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# **Time, space and ethics work: towards a 'politics of we' in a de-boundaried occupation**

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Paper presented in the Keynote Symposium 'The Teaching Occupation in Learning Societies: towards a global ethnography of occupational boundary work', convened by Helen Colley at the *Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association*, Warwick University, 2 September 2010.

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## **Introduction**

The work of Terri Seddon and colleagues, in their recent book on disturbed and disturbing work (2010) and in the papers at this symposium, investigates teaching through what they term a global ethnography of occupational boundary work. They situate teaching within a global division of labour in the broad field of human service work, and interpret the practice of teaching in the broadest sense: beyond established institutional settings such as schools, colleges and universities, they also take it to include all those who support learning in a wide variety of lifelong learning settings, including youth transition support and workplace learning. Their purpose is not to focus solely on the fragmentations and frustrations of working life that so many educators currently experience, but to look beyond these to find in boundary work the possibilities of movement towards some more open and socially just future.

The concept of boundaries inevitably draws us to think about spatiality – and this is how it has typically been addressed in much social and educational research. From the late 1980s, social science has taken a 'spatial turn' (Castree, 2009: 32) focusing on positionality, space, place, borders, liminality and so forth. Yet in most cases, this spatial turn has been largely metaphorical, concerned with epistemological questions about ways of knowing rather than any ontology of practice. Seddon and colleagues' international project takes a more ontological, materialist approach. They ask questions about how globalisation – and its expression in régimes of lifelong learning and discourses of the 'learning society' – challenges occupational practices, jurisdictions, and career horizons. They consider flows, barriers and demarcations; geographical, sectoral and disciplinary boundaries; and the migration of teachers from North to South, periphery to centre, or within nations across diversified learning spaces.

All of these are vitally important issues of boundary work, but still they focus our attention predominantly on space and place. What about time? How is space related to time in lifelong learning contexts? And what temporal aspects of boundary work might we consider in teaching? There is a danger that, in considering such work predominantly from the perspective of space, we still engage in a spatial separatism which treats space and time as unrelated. In this paper, I therefore wish to address one of the key concepts in this global ethnography project, the re-ordering of work in lifelong learning, in relation to time as well as space. A major contention I wish to

pursue is that this re-ordering is most usefully considered from a perspective which considers time and space not as separate categories, but as inextricably inter-related. (In trying here to ‘bend the stick’ back towards a more central consideration of time, I do of course risk hoisting myself by my own petard, privileging discussion of time over space on occasion. However, this separation for heuristic purposes should not be taken as one that can or should become solidified in our thinking. I follow Castree [2009] in referring interchangeably to space-time or time-space throughout this paper, depending on focus.)

Time is also intimately associated by many philosophers with ethics. So another, closely-linked contention in this paper is that, as the temporo-spatial boundaries of teaching work are re-ordered, this also produces a re-ordering of its ethics. This expands the questions that are being asked here. How is the work of teaching and its ethics being re-ordered by contemporary (re)configurations of time and space? What ethical boundary work is also engendered by spatio-temporal boundary work? And what are the implications for creating ‘spaces of orientation’ (Haug, 2010) towards a ‘politics of we’ that might offer progressive possibilities (Seddon et al, 2010)? In addressing these questions, I am concerned with applying a sociological rather than a philosophical lens; that is to say, I wish to argue that concepts of time, space and ethics abstracted from the lived experience of teaching are inadequate, if we are to explore the day-to-day practices of ‘doing ethics’ as an aspect of boundary work. My fundamental presupposition is that such an analysis must account for the fact that our ‘social universe’ (Neary and Rikowski, 2001) is one of patriarchal capitalism, and I will therefore draw on a Marxist-feminist perspective (Mojab & Carpenter, in press; Smith, 1987, 1999; Bannerji, 1995) that makes this context visible.

In this paper, I begin by reviewing some of the most influential philosophical understandings of time, pointing to the work of Heidegger, Levinas and Massey. In doing so, I wish particularly to illustrate the ways in which thinking about time leads us also to think about both ethics (most often explicitly) and space (sometimes implicitly). In the next sections, I draw on the work of David Harvey and others to present a sociological, historical materialist understanding of time, space and ethics within patriarchal capitalist society, arguing that all three need to be seen in dialectical relationship to one another. In particular, I consider the ways in which contemporary time-space re-orders human service work, including all forms of teaching, by shifting its use-value along a spectrum from care towards control; and I discuss the ‘ethics work’ that this boundary shifting engenders for practitioners, with brief illustration from a recent empirical project. Finally, I conclude by considering the different ways in which practitioners’ resistance might be expressed in the current context, and some key questions that we need to ask in order to see how occupational boundary work might be productive of socially transformative change.

