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Times, Theories and Practices in Social Psychology

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ABSTRACT. This paper begins by problematizing the ‘taken for granted’ status of Newtonian linear time at the heart of (social) psychology. Borrowing from Adam (1990), the paper makes a distinction between an ‘events in time’ and ‘time in events’ approach to social psychology. It argues that a ‘time in events’ approach helps to reveal the importance of multiple times for social psychological theories and practices. To demonstrate this approach, it considers some of the multiple times that are relevant for analysing the concept of ‘identity’. It also explores the multiple times of the research encounter. In doing so, it suggests that traditional dichotomies in social psychology between synchronic and diachronic methods, and between experimental and qualitative methods, can be dissolved by this focus on the temporal. The paper concludes with some observations about the importance of time for thinking about social psychology as a knowledge-producing practice.

KEY WORDS: qualitative, quantitative, social psychology, theory, time

In his book on time and psychological explanation, Slife (1993) argues that the history of psychology is heavily influenced by both the methods and the metaphysics of Isaac Newton. At the heart of Newton’s science was a belief in linear and absolute time ;something that persists in psychology today (McGrath & Kelly, 1986; Slife, 1993). However, while psychology has remained wedded to a Newtonian

conception of time, the physical sciences have moved on (see Adam, 1990). For example, in the field of physics, Einstein's work on time has undermined the 'old code' of 19th-century thinking, which was steeped in the traditions of Newtonian physics and Cartesian dualism (Elias, 1992). Einstein was the first to realize that time was not a neutral medium in which laws could be described, but played an unrecognized part in the way the properties of physics were conceived in the first place. His subsequent work shows that time is not fixed or independent of the system to which it refers. Instead of a single, fixed and universal concept of time, Einstein demonstrates that time is a local, internal feature of any system of observation, related to the position of the observer. Viewed from the perspective of contemporary physical science, time is no longer a value-free and objective entity.

This relativizing of time in the physical sciences has led theorists in a number of different social science disciplines to rethink the role of temporal phenomena in their disciplines as a whole. In sociology, for example, Giddens (1981, 1984) has argued for an approach to sociological theorizing that places time at the core. The importance accorded to the temporal can be seen in the work of influential theorists from Virilio (1986) to Bauman (2000). Others, such as Luhmann (1982) and Adam (1990), have even argued that a reevaluation of the nature of the temporal should lead to a reconceptualization of the discipline** itself. In anthropology, similar

concerns have also been raised. Fabian (1983), for example, shows how particular concepts of time are central to the way anthropology conceives of itself and of the 'objects' of anthropological inquiry. Similar arguments can be found in the work of scholars interested in geography (Thrift, 1988),** history (Ermarth, 1992), and political science (Shedler & Santiso, 1998). To borrow from Adam (1990), this body of work marks a shift in the way time is conceptualized from one that looks at 'events in time', to an approach that explores 'time in events'. What Adam means by this is that theorists have begun to focus less on how time can be used as a (linear) dimension along which a particular phenomenon can be arrayed, and more on how different kinds of times are deployed in the construction of the phenomenon itself.

In psychology, however, the grip of a Newtonian, linear time remains strong. Slife (1993) identifies five interrelated characteristics of what are considered to be the legitimate forms of explanations in psychology ;all of which are dependent on a Newtonian framework. These are objectivity, continuity, linearity, universality and reductivity. Firstly, the objectivity accorded to time in psychology means that it is seen as an almost invisible medium for events. It is then assumed that psychological processes are distributed across it. This means that relations across time are seen as more important than relations at the same time. Secondly, a belief in the continuity of time

means that psychologists tend to give primacy to the past (over the present or the future) in theory and explanation. Psychologists also assume a smooth flow of time, which means that any attempt to study change is predicated on continuous rather than discontinuous notions of how change occurs. Thirdly, assumptions of the universality of time are at the heart of attempts by psychologists to discover universal laws and principals. Psychology prizes similarity across situations and attempts to 'control out' unique characteristics of particular situations or contexts. Moreover, the importance given to the idea of replication, that a finding needs to be repeatable at different times in order for it to be seen as lawful, is predicated on assumptions of the universality of time. Fourthly, assumptions about the linearity of time lie at the heart of the way psychology theorizes cause and effect. Although most psychologists would hold that that the mere chronological order of events does not ensure causal relation, this distinction is often violated. As events are thought to occur along a linear time-line, and because cause is thought to produce effect, then cause is assumed to precede effect. Simultaneity and future orientations are seen as less acceptable causal explanations in psychology than those involving a linear story back to an event in the past. Finally, psychologists' acceptance of the idea of the reductivity of time means that research on process can be legitimately carried out by examining parts of the process. In other words, because psychologists take for granted that

time is neutral and linear, they also assume that it is comprised of equal units. Process thus becomes a series of discrete moments that unfold over time. A single moment in a single unit of time can be generalized to other moments in time.

