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Sexist Time Structures

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Introduction

This project is an extension of my reading of Teresa Brennan's *Exhausting Modernity*. In her introduction she argues:

The sense of significance of time is in the air. It is attested to not only by Heidegger and Derrida, but by the plethora of lay books on physics available today. But physics is not the only science of time. Economics is another such science. What this book is about, in the end, is the connection between the time of economics and the time of physics, for this is the key to the inertia that has to be overcome in daily survival. In the end, we will see too that personal inertia is

directly tied to global entropy via the proliferation of commodities ...
an effect of the speeding up of the world (2000, 13).¹

What I would like to do is to extend her argument, as she does to some degree herself, to the imperialistic qualities of worlded time structures as they are exhausting, unsustainable and – key to my argument – sexist. Distinct from Brennan’s approach, I want to use Levinas’ critique of Heidegger’s idea of ontological temporality in order to point to the fundamentally economic and non-ethical structuring of time. That which stands outside of the socio-political economy (especially as it is now globalizing and homogenizing) remains ‘out of time’ in relation to the speed and currency of global discursive structures.

Dimensions of my argument include:

- 1) An outline of the disjunction between economic cycles and ecological cycles (e.g., the lack of ‘seasonality’?). Time as it is structured in the everyday sense brackets off ways in which more biological and ecological time structures could be sustained (especially as they work in more fundamentally sustainable ways).
- 2) A critique of the capitalist ethos as it manipulates our sense of time. Brennan does some work on this point. Levinas offers an ethico-existential idea of non-economic obligation in a way that can undermine the agenda of a time schedule written on the promise of natural and human resources and the values of efficiency, productivity and private profit. It can be argued from a Levinasian reading that there is a masculinized impatience in organizing time around consumption, “Possession neutralizes ... Possession masters ... Ontology is a relation with things that manifests things” (1969, 158).²
- 3) And the most experimental aspect of my argument: gender-neutrality as it operates economically, socially and politically remains sexist in relation to body rhythms and gendered existence. The position of women remains subordinate as it is ignored by our idea of “clock time.” If we use a phenomenological interpretation of time, embodied existence is a temporalizing existence, such that, as it is for Levinas, existence cannot

¹ Teresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy* (NY: Routledge, 2000).

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Alphonso Lingis, trans. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969).

remain *neutral*.³ As he argues it, “It is in the Face of the Other [*Autre*] that the commandment comes which interrupts the progress of the world” (1998b, 110).⁴

As Levinas argues it, a “deformalization of time” is necessary in order to reveal the violence of this ethico-existential imperialism. This

violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. (1969, 21)

There will need to be an exegesis of his idea of this deformalization before I can properly critique our global economic time structures as sexist. This project is a component of a larger effort to construct a working ethics of alterity that includes and builds value around the responsibility for the vulnerable other. That is not to say that there is no agenda to this project other than building an ethics of alterity. Insofar as found myself ‘admitting’ some ‘excesses’ in the context of my concern, I’ve attached onto this project a fourth dimension; what I am calling, simply, ‘A Body Problem.’”

1. *An (short) outline of the disjunction between economic cycles and ecological cycles.*

Here is the summary of Teresa’s Brennan’s argument regarding the direction of globalization: she calls it a Pyrrhic victory over space as the present phase of capitalization:

Time – calendar time – and traversing space – the manmade map – are now significant. Both circumvent nature, and both contain within

³ The face-to-face relation is a realization of *non-in-difference*. The risk of disorienting our position in the world, in the present-tense – atemporal and morally neutral to the significance of passing of time – arises from a commitment to the vigilance and attention demanded by the ethical injunction of the Other. Here, I will develop a discussion of the *il y a* in relation to gender, borrowing some of Irigaray’s critique of Heidegger and Levinas. For Irigaray, “Being cannot take place in a language whose fundamental move is appropriation. What is too near would slip its seizure ... a distance, there ... would remain in obscurity.” From *The Forgetting of Air*, (Mary Beth Mader, trans. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1999), 164.