Despite my contention of the need for a sociological approach to understanding space, time and ethics in the occupational boundary work of teaching, Nowotny (1992) notes time is both a ‘slippery’ concept (p.426) and one that is ‘recalcitrantly transdisciplinary’ (p.441). It is helpful first, then to situate these questions in the context of competing philosophical understandings. I begin, therefore, by considering some taken-for-granted ways of thinking in this area, then contrasting three major contributions to such thought, from Heidegger, Levinas and Massey.

## ***Philosophising time and ethics***

A number of recent sociologically-oriented reviews have been undertaken of dominant ways in which time has been understood, primarily in idealist philosophy (e.g. Augustine, Kant) and in Newtonian physical science. The most notable is that by Barbara Adam in her book *Timewatch* (1995; see also, for example, Neary & Rikowski, 2002; Nowotny, 1992). These accounts grapple with the problematic tendency of both spheres of thought to encourage a dichotomous conceptualisation according to a binary of ‘natural’ vs. ‘social’ time. They also challenge dominant academic and common-sense views of time as some kind of flow, external to and independent from us, forming a contextual backdrop to our thought and actions.

According to this dominant perspective, time is treated as a triadic phenomenon: opening up the present to split the past from the future and, in doing so, allowing for ever-new becomings. Within this teleological framework, Biesta and Tedder (2006), for example, have investigated identity and agency in learning through the lifecourse. They argue that human agency exists as a series of changing orientations to these triadic elements:

- iterational orientations to influences from the past
- projective orientations to future possibilities
- practical-evaluative orientations to engagement with the present.

They view agency as the formulation of projects for the future and action in the present to realise those projects. Agency is thus presented as motivated and intentional, seeking to bring about a future that is new and different, exerting control and giving direction to one’s life. It is not only how we respond to events, but also our capacity to shape that responsiveness, to reflect on our orientations to the past, present and future and to imagine them differently. Here, then, the present becomes implicitly subject to an erasure, since it is always evaluated in terms of orienting to the past and future. Biesta and Tedder argue that we need to understand how the flow of time and different temporal contexts support particular orientations and enable possible ways of acting. Lifelong learning is seen as central to facilitating these agentic capacities, implicitly linking notions of time with moral notions of how a ‘good life’ should be lived and learned; but it is presented by them in a highly individualised way that privileges the masculine, autonomous and socio-economically advantaged subject (Colley, 2007).

## **Heidegger**

Such a view corresponds with that of Martin Heidegger, one of the most influential philosophers of time, and one for whom time is explicitly and intimately bound up with ethics. As Chanter (2001a, b) explains, Heidegger’s philosophy of Being-in-Time denigrates present time – everyday living – as imbued with inauthenticity, spatiality and materiality, and a loss of autonomous self through social association with others (*Mitsein*); whilst an orientation to the ultimate future (Being-unto-Death) is privileged as the means to ontological authenticity, a purely instrumental relationship to the material (solely as the means to meet biological needs), and the achievement of autonomous, asocial (and therefore aspatial) spirituality (*Dasein*). This perspective prioritises the abstract over the concrete and time over space, and ‘privileges the mastery, lucidity and transparency of a self that remains essentially in control of its own destiny’ (Chanter, 2001a, p. 52). As such, it is a deeply masculinist philosophy of ‘excessive virility and heroism’, remaining within rather than challenging the traditional

Western imperialist ontology that Heidegger had originally sought to disrupt (Benso, 2003: 196).

## Levinas

A radical critique of Heidegger's view of both time and ethics can be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas who, in response to the Holocaust, sought to create a philosophy that might prevent a repetition of such atrocities. To Heidegger's future-oriented theodicy of Being-unto-Death and solipsistic autonomy, Levinas re-affirms a metaphysics of the present, of materiality, and of desire, and counterposes an ethics of social solidarity: a temporal ethics in which presence and *Mitsein* are no longer associated with a state of being 'fallen', but are held to be a fundamental pre-condition for an ethically good life (Benso, 2003; Chanter, 2001a, b). Here, time is inextricably associated with the inherent space of the social implied by interaction with the Other. However, as a number of feminist scholars have noted (e.g. Chanter, 2001a, b; de Beauvoir, 1989; Irigaray, 1991), for Levinas the Other is construed as feminine and as object. His positing of absolute alterity in opposition to totality can be argued to depend upon the subordination of women to the goal of *men's* transcendence and spiritual progression. An aporium in his philosophy of time undoes its own ethics, since it fails to recognise the historical oppression of women and the responsibilities that this might entail in the pursuit of social justice (Chalier, 2001; Sikka, 2001). It could be argued, then, that Levinas' critique of Heidegger goes no further than presenting the other side of the coin of patriarchal thinking, in asserting the 'feminine' as ethically good, whilst obscuring a feminist perspective. Such a position risks encouraging radical but empty constructions of alterity, in which the abstract, generalised Other serves to erase concrete others and their material experiences of oppression; it risks offering nought but consoling mythologies in response to growing injustice and emiseration around the world, rather than any transformative project (Hewitt, 1997: 2).