In pointing to the legacy of Newtonian time in psychology, Slife demonstrates how time is both a central feature and an absent presence in psychological theorizing. Although almost all psychological research is inherently temporal, time is hardly ever at the centre of psychologists' thinking or practice. For psychology, Newtonian time is what Bruno Latour (1986) would call a 'fact' ;something that has taken on a quality that appears to place it beyond the scope of some kind of sociological or historical explanation. As Latour says, 'a fact only becomes such when it loses all temporal qualifications and become incorporated into a large body of knowledge drawn upon by others' (p. 106). In psychology, the quality that has lost its temporal qualifications is time itself. It was not always so. As Whitrow (1980) shows, when Newton first wrote *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*** in 1687, he felt it necessary to make his assumption about time explicit. Several competing versions of time were available, not least that offered by his critic and rival, Gottfried Leibniz. Leibniz and Newton disagreed over what kind of time to use in developing theory. Where Newton proposed that time existed in its own right, was absolute as opposed to relative, and had linear

properties, Leibniz proposed a time that was relational, did not exist independently of events, and had cyclical properties. In this argument Newton's linear and mathematical view of time was the pretender to the more 'taken for granted', cyclical time of Leibniz. The story of how Newtonian time came to predominate is far too rich to be dealt with adequately here. However, it seems that, in part as a result of the rise of clock-driven industrial economies and the eventual availability of cheap watches (Landes, 1983), linear time gradually replaced cyclical time. People began to experience linear time as it structured their work and domestic lives and could see the passing way of equi-unit time on the clock face. As a consequence, linear time came to have a common-sense position in Western culture (and a position of authority in psychology). The arguments that were previously needed to sustain linear time over cyclical time were required less and less. Linear time became 'freed from the circumstances of its production' (Latour, 1986, p. 105).

In suggesting that there are elements of construction in the Newtonian time at the heart of psychology, the aim of this paper is not to prepare the ground for an alternative (and somehow more 'appropriate') conception of time for psychology. Many interesting psychological stories have been told in Newtonian linear time, and a coherent theoretical and methodological edifice has been built around it. However, what Slife's work demonstrates is that alternative

temporal frames are possible ;and therefore that linear time should not be thought of as the only relevant (and credible) time for psychology. Slife suggests two possible alternative temporal models to a Newtonian linear time. He calls them 'organismic holism' and 'hermeneutic temporality'. Organismic holism, drawing inspiration from writing on time in the physical sciences, describes a time that is neither separated from events nor are the dimensions of time (past, present, future) separated from each other.** Hermeneutic temporality, drawing on a Heideggerian tradition in philosophy, places lived experience and practical activities at the heart of the temporal, and in doing so also tries to dissolve past–present–future distinctions. Slife suggests that both of these approaches can be defended (in different ways) by reference to a body of anomalous research findings that already exist in traditional psychology.

However, the aim of this paper is not to discuss the relative merits of linear time, organismic holism or hermeneutic temporality. Its scope is far more modest. It will begin with the insight that no single time can claim a privileged place in psychology. All times contain a set of arguments and assumptions that shape the kinds of psychological knowledge that are produced by and through them. These arguments and assumptions are buried in traditional psychological thinking. In order to see more clearly the productive

consequences of these hidden arguments about time, it is important to make them explicit. The paper will then explore the implications of this position for knowledge production in a particular branch of psychology ;namely social psychology.

Time and Social Psychology

Many of the speculations about time that are derived from the new physics have already found a voice in social psychology. The work of Joseph McGrath and his colleagues (Kelly & McGrath, 1988; McGrath, 1988; McGrath & Kelly, 1986) on time and social psychology is both rich and varied. McGrath and his colleagues acknowledge the multiple times of human experience; the multiplicity of times that may be relevant for social psychological analysis; and the role of temporal assumptions in both theory and methodology. However, despite the importance of this work, and its resonance with influential writing on time in disciplines outside (social) psychology, it has had only a minimal impact on theory and practice inside social psychology. The topic of time is almost entirely absent from social psychology textbooks. When time does appear in social psychology research papers, it tends to be as a design variable rather than a topic of ontological or epistemological interest in its own right.

