

# THEORIZING THE PRESENT

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## Highlights from the Readings

### J. Jack Halberstam (2005): "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies"

"The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment...and squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand" (p.2) KS

"If we destabilize the meaning of capitalism using poststructuralist critiques of identity and signification, then we can begin to see the multiplicity of noncapitalist forms that constitute, supplement, and abridge global capitalism, but we can also begin to imagine, by beginning to see, the alternatives to capitalism that already exist and are presently under construction." (p. 10) RH

"For the purpose of this book, 'queer' refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. 'Queer time' is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. 'Queer space' refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics" (p. 6). KS

### Rasheedah Philips (2016): "Future"

"Jeremy Rifkin explains that the use of linear progress narratives among oppressed peoples keeps them 'confined in a narrow temporal band, unable to anticipate and plan for their own future...powerless to affect their political fate.'" For those deprived of access to the future, they become stuck planning for the present while the society around them speeds forward in illusory, linear progress. The future thus becomes 'untrustworthy [and] unpredictable.'" (p. 172). KS

"Along with Afrofuturism, a number of alternative movements have emerged over the past few years (e.g., Chicano futurism, Queer futurism, and Crip futurity) to appropriate or redefine notions of 'future' while actively exploring what the future might look like for marginalized people" (p. 173). KS

"Future shock" by Alvin Toffler. CVZ

Colonial time makes liberation something linear and controlled by those who control their time, general time, and the terms of their oppression. It creates a situation where there is no way to know what their future looks like and (especially in terms of wealth), to deprive people of their hope. CVZ

Presentism: ahistorical modern values placed on past (or future) events

### Mark Rifkin (2017): “Indigenous Orientations”

“U.S. settler colonialism produces its own temporal formation, with its own particular ways of apprehending time, and the state’s policies, mappings, and imperatives generate the frame of reference...More than just affecting ideologies or discourses of time, that network of institutionalized authority over ‘domestic’ territory also powerfully shapes the possibilities for interaction, development and regularity within it. Such imposition can be understood as the denial of Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*, in the sense that one vision or way of experiencing time is cast as the only temporal formation--as the baseline for the unfolding of time itself” (p. 2) KS

“What does it mean to consider Native temporalities as having their own flow--as coherent yet changing, affected by other flows but not the same as them? In this way, *Beyond Settler Time* explores how Native peoples’ varied experiences of duration can remain nonidentical with respect to the dynamics of settler temporal formations, indicating ways of being-in-time that are not reducible to participation in a singular, given time--a unitary flow--largely contoured by non-native patterns and priorities” (p. 3).

“What possibilities are there for temporal multiplicity under the conditions of settler dominance?” (p. 16). KS

Colonial time makes “an ‘advancing people’ and a ‘static people,’ locating the latter out of time.” (p. 5). [how concepts of “authenticity” force performance instead of allowing growth and change]. CVZ

Veena Das’ idea of “the signature of the state.” CVZ

### John Clarke (2010): “Of crises and conjunctures”

“Turning to the current conjuncture might require us to think about the different temporalities (the histories, trajectories and rhythms) that come to combine in the present...we need to think of the

conjuncture as a point where different temporalities--and more specifically, the tensions, antagonisms and contradictions which they carry--begin to come together” (p. 342). KS

“I have tried to argue the importance of thinking conjuncturally, examining the heterogeneity of the present rather than relating it in epochal terms (of either continuity or rupture). I have also tried to show that the question of how many crises, in what sort of articulation, might be more productive than a concern with the single and a singular view of crisis” (p. 352). KS

### Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin (2015): “Displacing Neoliberalism”

“Conjunctural analysis is also partly about periodisation...Yet it is a periodisation of society as a whole that takes its shape out of the interweaving of different elements (social, cultural, economic), which often individually have different temporalities...These longer, differentiated, and intersecting temporalities and spatialities are crucial to understanding the character and dynamics of the current conjunctural moment” (p. 199-200). KS

“The argument we are making...is that a politics which seeks at least to contain capitalism within a limited, accountable and democratic space needs to have many dimensions, some of which may not seem recognisably political in the usual senses of that term. There are, as Deleuze and Guattari have put it in their different idiom, ‘a thousand plateaus,’ that is to say an almost infinite number of sites of multiple intersection within which a society’s future can be imagined, fought over, and determined... The challenge...is to develop ways of thinking and feeling which can bring about connections between different kinds of action, and identification between those engaged in them” (p. 220). KS

“The main mechanisms of exploitation and of appropriation of surplus are no longer so clearly located in relations between capital on the one hand and workers on the other. [...] This means that the locations of expropriation have multiplied, often to places that are less transparent and less easily contestable than the places of production to which we are accustomed. [...] Moreover, Other lines of social division are also important to the structuring of the current moment. Lines of division around gender/sexuality and race/ethnicity, for instance, structure social relations in distinctive ways. [...] When these social divisions operate within a capitalist system, they are, of course, profoundly shaped by it and articulated to it. But they retain their “relative autonomy.” p. 210 RH

“There are, as Deleuze and Guattari have put it in their different idiom, ‘a thousand plateaus’, that is to say an almost infinite number of sites of multiple intersections within which a society’s future can be imagined, fought over, and determined. Indeed in a good society there would be many co-existing and contending forms of power, and not exclusively those of property and capital on the one hand, nor of governments and political organisations on the other. The challenge, after these years of neoliberal

ascendancy, is to develop ways of thinking and feeling which can bring about connections between different kinds of action, and identifications between those engaged in them. [...] The task is to create and sustain a new consensus around such values, which elected governments would over time find the confidence to give force to through their decisions.” pp. 220 RH