Both Heidegger and Levinas, then, present us with the notion that a philosophy of time is by necessity a philosophy of ethics, and *vice versa* (cf. Benso, 2003). To Heidegger's virile time of individualist heroism, Levinas counterposes a space-time of social solidarity, epitomised by feminine nurture. But both present us with ahistorical, idealist visions that have patriarchy at their heart. How else might time and its relationship both to space and to ethics be understood?

## Massey

A different philosophical account of these questions is offered by Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005), in which she argues against dualistic understandings of space and time. Although space and time are not reducible to one other, she insists on a relational understanding, seeing them neither as counterposed nor even separable. Massey follows Foucault's (1980: 70) critique of conventional notions of space as fixed and 'dead', and of time as the source of innovation and change. Such notions, she contends, are politically conservative, treating time as dynamic 'becoming', and space as its opposite: immobile 'being'. Against this, Massey argues that although change does indeed imply the movement of time, it also requires social interaction and multiplicity, that is, the mobilisation of space. As such, '*change inheres in space-time*', and space-time both produces and is produced by difference (Castree, 2009: 34, original emphasis). From this philosophical position, Massey advances an ethical one: that a socially just political programme should not seek to eradicate differences, except those

which are malignant towards others. This places the differentiation of space-time (in both transitive and passive senses) as central to future progressive possibilities for society.

This opens up exciting prospects, but as Castree (2009) argues, Massey's treatment of these matters is not empirically grounded in particular, lived experiences of space-time in a world dominated by capitalism, and as such is limited to a 'normative desire'. Capitalism embraces difference, primarily as a source of profitability, so that to view difference in itself as a guarantee of a progressive politics or an open future could be seen as naïve. Such a view

...unfortunately neglects capitalism's paradoxical role. Difference is central to the system's success, yet it is difference in the service of the same old goal here, there and everywhere: the goal of profit. How, if at all, can 'good' difference be extracted from that which is central to the creation of wealth, inequality and poverty? (Castree, 2009: 53)

None of these philosophical accounts, then, account for the times in which we live. This leads us back not only to the need for more sociological perspectives on time, space, ethics and the relation between them; but also to consider those which offer a historical materialist understanding of these questions, grounded in the lived realities of a world dominated by patriarchal capitalism. It is here that I turn to the work of David Harvey and others drawing on Marxist theory.

For clarity of argument, I begin the following section with an artificially separate discussion of time, but go on to show how this needs to be viewed in terms of time-space, and then to argue the inseparable relationship of time-space to questions of ethics. Inevitably, since these issues are each the subject of a large volume of work, and my key aim here is to point to the necessity of their synthesis, I risk omission and oversimplification in this paper. In mitigation, I point the reader to detailed study of the original references on which I draw, and in particular to David Harvey's *The Limits to Capital* (2006) and Noel Castree's (2009) insightful interpretation of Harvey's work on the spatio-temporality of capitalism.

## ***Towards a historical materialist understanding of time, space and ethics***

Time is everything, man is nothing, he is at most time's carcase. Quality no longer matters. Quantity decides everything; hour for hour; day for day. (Marx, 1976: 126-7, cited in Mészáros, 2008: 47)

### **Time in capitalism**

Marxist perspectives (e.g. Castree, 2009; Colley, 2007; Harvey, 2006; Heydebrand, 2003; Mészáros, 2008; Postone, 1993) alert us to three registers of time within the capitalist social formation:

- historical time
- abstract time
- and concrete time

*Historical time* refers to a multi-layered understanding of social existence (Heydebrand, 2003). At the most macro level, it comprises an era determined by its mode(s) of production. In addition, within each era, we can discern epochs in which certain modes of production overlap or dominate. Within each epoch, there arise particular periods in which the mode of production takes on a distinctive character, often according to ascendancy or decline. Finally, within each period, there may be particular moments, of flourishing or of crisis.

*Abstract time*, expressed pre-dominantly as clock-time, has origins which of course pre-date capitalism. However, within capitalism, the particular form of abstract time is vital for calculating and ensuring the greatest profitability of production. (I summarise here key elements of extremely complex arguments to be found in depth in Harvey, 2006, Postone, 1993 and Rikowski, 2002a,b). Surplus value – profit – is created only by the *unpaid* portion of labour-power the wage-worker expends upon the production of a commodity, over and above the *paid* labour-power she undertakes. (Labour-power refers to our capacity to undertake labour; it is this special commodity which the worker sells in the labour market, and which is exploited to produce profit for the employer [Rikowski, 2002a,b].) Payment for labour-power (the wage or salary) is determined not according to the hours in which it is expended, but according to the cost of reproducing it. In its drive to maintain and increase its rate of profit, capitalism therefore has to increase the ratio of unpaid to paid labour-power, *and* to drive down the value of labour-power and the costs of its reproduction. Since capitalism is not interested in the use-values of commodities (whether in the form of objects or other less tangible goods and services) but in their exchange-value, abstract time accountancy is therefore essential both as the measure of labour, and as a regulatory force upon it.