The question of why the more radical elements of McGrath's work have failed to have a greater impact on theorizing in social psychology is difficult to answer. However, an examination of the

programme of research work proposed by McGrath on the basis of his temporal critique suggests two possibilities. Firstly, despite offering a critique of Newtonian time in social psychology, McGrath's work remains bound within a conventional and linear empirical frame. His favoured method remains the experiment (although he does point out the potential impact of 'experimental time' on the generalizability of psychological research). His suggested research developments include revisiting the work on the psychophysics of time, the rhythms of behaviour, time and task performance, and time and organizations. All these are clearly interesting topics, but they do not involve turning the gaze of this new view of temporality back on social psychology itself. In other words, the more radical possibilities of a temporal critique of social psychology have been domesticated. Ideas that might have been used to help develop a more reflexive temporal critique of social psychology (e.g. Gergen's [1970]** work on social psychology as history) are acknowledged, but not taken up (McGrath & Kelly, 1986, p. 148). For McGrath, time is something that needs to be integrated into the current stock of social psychological knowledge rather than something that is implicated in social psychology as a knowledge-producing practice in the first place.

Secondly, McGrath's work on time shares with traditional psychology the desire for synthesis rather than antithesis. Thus, despite acknowledging the multiplicity of times in social psychology

(both for the individual and for the researcher), McGrath is concerned with how these times come together, rather than in the insights that might be generated by keeping the times apart. His proposal for the integration of time and social psychology is the study of 'entrainment'. This is a concept borrowed from the biological sciences, where one process becomes 'captured' by, and then moves in rhythm with, another process. Once again, this is clearly an interesting question (and certainly resonates with how people experience the singularity of time). However, this emphasis on coexistence rather than conflict between times serves to blunt the critical edge of a temporal critique. If the focus is on how time is sown together, rather than on what happens to psychological ideas when different temporal frames are kept apart, then the 'fiction' of a single, fixed and unitary time remains relatively untroubled.

Rethinking Times in Social Psychology

Before we can test the implications for social psychological knowledge of the idea of multiple and potentially contradictory times, there are two misconceptions that it is important to avoid. The first is the commonly made claim that social psychology would be improved if only researchers concentrated on looking at processes over time rather than employing single-shot methodologies. This is the distinction, to borrow from Saussure's (1974) work in linguistics, between a diachronic and a synchronic approach to social psychology. In this view, synchronic

approaches in social psychology hold time as a constant and then map out the salient features of a data set. This appears to produce a rather static social psychology that underplays the importance of social change. A diachronic approach, on the other hand, explores changes in data over time. As such, diachronic analyses seem to be more dynamic ;orientating to the possibility of social change over time.

While, at first sight, a call for more diachronic and less synchronic social psychology might seem appealing, a number of theorists outside psychology have argued that this distinction between synchronic and diachronic may be more apparent than real. For example, Gell (1990) argues that there is no contradiction between synchrony and diachrony. For Gell,** synchronic classification can involve diachronic historicity in the same way that a diachronic perspective can be based on a set of synchronic analysis. To have a synchronic 'slice out of time' we need to know what came before and what came after. In order to analyse a phenomenon diachronically we need to identify the synchronic slices that are to be analysed over time. Doing one form of analysis implies the other, and vice versa. This perspective is echoed by Fabian (1983), for whom the issue is not whether to 'stress "diachronic" or "synchronic", historical or systematic approaches, they are all chronic, unthinkable without reference to Time' (p. 24).** In other words, in putting time back on the agenda for social psychology, the argument advanced in this paper is not that we

should have more research that looks at events over time. Rather, social psychologists need to think about what kinds of times are deployed in their research in general; where and why temporal boundaries are drawn in research, and what consequences for knowledge these (sometimes implicit) temporal decisions might have.

The second misconception can be found in the dichotomy frequently drawn in social psychology between quantitative and qualitative research. In this argument quantitative (and usually experimental) social psychology is criticized for obscuring the importance of the times and places in which knowledge is produced. It is suggested that the laboratory environment and the time limits of the experimental episode artificially constrain respondents ;and yet are invisible in the way knowledge is presented. Moreover, quantitative social psychology is also criticized for the use of particular technologies (like statistics) to create psychological universals where none exist (Danziger, 1990; Hacking, 1990), or to emphasize stability and continuity over argument and change (Billig, 1987). These criticisms are inherently temporal in that they assert that quantitative social psychology not only decontextualizes but also reifies psychological phenomena. The alternative is usually presented as a more discursive-influenced approach to social psychology in which the local context of talk and the dynamic of conversational interaction are central (Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1987; Edwards, 1997; Edwards &

Potter, 1992, 1993; Parker, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In this view it is participants themselves, rather than psychologists, who decide what is important about a (psychological) event. One of the key claims of a discursive approach, therefore, is that the temporal gatekeeping of quantitative social psychologists (with their experimental designs and their aggregating statistics) is, through the turn to language, rendered redundant.