⁴ From Levinas’ *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*. (Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, trans. New York: Columbia UP, 1998b).

themselves the structure of a different economy where time is at war with space. (2003, 140-141)

[Natural] time is losing out to speed of acquisition altogether. Free trade advances with globalization, and time for human and natural reproduction and regeneration decreases as it does so. (142)⁵

The emergence of the disjunction between the human and nonhuman economies has historical roots that I cannot outline here, but has been well-laid out by other authors (Merchant 1992, White 1967). While the mythology of a state of nature and the politicization of social contract theory has contributed to this disjunction (Pateman 1988), the track of my concern begins with the divide between production and reproduction. Much, I think, has been said about the difference between the linearity of economic productivity and how it opposes the ‘circularity’ of natural, more reproductive economies. The need for economic models that ‘close the loop’ comes out of the ethical imperative to *not waste* and *not pollute*, a position easily formulated by a utilitarian model of ethics. Yet, the work of efficiency and the value of not being “wasteful” (‘reuse and recycle’) misappropriates the significance of the gap between the human and natural economies. All economic considerations, especially as they are limited to the demands of the global market, still use short and medium term profits as a measure for value (Brennan 2000, 108).

Brennan’s approach to the disjunction, though, has me considering the temporality of these two diverging economic systems. The pace of production, especially as it goes global, leaves ‘no room’ for the replenishment of systems. We then see practices that effect a violence – a depletion of those resources, natural and human, that are *exhausted*⁶ by the force of industry and trade. Brennan argues that there is an embodied toxicity in the way that natural and human systems attempt to keep pace with these forces and end up burdened by the unsustainability of the practice. She argues, “The speed of acquisition will sometimes embody the cost of reproduction, and sometimes, more usually, not. When it does so, it does so because the general

⁵ This is from the chart Brennan outlines on the different phases of capitalization in *Globalization and Its Terrors: Daily Life in the West* (NY: Routledge). Quoted from ‘Stage 10: The Pyrrhic victory of space, 1965-present’ (2003, 141-142).

⁶ She also references exhaustion as inertia, but I will not follow her on this connection.

law of substitution is constrained by the fact that the reproduction time of certain natural substances ... forces itself into account” (2000, 108).

Sustainable systems here would have to mean those modes of production that not just account for or repair what has been taken out of reproductive power, but also *replenish* these systems. Val Plumwood, in tracing the imperial roots of Cartesian thought as it appropriates and instrumentalizes nature, can also help describe how this stage of the global economy, what she calls the Rational Economy, is ‘devouring the other’ (1993, 192):⁷

Increasingly [the Rational Economy] withdraws access to resources from unassimilated others, those who cannot be used or incorporated into Self (as commodities or in some other appropriated form which destroys otherness). In [this] stage, the world is not only conceived instrumentally, but completely instrumentalised. The objective is the implementation of the Cartesian dream of complete control over the other of nature and the final destruction of all resistance that the earth as other has to offer ... (193)

The concentration of all projects in relation to the global economy fixes a particularly destructive and unsustainable time/space relation. Brennan, most helpfully, attributes the progressive demands of speed and the collapsing of distance to the acquisition of capital. Here, I would like to treat the exclusivity of this project, the ‘devouring of the other,’ as an existential aporia. For my purposes, I cannot speak to the models of distributive justice (as it can account for either the reappropriation of ‘energy’ or ‘resources’) when addressing the problem of reproductive systems in relation to global economic productivity. In this way also, I cannot rest with Brennan’s approach to the problem – with her assessment of the global economy through energetics and the defense of a new Prime Directive.⁸

⁷ From Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (NY: Routledge, 1997).

⁸ Brennan’s energetics are psychodynamic and assume, “all entities in and of the natural world, all forces, whether naturally or artificially forged, are connected energetically. I am calling this the interactive energetic economy” (2000, 41). In treating this as an existential problem, There are non-economic, ethical and not energetic, elements I would like to bring to this assessment of otherness. Her Prime Directive argument “is borrowed from ... *Star Trek*. ...From the perspective of the twenty-fourth century, it will be plain that we either reversed course peaceably or

As an existential aporia, the destructive capacity of the economic/ecological disjunction is in the consumptive quality of capital accumulation and profit-based production. It is also, I think, a fundamentally *temporal* problem as the global economy functions closer and closer to satisfying a desire for instantaneousness and synchronicity. In a kind of global project of the ‘all at once’ and ‘everything at the same time,’ there is a cacophony of efforts (both market-based and masculinized) that are exclusionary to the temporality of reproductive forces, rendering regenerative, replenishing possibilities for the world impossible to withstand or sustain.

2. *A critique of the capitalist ethos as it manipulates our sense of time.*

The object which make a profit is the object which controls the environment, in terms of speeding it up and moving it round, creating its own ‘laws of motion.’ ... It does so not only in terms of class and sex-patterning, but in terms, which we can now see are related to class, of the extent to which fantasies come true and gratification comes more rapidly. (Brennan 2000, 150-151).