Abstract time thus has both quantitative dimensions which are heterogeneous, metrical and divisible (minutes, hours, weeks etc), and qualitative dimensions which are homogeneous, indifferent to content, and disciplinary (the socially average labour time necessary for the production of any commodity – including the commodity of labour-power). Although a social construction and, as such, one among multiple social constructions of time in our world, abstract time is a dominant and all-pervasive one, which has very real and inescapable material effects across the globe (Castree, 2009). It commodifies time and transforms it into a tyranny, reifying our personhood and social relations in ways that are degrading and alienating (Heydebrand, 2003). Moreover, through the imposition of abstract time, capital seeks to annihilate historical time, at least in appearance, and therefore to preclude any transformative possibilities:

For [capitalists], time can have only one dimension: that of the *eternal present*. The past for them is nothing more than the backward projection and blind justification of the established present, and the future is only the self-contradictorily timeless extension of the – no matter how destructive and thereby also self-destructive – ‘natural order’ of the here and now, encapsulated in the constantly repeated mindless dictum according to which ‘there is no alternative’. Perversely, that is supposed to sum up the future. (Mészáros, 2008: 21)

Unfortunately, Marxist studies of time have concentrated predominantly on abstract time in the space of commodity production, thanks to masculinist and economic readings of Marx’s thought (cf Bannerji, 1995) and a mistaken dismissal of other forms

of labour as ‘unproductive’ – especially labour concerned with social reproduction, including human service work such as education. Capitalism is, in fact, as ‘abjectly dependent’ (Wilson, 1999: 164) on socially reproductive labour as it is on commodity production, since the former ensures the supply of labour-power that is capitalism’s life-blood (Heydebrand, 2003; Rikowski, 2002a,b). Moreover, *all* labour employed within the system is exploited by capital, including ‘non-production’ work such as human services (Shaikh and Tonak, 1994: 31). Indeed, Harvey (2006) argues that far more empirical research is required in understanding the experience of time-space within this type of labour. It is in turning to consider the register of concrete time, then, and its particular visibility in non-production labour, that we begin to see clearly how space enters the equation. This returns us to the basic philosophical position of Doreen Massey (2005), and represents also a major contribution that David Harvey has made to sociological thought.

### Time-space in capitalism

*Concrete time:* It is in considering concrete or ‘process’ time (Davies, 1994) that we may best understand that a radical social critique of time poses a different ontology than that of most philosophical perspectives. In this register, time is a variable function of social practices, tasks and processes, which are themselves spatially located. Time, therefore, should not be regarded as a background context, external flow, or internal *a priori* mindset against which human actions take place. Rather, time is *engendered through praxis* (Harvey, 2006; see also Castree, 2009; Postone, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is also true of abstract time, since it is human practices which impose its rule rather than any *deus ex machina*; and of historical time, since Marx reminds us that we make history, but not in circumstances of our own making. But in the distinctive register of concrete time, labour clearly acts as the measure of time, rather than (abstract) time being the measure of labour (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003). Unlike abstract time, concrete time is ‘registered differentially in different settings, depending on the practices and experiences of the people involved’ (Castree, 2009: 42-3), and as such is perceived as ‘real’ and lived (see Fig.1)

#### Abstract time

Clock time  
Measures labour  
Qualitatively homogenous  
Indifferent to material content  
Imposed on experience  
Focus on exchange-values

#### Concrete time

Process time  
Is measured by labour  
Qualitatively variable  
Defined by material content  
Lived through experience  
Focus on use-values

Fig.1: Some contrasts between abstract time and concrete time

Since concrete time is particularly visible in the space of work devoted to social reproduction, it is a strongly experienced element of unpaid work within the family, or paid work in healthcare, social services and education. Such caring work largely falls to women in patriarchal capitalism, so it occupies a *gendered* time-space in which use-values rather than exchange-values predominate. This has been an important focus of attention for many feminist scholars (see Colley, 2007, for a review), whose theoretical and empirical work has demonstrated that time is here experienced as one side of a gendered dualism: as processual, circular, driven by others’ needs, multiply



overlapping, embedded and embodied (Colley, 2007: 434). It therefore largely reflects the stereotype of feminine nurture akin to that celebrated by Levinas.