Whatever the merits of such criticisms, discursive social psychology, as Condor (1997) points out, has some temporal skeletons of its own. How qualitative data are analysed, be it in the form of texts or transcripts of conversations, is crucially dependent on temporal decision making. For example, how to divide up a transcript for analysis, whether to treat a transcript sequentially or to allow excerpts out of sequence, and where to begin and where to end a sequence are all temporal questions. Discourse analysis itself, particularly that influenced by a conversation analytic perspective (analysing on a 'turn-by-turn' basis; focusing on turn taking and sequence organization), is also inherently temporal. Moreover, the way such temporal decisions are resolved enforces a distance between respondents and analysts. Research subjects do not share in the decisions that shape the temporal parameters of research. This distance is enhanced by the fact that the conversation/interview on

which the analysis is based is usually tape-recorded. The recording becomes a 'frozen' period of time that can be played backwards and forwards in a way unavailable to the conversationalists and can even be analysed decades after the original conversation took place (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). The point to be made here is not that these issues invalidate this kind of research, but that the same temporal questions that can be asked of quantitative social psychology can also be asked of qualitative social psychology. In other words, in arguing for the importance of a re-evaluation of time in social psychology, this paper is not arguing for more qualitative/discursive psychology and less quantitative/experimental psychology. Rather, it is suggesting that the practice and the knowledge generated by both kinds of approaches are bound up with questions of temporality, and that it is time itself that should be the focus of investigation.

From Events in Time to Time in Events

How, then, should we approach the question of the interrelationships of time(s) and the production of knowledge in social psychology? In attempting the outline of an answer to this question, this paper will suggest a return to Adam's (1990) distinction between 'events in time' and 'time in events'. One way to make the temporal an explicit part of social psychology is to shift focus away from seeing time as a neutral medium in which phenomena can be described and attempt instead to explore the times in the phenomena themselves. From a social

psychological point of view, 'events in time' encapsulates the traditional 'taken for granted' approach to time in most mainstream social psychology. 'Time in events' prioritizes the search for the multiple times in any object of inquiry and focuses on how the different times might contribute to social psychological knowledge. Of course, many of the times to be identified will have linear properties, but the intention is to focus on the multiplicity of times ;rather than to concentrate on following the logic of one kind of time.

Times and the Objects of Social Psychological Inquiry

One way to explore this distinction is to take a key area of social psychology and explore it from both an 'events in time' and a 'time in events' perspective. For this purpose, the paper will briefly consider work on identity, a key concept in contemporary social psychology, and one that has spawned** a number of theoretical approaches (Marcus, 1977, Marcus & Kitayama, 1991; McAdams, 1988; Stryker 1980, 1987; Tajfel, 1982;** Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Much of the research work that accompanies these theories examines either the stability of identity over time or changes in identity over time. This is true for both quantitative work on identity (Cinnirella, 1997) and discursive work on identity (Antaki et al., 1986). As Condor (1996) points out, particular temporal slicing or emphasis on certain aspects of linear time (at the expense of others) is then used to support different theories of identity. While these debates are clearly

consequential, the approach advocated in this paper tries to go beyond this 'identity in time' perspective to look for other kinds of times that might be important for the concept of identity itself.

For example, we can begin by considering the importance for identity of what might once have been seen as 'natural times'. These include both biological and seasonal times and (a little more tangentially) the role of calendar times (Elias, 1992; Zerubavel, 1981, 1985). There is already a body of work by chronobiologists (Rifkin, 1987; Young, 1988) that attempts to link the rhythms of biological time to those of human organization and culture in ways that are neither reductionist nor overdetermined. Chronobiologists argue that rhythmicity is a central feature of all natural phenomena (including humans) and that all living things are composed of a myriad of internal clocks that are entrained to work in co-ordination with the external physical world (Young, 1988). In bringing together the temporal, the human and the non-human in this way, an alternative to the traditional view of subjectivity might emerge.¹ For example, this blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human time is

Prigogine (1980) the Nobel prize winning physical chemist, demonstrates that concepts of past, present and future, usually claimed by social scientists as an exclusive feature of the human realm, are in fact a 'law of nature'. Prigogine's work provides a critique both of Newtonian time concepts and of the idea of a distinction between the human and non human realm. However, as Adam (1988) points out, this work has had comparatively little impact on the human sciences as yet.

something that is mirrored in recent approaches to identity influenced by Actor Network Theory (see Michael, 1996). The times of non-human phenomena might therefore be one kind of time worthy of exploration in the social psychological event known as identity.