The manufacture of these ‘laws of motion’ is systematically effecting an ontological cloning of the “now” (yet again)⁹ that disfigures natural systems. Reproduction is sabotaged by quality-control systems that produce and replicate the same ‘stuff’ for the sake of the self-same.¹⁰ This replication and multiplicity of things for the sake of the self-same, (insofar as the thing can be commodified and objectified for the sake of consumption and satisfaction) engenders profitability and market-based desires, making possible only those modes of living that use and

had the reversal imposed upon us by the consequences of our own actions. In the *Star Trek* universe, we reversed on our own accord after a terrible war. As we did so, we built a world where poverty is unknown, where exploitation of humans and animals has been abolished, and where money does not exist. The prime directive here has similar ambitions,” from *Globalization and Its Terrors*, (2003, 163).

⁹ Here I am thinking of Heidegger’s critique of the philosophies of presence, “If one directs one’s glance towards Being-present-at-hand and not-Being-present-at-hand, and thus ‘thinks’ the sequence of ‘nows’ through ‘to the end’, then an end can never be found. In *this way of thinking* time through to the end, one *must* always *think* more time; from this one infers that time *is* infinite” (1962, 476). Also see Heidegger’s note, Division Two, Chapter Five, (nt. xiii, 499) regarding the traditional position of eternity as a *nunc stans* as emerging from an ordinary conception of time. All citation from *Being and Time* (John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1962).

¹⁰ I would argue that this replication of the now is also linked to the preservation of the youth market. Levinas describes this perpetuated adolescence.

consume, possess and claim. The marketing for novelty (as in the ‘new and improved’) further masks the toxic effects of the exclusivity of global economic value, perpetuating adolescent, if not also infantile, impulsive attitudes.¹¹ As Benjamin Barber states it, “The ethics of narcissism promote and reflect a preference for the timeless present over temporality itself – whether past or future” (2007, 108).

The violence of the ‘now’ is gender specific. The economic fixation of reproductive and biodiverse systems is absorbed into the overall world pace and this pace unevenly burdens regenerative powers. As alterity comes on the scene, it cannot be an interruption of the day-to-day; rather, it becomes embodied *opportunity*, a site of new consumption, and, hence, in the face of the global economy, alterity collapses.

The self-same is assumed to be but is not preserved by the instant; yet the present is a *passing*. For Levinas, this passing is from one to another, not simply of the past into the future.¹² The financial quarter, the work-week, the business day slices and dices everyday time into smaller, digestible economic demands that can be neither embodied nor ecologically sustained. Yet the work of grasping and consuming retains a fundamental indifference to and impatience for those who pass. For Levinas, “Groping [is] the work of the hand par excellence ... Groping reveals the position of the body ... always invited to traverse a distance at random, and maintains this position all by itself. Such is the position of a separated being” (1969, 167-168).

The marking of events and the passing of time, as the naming and identifying of things and with persons in shared public space, is still the work of appropriation and representation. This work, as Levinas describes it, is an enchantment with ontology as it is also a lingering enchantment with the Cartesian *cogito*. In this way, the desire for intentional appropriation of the world in terms of self-interest requires interruption; the certainty assumed in selfhood is challenged. The certainty and interests of the selfsame is met by the injunction of ethical

¹¹ It is Benjamin Barber’s argument that the global market has created “*kidults, rejuveniles, twixters, and adulescents*” creating an “infantilist ethos ... potent in shaping the ideology and behaviors of our radical consumerist society today” and it has “worked to sustain consumer capitalism, but at the expense of both civility and civilization” (2007, 3-4). As it regards novelty, Levinas offers a more provocative suggestion: “One loves the new ... the worry about fashion, the search for originality at any price – and all the degrees of degradation to which this love lends itself ... the Desire for the new in us is a Desire for *the other*; it distinguishes our being from *existing*, which is self-sufficient, and which, *conatus essendi*, perseveres in existing, holding, above all, to this very existing,” (1987, 121).

¹² See Levinas’ conclusion of *Existence and Existents*, (1978, 101-106).

substitution ('the one-for-the-other'), otherwise, "things have no face" (1969, 140). Only with ethical substitution can there be 'open time' to what is otherwise, facing that which "[comes] forth from nowhere," and "comes upon me from nowhere" – face-to-face with an other, without intention and without return (142).