As such, it is important to recognise that concrete time-space does not constitute a utopian place or moment outside of or exempt from patriarchal capitalist social relations; nor does it provide, in and of itself, the standpoint for a critique of those relations (Postone, 1993). Firstly, capitalism does not operate ‘in’ or ‘through’ time-space, in ways that might allow for some non-capitalist location, but it constitutes time-space as a means of constituting itself (Harvey, 2006; Postone, 1993). Capitalism has become, our social universe, and we cannot (in the present, at least) escape it (Allman, 1999). Secondly, we must also remember that concrete time-space always and everywhere exists alongside and in dialectical relationship to historical and abstract time-space – the respective visibility of each register in diverse spaces should not be taken to indicate the absence of the others.

Indeed, it is in considering the dialectical unity of historical, abstract and concrete time-space in relation to non-production, human service work that will lead us to see the inextricable synthesis of time-space with ethics in capitalism. The explication of this time-space-ethics nexus that follows here returns us to a less abstract and more concrete discussion of time-space and ethics in human service work under capitalism, including teaching in lifelong learning contexts.

### **Time-space and ethics in human service work under capitalism**

Harvey (2006) argues that capitalism is a broader and more holistic social formation than its narrowly defined mode of production. Working people are not only engaged with commodity production and exchange, but also need *use-values* in order to live and reproduce their labour power. Such use-values include health and social care or education. Although the reproduction of labour power through such services does not directly produce profit, they nonetheless remain within capitalist social relations as a whole, and entail similar problems of exploitation and alienation as the commodity-production workplace. They also form part of the spatio-temporal circulation of value (capital), particularly through the taxation that funds them (see Fig.2 below).

Harvey terms this the ‘living space’ of working people, and work within it is strongly feminised. As Davies (1994) argues, this living space is one in which concrete process time is a fundamental aspect of the work: to care for or educate people, or to support them through lifecourse transitions, takes ‘as long as takes’.

...the carer acts on the basis of the specific context that presents itself which is rooted in a spatial-temporal here-and-now, together with her/his specific knowledge that is grounded in experience and praxis. Needs are frequently unpredictable and the relation on which care is premised often requires continuity and a form of time that is not primarily determined by a qualitative and abstract conceptual measure. Care requires process time. (Davies, 1994: 279)

Yet at the same time, this work is also subject to the discipline of abstract clock time, which stands in tension with concrete process time. Tensions between these temporal registers can lead to overwhelming perceptions of time as a ‘prison’, or a ‘screw’ that is ever tightening (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003: 69).

Postone (1993: 202) reminds us here that concrete (process) time has an inherent ethical dimension to it: it can be characterised as good or bad, well- or ill-spent, sacred or profane. We can see this in the way that the temporal re-construction of experience into coherent professional narratives often has a strong resonance with the ethical (re)ordering of work (Ylijoki, 2005). However, concrete time and its ethical nature come under pressure at times of economic cut-backs in public services, which in turn are intimately linked to historical time, since they derive from periods and moments of crisis in the capitalist system. In such a situation:

Logics of rationalization and efficiency, with their close linkage to a time that is measurable and accountable, profoundly shape the practices of this form of labour activity. (Davies, 1994: 279)

It is important here to note that the space of human service provision has always been won through the active struggles of working people to improve their living conditions and ensure that care of different kinds is available to those who need it (Barnes, 1994, 1999; Harvey, 2006; Shaikh & Tonak, 1994). Since care (including education) supports and reproduces labour power of a particular quality, it constitutes part of what is termed the ‘social wage’. Not only has it been gained in addition to the monetary wage, but importantly it also applies to those excluded from waged work – the very young, the elderly, those who have difficulty finding work, and women whose work is in the home.