A second (and related) kind of temporality relevant for the analysis of identity can be found in the times of technology. For example, Urry (1994) and Lash and Urry (1994)** describe the advent of three new kinds of time, described as ‘instantaneous’, ‘video’ and ‘glacial’, which are related to technological advances (in computers and communications in particular). For Lash and Urry, these times are the product of what they call ‘disorganized capitalism’. They impact on social and psychological functioning through the capacities of modern technology not only to function at speeds below human consciousness but also to ‘empty out’ time and space. Lash and Urry argue that these kinds of times are central to the development of a more reflexive subjectivity ;a subjectivity that involves thinking, feeling and acting in ways that are different to previous epochs. Whatever the merits of such a claim, Lash and Urry are surely right in pointing to the importance of the times inherent in different technologies. After all, clock time (which they identify as a central feature of the organized capitalism that precedes disorganized capitalism) is itself predicated on a particular kind of technology that was mass-produced in the 18th century. The mass-produced timepiece led to a shift in clock related-

social behaviour (what Adam, 1990, calls 'industrial time' and Thrift, 1990, 'capitalist time consciousness'). While the upper classes fetishized clock time (dressing for dinner, having 'visiting times'), workers were disciplined to the rhythm of machine time. One of the consequences of this was that workers began to develop an economic rationality with respect to time (Thompson, 1967). Financial value was attached to future time so that planning ahead became a part of the habitus of the worker (Thrift, 1990). It is clear from this that the times of technology, in all their different manifestations, have implications for thinking about the concept of identity.

To such times can be added the times of intergroup relations. These are times that can also be related to the development of technologies but not simply reduced to them. For example, recent work has explored the concepts of time inherent in democratic governance (Schmitter & Santiso, 1998); the timing of electoral cycles and the logics of direct democracy (Linz, 1998); and the nature of the self in political time and place (Strong, 1990). Time is also a central feature of the struggle between different political systems (Reicher, 1996), political parties (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) and in ecological politics (McNaughten & Urry, 1998).** Work on ethnicity and nationalism also points to the centrality of time in both the nature of identification and the (sometimes lethal) intergroup conflicts that are fought in their name (see Anzulovic, 1999,** on the importance of the Battle for

Kosovo in 1999 in the 'ethnic cleansing' in former Yugoslavia).

By adopting a 'time in events' perspective on identity, it is possible to see new avenues for addressing the concept of identity itself. The approach encourages us to move beyond the debates over stability and change in identity to consider other times that might play a part in structuring what we understand by identity in the first place. In this way a 'time in events' perspective allows new insight into more established ideas in psychology. However, the utility of such a perspective is not limited to the study of concepts in social psychology. It can also be useful for looking at the consequences of particular research practices. In the following section the paper will consider the benefits of a 'time in events' perspective for thinking about research practice in social psychology.

Times and Research Practices in Social Psychology

In the previous section it was argued that, in addition to exploring identity over time, it was important to consider the times in identity. In this section, the same logic will be applied to the way the 'research encounter' is imagined in social psychology. For the most part, social psychologists (both quantitative and qualitative) think about collecting data over time. This may be the 'time of the experiment', in which temporal parameters are constructed and data are collected from subjects exposed to 'events' over time. It may also be the 'time of the interview', in which respondents are asked a series of questions over

time that are designed to incite a set of responses. Despite the centrality of linear time to such research in social psychology, the temporal shaping of the data collection process (and the research findings that subsequently emerge) is not always acknowledged (McGrath & Kelly, 1986). Once again, the argument in this section of the paper is not that this linear approach to research is illegitimate. Rather, it is argued that there are other times (in addition to linear time) that are relevant to the research encounter. Thinking about these other times might help to shed new light on the way knowledge is produced in social psychology.

Coevalness and the Research Encounter

If we are to consider the possibility of multiple times in the research encounter, perhaps the best place to start would be with the (potentially different) times of the researchers and the respondents. As we have seen, most research in social psychology tends to assume that time is a neutral background against which research can be conducted. In terms of the researcher–respondent relationship it is assumed that, in the moment of data collection, both researcher and respondent share the same time; both attribute the same meanings to the time of the research encounter; and time itself has no special part to play in the way knowledge emerges. However, these assumptions have recently been criticized by Condor (1996) in her work on time in social identity, and by Bowers (1991) in his analysis of time in

cognitive science research. Both Condor and Bowers draw on recent developments in the social theory of time as a way of thinking about analysis in (social) psychology. Both employ what could be characterized as a 'time in events' perspective. In particular, both are concerned to point out that it is not inevitable that researcher and researched should inhabit the same time. Condor describes the 'sequestration' of time as experienced by participants in an experiment. For subjects in an experiment, time is transformed and becomes a special instance ;a period of time outside the times of their ordinary lives. For the researchers,** however, the times of the experiment are part of their everyday working lives. Where respondents leave the experiment behind, researchers try to weave the multiple responses of the subject (in combination with evidence from other experimental episodes) into an enduring psychological story. The same of course can be said for those psychologists working with qualitative data. Long after the interview has been forgotten by the respondent, the researcher pours over the transcript in an attempt to produce a coherent narrative.

