personal life, around the world, mythological personifications of time have usually also been personifications of death. I've been thinking about that connection in the abstract for two years now, and suddenly it has become all too real.

In the West, the Greek god Chronos evolved into the Roman god of objective time, Saturn (possibly via conflation with Cronus, the king of gods), and then into the modern Father Time, the familiar figure of death in a black hood with a scythe (who has also, via Terry Pratchett novels, been a constant presence in my stream of consciousness for the last two years as I've binged the Discworld series). In Hinduism, Yama is both god of death and god of time (sometimes referred to as Kala, subordinate to Shiva, or Mahakala — Great Time, god of creative destruction).

While the idea of time-as-death is associated primarily with Chronos — an inescapable, objective reality and an inexorably ticking-down countdown clock that doesn't go away when you stop believing in it — there is also an element of Kairos in the mythology, as hinted at by the alternative name for Father Time: The Grim Reaper. The imagery of harvesting when the time is "ripe", subjectively judged, juxtaposed with that of your time being "up" in an objective sense, paints a portrait of death as a moment of convergence when both kinds of clocks stop together for a particular living thing. I suppose that's what the line "meditation is the art of conscious dying" gets at. Bringing Chronos and Kairos together in harmony at the end of a life (and Aion too, the third personification of time I've talked about here for a while, though that's a more complicated connection).

As you can see from the self-referential entangled mess I've created in my head thinking about all this for 2 years, and the red TODO items I've set for myself in the mind-map, there is need for compression, systematization, and serialization, and some brutal pruning of bunnytrails and taming of shrubbery.

The analogy to processor evolution is almost too close for comfort. For example, I want to try and pull everything into Scrivener as my one monolithic tool (monolithic is an architecture approach to processor design, as well as Tiago Forte's approach to [building a second brain](#), a personal psyche-engineering project that has some interesting commonalities with my notion of creating your own time — to create your own time is perhaps to create a second brain, and vice versa). The prospect of doing this seems a bit like trying to sew Frankenstein's monster together and trying to breathe pulsating life into it. To switch from this *tick* to its paired *tock,* I have to bootstrap some good old Bergsonian *élan vital* in here.

Some of this is going to be grunt work (email notes to myself). Some will need technical tricks (the export from my private slack channel where I was initially scribbling notes is in JSON form). Some could probably benefit from tricks (twitter bookmarks) but I'll probably just grunt through them. I hope this first *tick* is the heavy lift, and once I get it all sucked into Scrivener, future tweaks will be easier. The first *tock,* or microarchitecture update, will be to rethink my 2-year-old table-of-contents/outline since that's now garbage based on my more recent thinking.

I love outlines. I especially love the crunching sound they make when they collapse under the weight of what you're trying to coerce them into doing.

So far, I haven't come up with a good elevator pitch for what I'm up to. This sort of thing, from my Berggruen project page, is what I usually come up with when asked by people who I can't subject to the sort of meandering tour of an illegible headspacetime that is this post:

During his Berggruen fellowship year, he plans to study the changing relationship between time perception and the human condition, with particular focus on the hypothesis that a century-old culture based on universally shared objective clock time is giving way to a condition of multitemporality — a human condition based on a fragmented landscape of subjective time cultures.

I usually have to shuffle my feet and go hide behind the nearest potted plant when I describe the project this way. Research-stage larger projects are necessarily embarrassing, like a baby's poopy diaper. This is my poopy diaper pitch. I hope my next few iterations get me closer to, say, baby powder smell, then to elevator pitch smell, and finally, new car smell.

I wonder if there is a god of time-smells. I guess that thought goes direct to the Nuggets section in Scrivener now.

It feels weird to be back in a somewhat structured institutional context after more than 8 years. I have access to an actual library now, and have an office and stuff. I haven't done a proper literature search in 20 years. Hmm, maybe I'll scrounge around for some budget to hire a research assistant.

Anyway, here we are, and here we go. Tick tock.