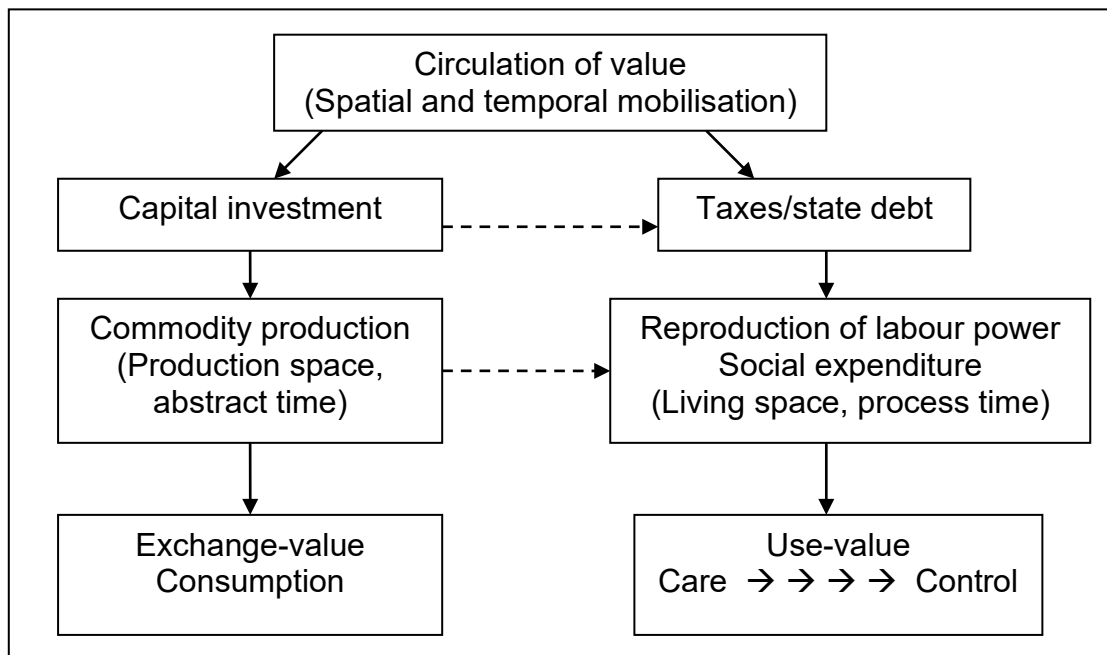


Fig. 2: Spatio-temporal-ethical relations of capitalist production and reproduction

The cost of human service work is therefore not something that capitalism willingly espouses, since it raises the price of labour power. The capitalist class, and different fractions within it, take a vacillating attitude towards it, provoked by the contradiction between their need to reproduce labour power of a suitable quality on the one hand, and the inexorable drive to reduce the cost of labour power on the other (Harvey, 2006).

Since the main vehicles for social expenditure are taxation and state debt, these vacillations are not resolved by simply ethical or political debate: the power of capitalist markets, including financial markets, comes to bear (Harvey, 2006; Shaikh and Tonak, 1994). The space-time of living and the space-time of production are thus thoroughly intertwined. During historical periods in which the rate of profit is falling, and particularly at historical moments in which capitalism experiences crises of over-accumulation and state debt reaches critical levels, ‘austerity drives’ are put in place. Harvey (2006) argues that major disjunctions are thus provoked, and three disturbing tendencies arise to re-order human service work across boundaries of time, space *and ethics*:

1. Capitalism moves to reduce social expenditure on human service work, by reducing the time devoted to it. This increases the tension between abstract and concrete time.
2. As unemployment grows, there is less imperative for capitalism for support the most needy and the least employable: the space for human service work is restricted.
3. Insofar as capitalism must maintain some social expenditure, *it acts to shift the space of human service work away from the use-value of care, and along a spectrum which tends towards a use-value of control*. This reveals a deeply ethical dimension of boundaries in human service work.

Figure 2 above represents diagrammatically the spatio-temporal-ethical relations which fuel and are fuelled by these tendencies, especially in moments of capitalist crisis. It is the third of these tendencies, the ethical shift from care to control – an often overlooked aspect of discussions on time-space in capitalism – on which I particularly want to focus for the rest of this paper. In this context, time, space and care are experienced as more sharply commodified, with negative consequences for both the practitioner and the service user. Changes in organisational values threaten traditional professional values, especially in a context of increased demands and decreased resources (Ylijoki, 2005). In addition, the pressure of time creates a sense of powerlessness and stress in the caring or educational workplace, as the pace of work is intensified, its rhythms are fragmented, and our orientation to work is re-ordered (Tronto, 2010; Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003).

These effects, and the alienation and gender-oppression they create, have been widely explored in relation to emotional labour (notably, by Hochschild, 1983; see also Brook, 2006, 2009; Colley, 2003, 2010), and I do not propose to revisit these arguments here. Little explicit attention, however, has been paid within educational research to the impact of austerity on the *ethics* of human service work, or to the ethical boundary work that this might entail in such work. Here once again, it is necessary to foreground artificially the final element of the time-space-ethics nexus in order to examine it in detail, whilst attempting all the while to bear in mind the holistic relationship between all three. Let us look, then, at some recent contributions which shed a social (rather than purely philosophical) light on the ethics of human service work, before moving on finally to consider an empirical example.

## ***Ethics in the time-space of human service work***

Resonating with our initial discussion of time, Banks (2009) argues that consideration of ethics in human service work is all too often undertaken in an abstract philosophical manner disembedded from its temporal and spatial grounding in experience. What is required is a consideration of ‘situated ethics’ located in actual practice; that is to say, in the day-to-day work of ethical thinking and decision-making that goes on – largely unrecognised – in this kind of occupation. This is all the more important, she contends, in contexts where human services are under pressure in times of economic crisis. There are, however, some important recent contributions to such thinking, to which it is hoped this paper will further contribute. They turn our attention to a broader understanding of different roles within human service work, and a division of labour, including for ethical responsibilities, that can be discerned among these roles.