It is this question of the representation (or re-representation) of respondents' words and deeds that Bowers (1991) is particularly concerned with. Bowers argues, using insights developed by the anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983), that one of the key steps in producing knowledge in psychology is the denial of shared time

between researcher and researched. Describing what he calls (after Fabian) 'the denial of coevalness', Bowers shows how respondents are systematically excluded from sharing the same time as researchers. It is this 'denial of coevalness' that allows researchers to tell coherent psychological stories based on the data extracted from respondents. For example, Bowers argues that the fact that subjects are sent home after an experiment is not accidental. Resident subjects in psychology departments would destroy the temporal boundedness of the experiment. If they were to stay, they might present multiple and unmanageable representations of themselves. Respondents are allowed a short period of shared time, on the terms of the researcher, who then controls how the story of that encounter is told through the subsequent denial of coevalness. This denial of shared time is not only achieved by removing the subjects physically. It is also manufactured through the way data are analysed and through the language of written academic papers (see, e.g., Atkinson, 1990, on the use of the 'ethnographic present' to manufacture general properties out of local and specific data).

It is important to note that, while there may be practical or structural factors that undermine the ability of the researcher and the research to inhabit shared time, it is not inevitable that they should inhabit 'allochronic' or mutually exclusive times. While it may not always be possible (or even desirable) for researcher and researched to

share the same times, how the temporal relationship is managed will affect the nature of the psychological story that is told. One clear lesson to be learned from a 'time in events' perspective, therefore, is the importance of a sensitivity to the relative coevalness of social psychologists and their subjects in the research encounter and beyond.

The Times of Technology and the Research Encounter

A second important temporal factor (and one that is intimately related to the question of coevalness between researcher and researched) concerns the times that are bound up with the technologies of data collection. Even in linear 'events in time' designs, there are (usually unacknowledged) 'time in events' properties of the data collection itself. Some of these properties can be identified in the instruments that are used to record or calibrate responses in social psychological studies. Because these times are instantiated in research technologies (like clocks, computers or tape-recorders), they tend to go unnoticed. At best, such technologies and the times they embody are seen as a resource whose temporal facility can be used to test hypotheses. What is less well recognized is the productive part such times in technology can play in shaping the development of psychological phenomena in their own right.

Take, for example, the development of ideas about stereotyping and racism. The traditional view in social psychology has been that prejudice is an inevitable consequence of ordinary categorization

(stereotyping) processes (Allport, 1954; Hamilton, 1981; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). This 'inevitability of prejudice' approach has, however, been attacked for 'naturalizing' racism (Hopkins, Reicher, & Levine, 1997); for failing to explain the rapidity of attitude change (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986); or for misunderstanding the nature of categorization (Billig, 1985). An important part of this debate has been the distinction drawn between knowledge of a stereotype and endorsement of that stereotype. It was argued by those opposed to the 'inevitability of prejudice' position that there may be universal knowledge (within a particular culture) of a negative stereotype; but that didn't mean that everyone who knew of the stereotype would be bound to deploy it.

******One of the most influential studies in this debate has been an experiment devised by Devine (1989). She imported a technology previously used in person perception research that allows non-conscious priming of information (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982). This technology (initially a timing device and tachistoscope, but in later studies a computer) allowed the presentation of information at speeds that were too fast for conscious processing (typically 80 ms, but other studies have used shorter periods). Even though these times were too fast for the words to be consciously recognized, they were nevertheless non-consciously processed by subjects. In place of the usual trait information (and using white, American subjects), Devine substituted primes for the category 'Black' and information about the stereotype.