Neoliberalism “is nothing if not a new sexual settlement” (p. 212). CVZ

## The 1619 Project

Jamelle Bouie: “American democracy has never shed the undemocratic assumption present at its founding: that some people are inherently entitled to more power than others” (p. 50). KS

Crispus Attucks (first person to die in the American Revolution and was a black man). Robert Hemings (Jefferson’s half-brother kept in slavery by Jefferson). Isaac Woodard (a veteran beaten blind by police 4.5 hours after being discharged). Phillis Wheatley (first African American to publish a book of poetry in the US). Gabriel Prosser (lead a slave rebellion and wanted to make an independent black state in Virginia). CVZ

Drapetomania--the “disease of the mind” that doctors like Thomas Hamilton and Cartwright thought “afflicted” enslaved people from running from their enslavers. CVZ

The term “seasoning” as forcing assimilation. CVZ

“They’ll see how beautiful I am/ And be ashamed/ I, too, am America.” Quoted Langston Hughes in this piece. CVZ

## Robin DG Kelley (2016): “Trump Says Go BAck, We Say Fight Back

“So where do we go from here? If we really care about the world, our country, and our future, we have no choice but to resist...What must resistance look like? There are at least five things we have to do right now: 1. Build up the sanctuary movement. [...] 2. Defend all of our target communities. [...] 3. Stop referring to the South as a political backwater, a distinctive site of racist right-wing reaction. [...] 4. Support and deepen the anti-Klan and anti-fascist movement. [...] 5. Rebuild the labor movement.”

KS

## Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016): “Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment”

“Protests *are* for everyone--but how do you determine if the protest was successful or not, and how do you draw those who showed up deeper into organizing? Basically, how do you move from protest to movement? Historian Barbara Ransby speaks to this difficulty: ‘While some forms of resistance might be reflexive and simple--that is, when pushed too hard, most of us push back, even if we don’t have a plan or a hope for winning--organizing a movement is different. It is not organic, instinctive, or ever easy. If we think we can all ‘get free’ through individual or uncoordinated small group resistance, we are kidding ourselves.’ (175) KS

“#BLM has reinvigorated the Occupy method of protest, which believes decentralized and ‘leaderless’ actions are more democratic, essentially allowing its followers to act on what they want to do without the restraint of others weighing in. ... Organizational autonomy and decentralization raise questions of how actions will be coordinated and the concentrated weight of an entire movement brought to bear on targeted institutions. Different locations have different issues: how are local actions woven into a coherent social movement, not just a series of disparate demonstrations with no relationship to each other? If every city, organization, and individual does whatever it/she/he feels empowered to do in the name of the movement, how will we ever transform a series of effective local actions into a national movement” (p. 176-177). KS

“[F]ighting around the demand to be ‘free’ does not clarify the steps it will take to achieve that goal. Demanding everything is as ineffective as demanding nothing, because it obscures what that struggle looks like on a daily basis....This is not an argument for thinking small or abandoning the struggle to completely transform the United States; it is an argument for drawing a distinction between the struggle for reforms that are possible today and the struggle for revolution, which is a longer-term project” (181). KS

“The challenge for the movement is transforming the goal of ‘freedom’ into digestible demands that train and organize its forces so that they have the ability to fight for me, the movement must also have a real plan for building and developing solidarity among the oppressed” (p. 186). KS

## Robin Truth Goodman (2013): “Gender Work: Feminism After Neoliberalism”

“By ‘women’s work,’ I mean a type of labor that in the industrial age was considered domestic, affective, immaterial, or reproductive, and having to do with functions of ‘care’ and socialization... As capital has approached the limits of the universal expansion that Marx imagined for it, ‘women’s work’

has become one of the most viable sites where primitive accumulation can still operate by creating new zones for robust capitalizability and exploitation” (p. 139). KS

“‘Women’s work’ is both constituted as the current face of capital and escapes from that constitution by always constituting anew. The revolutionary strength of ‘women’s work’ is in its destructive opposition to the forces of privatization that try to reduce it to the count--that is, to a quantity of exchange, to measure” (p. 161). KS

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## Class Notes

by RTO

Everything resists in the now, even though we reflect on what has come before. The significance of mechanization of time

- Literacies, and different ways in which we interpret time. E.g. Comics, physical experiences (e.g. sexual reproductive time)

Futurisms: give us a space to imagine a creativity of PoC without framing the experiences of PoC exclusively as deficits. It creates a space of hope, power and generation.

How do we grapple with the points of connection between multiple temporalities?

- The notion of linear time, is an imposition on all of us “having to exist in the same way and same space”. Marching into this *modern* future
  - Implications:
    - for ways of being; how we relate to our pasts, and the possibilities of ourselves in the future.
    - Space, accumulation, buildings
- Day to day ways of measuring time:
  - 2 year periods: between DOCA issues.
  - “Past” as located in a particular space, but what if it becomes, a realistic space for the future? (and a happy, productive, content future that isn’t intrinsically located in the place of the USA)
    - What does this kind of imagination mean in terms of links to ancestors?

### On Crisis:

*Crisis for whom? When were ‘we’ not in crisis?*

“What is the presentness in the present?”- Clarke

What are the histories that we see/feel ourselves living in/with today.

The future as something to be mined, as a practice that needs to happen in the present in order to validate / justify what we are doing. BUT we must perpetually defer the realization of our future potential, in order to avoid disrupting the hegemonic powers of the moment.

Closing words:

- Capitalism, imposes a time that Capitalism feels/views as inevitable - *do the/a/some reading, because they take time!*
- If your writing isn't accessible it is not radical