We can begin by acknowledging that particular professional roles will occupy particular positions in ‘ethical space’ (Cribb, 2009), and that these ethical positions – often highly central to vocational identity – cannot be viewed as ahistorical or essential, but are socially constructed and changing. However, to view this solely in terms of the way in which each occupation has evolved its ethical position, and to assume that ethical positioning is created by practitioners themselves, is to make a grave error. As Tronto (2010) reminds us, the ‘full’ care process not only includes the work of care-giving (by practitioners) and the experience of care-receiving (by clients), but also the determination of care needs and the allocation of care resources by employing institutions and by policy-makers. The latter two roles, she argues, are all too often overlooked and unnamed, remaining tacit when we look at front-line caring work; yet they in fact engage in the work of *pre-constructing* occupational roles – and respective ethical positions – prior to the entry of any actual practitioners into those roles (Cribb, 2009).

This confronts us with an invisible boundary between care-assessors/resourcers and care-givers/practitioners, between policy *formulators* and those whose work is to *implement* policies in human service work (Wilson, 1999). The work of the former is conducted from positions of power and privilege, and tends to be regarded as straightforward – thus obfuscating any serious concern about *how* it is to be implemented. It assumes a hierarchy of binaries which privilege time over space, exchange-values over use-values, expediency over responsibility, product over process, *what* works over *how* things work, and so on. This in turn results in a proliferation of successive policy initiatives, in which forgetfulness – the erasure of history – is ‘handsomely rewarded’ (Wilson, 1999: 174). Control of the living space-time is held by those who are absent from it and abnegate responsibility for it, and this has a material impact on ethical praxis within it (Tronto, 2010).

One major concern about the effects of current managerialist policies upon professional ethics is that such policies are in fact *intended* to re-configure professional norms, cultures and identities and re-order the nature of this work, as audit and accountancy practices are brought to bear (Cribb, 2009). They prioritise technical rationality, instrumental thinking, and institutional performance indicators over ‘thicker’ understandings of public service goods. Not only does this lead to a distortion of priorities, but also to ‘ritual practices’ (Cribb, 2009: 34) oriented to meeting targets rather than service users needs, and even to downright cheating. This confronts practitioners with considerable dilemmas around ethical boundaries: when, for example,

is the greatest good served by ensuring the provision meets its targets, retains its funding, and is thereby enabled to continue functioning? Where does the boundary lie between the valid claim that work roles can have on our ethical behaviour, and our own independent ethical agency? To what extent does the re-ordering of work such as teaching constitute a *reorientation* of ethics, or go over into an *erosion* of ethics? When should we conscientiously object, comply, or adopt a stance of ‘principled infidelity’ (Cribb, 2005: 7-8)? At worst, managing such ethical disjunctions risks producing a distanced alienation and corrosion of character (cf. Sennett, 1998) in the practitioner; it may also lead to resistance, though Cribb has little to say on this.

A second, corollary concern is that policy *implementation*, along with the practitioners who must enact that implementation, becomes regarded as a perennially intractable problem. The policy formulators’ desire to find ‘what works’ serves only to freeze the processes which ethical caring necessitates – and their frustration at the problematics of implementing an absolute solution leads them to castigate practitioners on the basis of ‘mystical obfuscations’ such as ‘politics’, ‘value conflicts’, ‘human nature’, ‘vested interests’ and ‘complexity’ (Wilson, 1999: 176). In this way, care-givers are all too often made the objects of blame when their practices are limited by inadequate resources over which they themselves have no control (Tronto, 2010). What is needed, Tronto suggests, is a source of alternative judgements and legitimacy for the process of care; that is, a moral and political space-time. In the light of the arguments made throughout this paper, this would be a space-time in which practitioners and service users – working people – could discuss these issues and struggle to resolve them in their own interests rather than those of capital.

Both these sets of concerns demand that we pay closer attention to the situated ethics of human service work. Banks (2009) makes a specific contribution to this debate. She argues that philosophical models of ethical decision-making dominate human service professionals’ initial training, but focus on extreme and unusual cases, and may not therefore sensitise us to the constant presence of ethics in the space-time of this work. On the basis of evidence she has generated from empirical research with social workers, she suggests that we need to pay far more attention to what she terms ‘ethics work’: the day-to-day, even hour-by-hour, work of confronting ethical dilemmas of a more pervasive, if mundane, kind. Her conclusion is that more sociological studies of ethics work would be highly valuable in helping us to gain a more thoroughly situated understanding of the relationship between time, space, ethics, and boundary work in human service occupations. This brings me to illustrate this theoretical discussion with a few examples that highlight the relationship of time-space and ethics work: a powerful theme that emerged from a recent research project about career education and guidance work with young people in school-to-work transitions.