She was thus able to explore the differences between non-conscious stereotype activation and conscious responses to questions of racism and prejudice (as measured by a 'modern racism' questionnaire ;McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981). One consequence of this study was that Devine could show that there was indeed a generalized stereotype shared by those who were prejudiced and those who were not. She argues that this is evidence against the 'inevitability' hypothesis because non-prejudiced people were able to inhibit the stereotype. However, at the same time she points out that prejudiced and unprejudiced subjects (on the conscious measures) shared the same levels of prejudice when the priming for race was non-conscious. In other words, her study appeared to show that white people who felt themselves to have no negative prejudices against Black people still held a negative stereotype that could be triggered. For the first time it was possible to imagine that racism was not about the difference between those people who were prejudiced and those people who were not. Rather, the technology appeared to have opened up the possibility that even the non-prejudiced harboured the same unconscious prejudice as those who consciously expressed prejudice. As Devine points out in her paper, this is not the same as the conscious attempt to disguise racism by those who recognize that their views may be disapproved of by others (p. 16). It can be argued instead that her use of this priming technology resulted in the 'invention', in social

psychology at least,² of a new category of person: the non-prejudiced person who unknowingly harbours the same prejudices as the conscious racist. The fact that this aspect of Devine's study has subsequently been challenged (Lepore & Brown, 1997; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997) is beside the point. Arguments about whether non-conscious and conscious racist stereotype activity are congruent or not obscures the fact that a new way of thinking about racism has emerged. It is only by dint of the technology that we can imagine the possibility of such a person. It is this ability to manipulate times below the threshold of human awareness (rather than the study of prejudice and stereotyping over time, for example) that is central to a new psychological story.

It is worth pointing out that the computer control of microtime is not the only technology that has been mobilized in an attempt to challenge the 'inevitability of prejudice' hypothesis. Discursive social psychologists have also taken issue with the idea that categorization and stereotyping are the automatic precursors of racism. For example, Billig (1985) argues against the mechanical and bureaucratic model of cognition that equates prejudiced thinking with rigid categorization.

² The idea of a person who might be consciously anti-racist or unprejudiced but unconsciously harbour malevolent feelings towards Black people would sit more easily within a Freudian psychoanalytic frame. However, as Billig (1999) points out, Freud's legacy has largely been 'repressed' in social psychology. At the same time, it is clearly no accident that Devine chooses the term nonconscious rather than unconscious to refer to the state of mind created by the subliminal primes.

Instead he suggests a ‘rhetorical approach’ that might reveal the argumentative and fluid nature of thought. He uses *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950, 1969) to develop the argument. He begins by suggesting that this book has probably been more responsible than any other work for contributing to the idea that prejudice is achieved through rigid thinking and intolerance of ambiguity. He then shows that, in the interviews reported in the book itself, the idea of the rigid-thinking racist is actually undermined. By revisiting interviews conducted by the *Authoritarian Personality* team more than thirty years before, Billig is able to show that (in the reported speech of those who were described as prejudiced and those who were described as tolerant) there were formal similarities between prejudiced and tolerant thinking. For him, this reanalysis of the interview data suggests that it is the content of ideas, rather than a particular underlying cognitive style, that is important in explaining racism. It is because of the time-capturing facility of a particular technology that Billig is able to go back and challenge *The Authoritarian Personality* on its own terms, and through the voices of those who were subjects of the original research.

At the same time, there are other ways in which an examination of the interviews in *The Authoritarian Personality* reveals the importance of the times of technology for research in discursive social

psychology. While Billig treats the interview data as if they are is the verbatim accounts of those interviewees in the original study, a look back at the recording methods of Adorno et al. (1950, 1969) suggests that all is not quite what it seems. It is clear (from a footnote on page 33 of the 1969 abridged version) that, rather than record the interviews directly onto audiotape (as would be common today), interviewers for *The Authoritarian Personality* made contemporaneous shorthand notes (of their own devising) that they then read into a dictaphone after the end of the interview. This gave an ‘almost verbatim’ account of what interviewees said. As a consequence, we can see the interviewees’ words (filtered through the conventions and limitations of the interviewer’s shorthand), but we can’t be sure the words are really in their own ‘voice’. This temporal distancing was probably a result of the difficulties associated with portable tape-recording in the late 1940s. However, this was not something that seemed to worry the *Authoritarian Personality* team unduly. (They include the information about recording of the interviews in a footnote while presenting copious detail about all other aspects of the interview process in the main body of the text.) Nevertheless, it is not a standard of data recording that would be acceptable today. For example, Potter and Wetherell (1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988,** 1992), who also write about categorization and racism from a discursive perspective, provide extensive detail of the recording and transcribing conventions

of the corpus of interviews on which their arguments are based. The development of portable tape-recording technology has meant that interviews can be captured for posterity in the moment of the conversation, and played back ;and transcribed ;for the purposes of later analysis. It is this facility that allows Potter and Wetherell to develop a sustained criticism of the idea of stable and enduring categorizations that are said by traditional social psychology to underlie stereotyping and prejudice. By analysing the talk of their interviewees in close detail and at first hand, they can argue that speakers 'give shifting, inconsistent and varied pictures of their social worlds' (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 171).** The tape-recorder allows a story about variability to be told because (a) it has the facility to capture a conversation both in time and over time, and (b) it allows repeated visiting of different moments of the conversation to check for consistency. It is the evidence for lack of consistency that is the platform for the study of variability. Variability in turn allows stories to be told about the function of talk in context. Without the times of this particular technology, claims about the prevalence of variability, and its relationship to the theoretical edifice of discursive social psychology, would be far more difficult to sustain.