"Possession is accomplished in taking-possession or labor, the destiny of the hand ... Labor is the very *en-ergy* of acquisition" (1969, 159). The labor of the "groping"¹³ hand has also been the work of virility. Out of the handiwork of the modern world has been the architecture of systemic suffering, a world shaped by the hands of those who sought heroism and destiny. In this way, the feminine as alterity is marginalized, dispossessed, and reduced to the social and political representations of otherness. And, as Tina Chanter describes it, "The figure of the feminine remains on the margins" (2001, 253). Alongside this marginalization is the perpetuated ethos of adolescence; so that, to not participate in the adventure of the global market is denounced as being 'afraid to live' and "there is no greater cowardice than this fear" (Levinas 1990, 155).

It is out of the dangers of consumption and the enchantments of the *cogito*, in all the ways that it attempts to evade hunger, which Levinas then describes and defends the feminine. It is a masculine impatience that transforms the worldly relations into a matter of possession: "Possession neutralizes ... Possession masters ... Ontology is a relation with things that manifests things" (1969, 158). So, there is a masculinized impatience in organizing time around consumption, and as Levinas argues it, "In enjoyment throbs egoist being" (1969, 147), so that complacency, the satiety within the selfsame, manifests a Western incapacity for patience.¹⁴

The "industrious gaze" is a covetous gaze, "between vision and grasping and the consumption of terrestrial nutrients, but also for their comprehension and their exchange"

¹³ Levinas defines the work of groping: "Groping is not a technically imperfect action, but the condition for all technique. ... The end is a term the hand searches for in the risk of missing it." (1969, 167). Other than this work of the hand is the caress, The not-yet-being is precisely not a possible that would only be more remote than other possibilities. The caress does not act, does not grasp possibilities. ... Wholly passion, it is a compassion for the passivity, the suffering, the evanescence of the tender. It dies with this death and suffers with this suffering. Being moved [Attendrissement] suffering without suffering, it is consoled already, complacent in its suffering (259).

¹⁴ "A gustative sensation is not a knowing accompanying the ... mechanism of consuming ... enjoyment is an enjoyment of enjoyment, always wanting with regard to itself, filling itself with these lacks for which contentment is promised, satisfying itself already with this impatient process of satisfaction, enjoying its own appetite. There is enjoying of enjoyment before any reflection, but enjoyment does not turn toward enjoyment as sight turns toward the seen. ... it is the very movement of egoism" (1981, 73).

(1998a, 7).¹⁵ The “universality of economic life” (8), which, for my purposes, is suspiciously neutral in its regard for otherness. This industriousness, as it brings being into command – setting the pace and situating the material conditions for worlded value – is an assumed neutrality that, if we connect it with Levinas’ *il y a*, is “unbearable in its indifference”: “Not anguish but horror, the horror of the unceasing, of a monotony deprived of meaning. Horrible insomnia” (de Vries 2005, 395, qtd. Levinas).¹⁶ And so, it is just this kind of neutral, economic appropriation that exhausts, reducing being to its ‘nothing other.’

Levinas provides the insight to this connection between the direction of modern globalizing capitalism and the implicit irresponsibility inscribed into the world by this relation. To quote: “The new as modern is the fully arranged state of the self and world. ... Freedom is the *positive* power of modern man, exerted upon nature and human events ...” (1987, 125). Insofar as responsibility is *before all freedom*, only fecundity and the heterogeneity of the “relationship between genders” (1978, 99-100), first embodies the hypostatic state: “the apparition of a substantive ... it signifies the suspension of the anonymous *there is [il y a]*” (83).

Following Chanter’s reading, the feminine comes as a disruption to “the virile categories of master, domination and self-possession ... For Levinas, the feminine way of being ... interrupts the economy of being” (2001, 251-252).¹⁷ She argues that the moments of deformatization that Levinas selects out of Heidegger’s ontology point to the resistance to the egology of presence, in which the “the present is accorded a privilege in relation to the past and the future ... this privilege of the present or the now ... amounts to a privilege of the graspable (main-tenance)” (30). I think these moment of deformatization indicate that the time of

¹⁵ There is an interesting reference here to Rabelais’ Messer Gaster (“Mr. Stomach”) signifying all the ways, both creative and destructive, to the ways in which humanity ‘hungers.’ He asks, “Have we measured the depths of hunger?” (1998a, 10). So that as he reads it, “a famished stomach has no ears,” but, in the wake of secularity, the only hunger left is the ‘hunger of the other’: “All our values are worn out except this one” (11). But it is only the memory of my own hunger that gives me a (banal) compassion for another’s hunger; otherwise, “he never ceases to fly from his responsibility, without escaping himself.” To this he says, as it regards our responsibility for the hunger and suffering of another, “we are not astonished enough.”