Conclusion

In this paper it has been argued that, given the advances in our understanding of time, the 'taken for granted' status of Newtonian

linear time in (social) psychology needs to be rendered transparent. The paper seeks to demonstrate that a multiplicity of times are both important and relevant to the way knowledge is generated in social psychology. A strategy for identifying and exploring the consequences of multiple times is proposed. Borrowing from Adam (1990), the paper proposes a distinction between ‘events in time’ and ‘time in events’. It is argued that an ‘events in time’ perspective describes the default, unreflexive approach to time in traditional social psychology. A ‘time in events’ approach, by contrast, seeks to make visible the multiple times of social psychological theory and practice and explore their consequences for the generation of knowledge. The paper also suggests that traditional dichotomies in social psychology (between synchronic and diachronic approaches, and between quantitative and qualitative approaches) can be dissolved by this focus on the temporal. Given the dominant yet invisible presence of linear time in social psychology, the aim of a ‘time in events’ approach is to open up thinking about concepts and research practice. In an attempt to show what a ‘time in events’ perspective might contribute to social psychology, the paper presents some of the multiple times that might be relevant for analysing the concept of ‘identity’. It also explores some of the times in the event of the research encounter. The times described in the paper are by no means an exhaustive selection of the relevant ‘times in events’ in social psychology. They are presented here as an illustrative

counterweight to the 'events in time' perspective that dominates social psychology.

In arguing for a 'time in events' perspective, this paper proposes (following both Fabian and Bowers) that different kinds of time do different kinds of work. However, it is clear that, even in a world of multiple temporalities, some times can appear to be more 'natural' and less constructed than others. This paper suggests that the more natural and less constructed a time appears to be, the greater the work being done. In other words, the less the time seems to have to do with the way we come to know the psychological object, the more important it becomes to explore the role of the temporal. By pointing to the multiple times of social psychology, the aim of a 'time in events' approach is to open up debate on the largely unacknowledged impact of all sorts of times on social psychological knowledge.

The question of how psychological objects come to be known is one that has exercised a number of philosophers of science (e.g. Coulter, 1983; Greenwood, 1991) and discursive social psychologists (e.g. Edwards, 1991; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) alike. For the most part, this work has focused on the importance of the study of natural language for understanding how representations are achieved in talk and text. A 'time in events' perspective seeks to open out the question of representation to include the importance of the temporal. In other words, the paper suggests that one of the key issues in social

psychology is not just to show that, by definition, psychological objects are (re)representations achieved by and through language. It is also to show that such representations can be more or less temporally distanced from the times of those who are represented. It is by looking at the multiple times inherent in any (re)representation that a clearer understanding of the nature of psychological knowledge can be achieved.

The aim of this ‘time in events’ perspective is therefore to render visible the multiple layers of time that are relevant to any social psychological topic. In that sense, a ‘time in events’ approach is what Bruno Latour (1988) would call an infra-reflexive strategy. Latour describes an infra-reflex** approach as one in which an account given of an object is applied to the account also. A ‘time in events’ approach asks not only about the times that are relevant to the objects of social psychological inquiry, but also about the times that are relevant to the way those stories are told by social psychologists. Times are everywhere in social psychology, but their impact is hardly recognized and poorly understood. It is by emphasizing the importance of the temporal at the heart of theory and practice that social psychology can finally begin to exorcize the ghost of Newtonian time.

Notes

1. Prigogine (1980), the Nobel prize-winning physical chemist, demonstrates that concepts of past, present and future, usually claimed by social scientists as an exclusive feature of the human realm, are in fact a ‘law of nature’. Prigogine’s work provides a critique both of Newtonian time concepts and of the idea of a distinction between the human and non-human realm. However,

as Adam (1988) points out, this work has had comparatively little impact on the human sciences as yet.

2. The idea of a person who might be consciously anti-racist or unprejudiced but unconsciously harbour malevolent feelings towards Black people would sit more easily within a Freudian psychoanalytic frame. However, as Billig (1999) points out, Freud's legacy has largely been 'repressed' in social psychology. At the same time, it is clearly no accident that Devine chooses the term 'non-conscious' rather than 'unconscious' to refer to the state of mind created by the subliminal primes.

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