¹⁶ Hent de Vries quoting Levinas’ *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Jill Robbins, ed. Stanford UP, 2001), p. 45. *Hypostasis* is the “Getting out of the anonymousness of being” (*ibid.*).

¹⁷ Specifically to his use of the feminine as critique, she argues, “under the sign of the feminine ... Levinas explores sensibility, materiality, and the corporeal. ... One could say that the feminine, as eros, as preoriginary welcome, and as maternal body, provides the most thoroughgoing and convincing critique of Heidegger.” Yet, Chanter goes on to argue that, “while Levinas might open up a space for rethinking the feminine, he does not follow through on this promise, bur rather, closes it down” (*ibid.*).

prospection and prospecting ego must come to an end; a kind of more epochal thinking is necessary to change the tempo of worlded time, structured in a way that opens resistance to and out of deference (a *respective* non-indifference?) for the horrible anonymity of the *il y a*.

3. *Connecting the supposed gender-neutrality that operates economically, socially and politically as sexist, especially in relation to body rhythms and gendered existence.*

With our deep roots in individualism, we have a Utopian devotion to ‘making it on your own,’ improving yourself, moving up in the world, pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps, striking it rich by an ingenious personal effort. **This is a culture in love with self-made men.** (Freire & Shor 1987, 110 [emphasis added])

In the context of the global economy, expectations and roles are most often still scripted by sexist practices disadvantaging women; this disadvantageousness is compounded by nationalist drives for position in the global marketplace while social protections for women like healthcare and education become low priority. As Vandana Shiva puts it,

Insufficient and inadequate ‘participation’ in ‘development’ was not the cause for women’s increasing underdevelopment; it was, rather, ... enforced by [their] asymmetric participation in it, by which they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits. ... Economic growth was a new colonialism, draining resources away from those who needed them most. (2003, 296).¹⁸

So, I ask with Levinas:

Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality – or the drifting – of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and the conquered, and which spare the conquerors, whom the wicked must join? (1988, 164).

¹⁸ Shiva, “Development, Ecology and Women” in *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*, Third Edition (Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce, eds. Thomason Wadsworth, 2003).

As long as there is a glorification of indifference to what cannot keep up with the pace of being, as the economic has ‘gone global,’ we will structure world time and the everyday without regard to the embodied heterogeneity of gendered existence. There is no neutrality in the way we have created an accelerating frenzy of gadgets and transportation. And, as Levinas states it, “Machines sum up instants. They produce speed; they echo the impatience of desire” (1978, 93).

The pace of contemporary life has created obscene demands on the body and on the natural world. An ethics of alterity might offer a ‘resetting’ of the pace (without an apocalyptic invocation – a sign of ‘disaster’?¹⁹). It may come at first as if it were a ‘slowing down,’ and a ‘setting back’ – both early moments in the work of regeneration: beyond the repair and remediation of the disjunction between the natural and economic cycles. This is what I mean by suggesting a more ‘epochal’ thinking when it comes to the periodicity of punctuated, global time. It would also have to be un-imperial in its command, vigilant for the vicious expeditiousness of a co-opted eroticism. As Levinas suggests:

... concerning contemporary violence ... [it] is not just egoism ... The modern world has forgotten the virtues of patience. The rapid and effective motion to which everyone is committed for a single moment has furnished the dark gleam produced by the ability to wait and suffer. But the glorious deployment of energy is murderous ... The hand that grasps the weapon must suffer in the very violence of that gesture (1990, 154-155).

The investment in the ‘pleasing’ vs. hope found in the aesthetics of the ugly. Time for prospecting and circumscription comes to an end. Even the romantic notion of dwelling, as Heidegger has been read, cannot respond to the suffering of sexist time structures. The indifference of the standing reserve, an existentialist interpretation that still places freedom before responsibility,²⁰ is insufficient resistance to the aesthetics of speed and self-making.

¹⁹ This is in reference to a eco-phenomenological reading of Levinas: “Emmanuel Levinas is no stranger to disasters. For him the disaster is written on the face of the other; it is the wandering destitution of the other who is exposed to violence ... it is the mortality of the other ... and calls me to responsibility” (Diehm 2003, 171). Here, in asking about the contribution Levinas might make to environmentalism, Diehm references the question of animals when it was posed to Levinas, “I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question” (172).

²⁰ Here I am employing one of Levinas’ earliest critiques of Heidegger.

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