### ***Time, space and ethics in careers education and guidance – a de-boundaried occupation***

Careers advisers comprise a small and marginal group of teachers; but one that nonetheless can play a vital role in impartially helping young people navigate a complex – and fiercely competitive – landscape of 14-19 provision in England. A fuller discussion of this study of careers advisers, and of wider aspects of the boundary working revealed by it, has been undertaken in another paper given by Charlotte Chadderton and myself at this conference. Here I focus on some of our findings which

relate most closely to key aspects of time-space and ethics discussed above, and the boundary-working associated with them.

## Background

I refer to the career guidance profession here as ‘de-boundaried’ to reflect the radical restructurings English governmental policies have visited upon in the last decade. Originally provided through specialist careers services, the New Labour government first ‘refocused’ their work to target so-called ‘disaffected’ youth; and then subsumed careers services whole-scale into a new generic youth support service, Connexions, alongside other practitioners drawn from on-going youth services, school-teaching and other social services. CEG was only a part of the broader remit of Connexions, and from a universal service for all 14-19 year olds, it was targeted only at those not in education, employment or training (NEET), or those most at risk of so becoming. In addition to these changes in infrastructural boundaries, this policy promoted an experiment which goes beyond the multi-agency working that has become so prevalent in lifelong learning and other human service work: it pursued the formation of a *generic, multi-occupational professional* – designated the Personal Adviser (PA) – in this new workforce, and sought to dissolve the boundaries of PAs’ former occupations. The primary data in the project were generated through narrative career history interviews with 26 practitioners who had originally trained as careers advisers, with differing lengths of service, and who had worked as PAs in Connexions. 9 of these had subsequently left Connexions for professional reasons of disagreement with the way policy was being implemented through this service, while 17 were still working in Connexions – the latter also completed time-use diaries over two weekly periods as part of the project.

## Historical time-space

This background has to be set in the context of the specific historical time-space in which we live:

- the era of the capitalist mode of production
- the epoch of late capitalism or imperialism, in which globalisation ensures that there are no non-capitalist spaces (Harvey, 2006; Mészáros, 2008)
- a period, since the 1960s, of on-going decline of the *rate* of profit (Barnes, 1999, 1994; Shaikh & Tonak, 1994), albeit masked for several decades by expanding the *volume* of profits, and by the dominance of finance and fictitious capital (Harvey, 2006)
- a moment in which the limits of these ‘fixes’ for capital have been reached and we are confronted with a global economic crisis of over-accumulation, and the consequent devaluation and destruction of capital in general (Harvey, 2006).

The response of governments in this period, including in the UK, has been to embark firstly on policies for ‘welfare-to-work’. But since the spectacular financial collapse in the recent banking crisis, the current moment has led to the growth of large state debts, and therefore to more intensive ‘austerity drives’ to claw back social expenditure. This has impacted on the living space: in relation to young people, who have been worst hit by unemployment in this moment, we see how capitalism ignores the needs of those not participating fully in production or consumption. Despite the labour market and other

socio-economic difficulties faced by young people in this context, Connexions, for example, saw an initial reduction of over 15% in spending on CEG. Universal provision – still a legal entitlement for all young people – became impossible to resource (NAO, 2004; DfES, 2005). Employing at its peak less than half of the workforce originally promised, Connexions now faces further cuts of between 11% and 50% in different localities, with severe reductions in its already-inadequate staffing. In one sense, then, this is a de-boundaried area of professional work; in another, it is one in which capitalism's historical times have re-drawn its spatial boundaries in a very limited and restricted form.

### **Tensions between abstract and concrete time-space**

This has resulted in tensions between abstract and concrete time-space for PAs working in the service. One consequence is that they are carrying far larger caseloads than originally envisaged, and this quantitative expansion of their work, along with restriction of their time resources, leads to ethical dilemmas about the quality of their work. The tension between targets and process epitomises this conflict.

PAs with school-based caseloads of up to 800 young people challenged the boundaries of 'targeted work', and continued to try and offer support to all young people in their cohorts. However, this could only be managed through barely acceptable time-boundaries on individual interviews (reduced from 30 or 40 minutes to 10 minutes); or through an unsatisfactory spatial compromise in which they saw young people in groups, but worried that they were breaching the boundaries of confidentiality and client-centred practice. This represents one example of the routine ethics work into which PAs were drawn through the abstract-concrete time-space conflict.

Other PAs allocated to caseloads of young people needing intensive support were responsible for up to 80 young people at a time, four times as much as the maximum proposed in the original Connexions policy. Here, ethics work was again clearly visible: on a day-to-day basis they had to make decisions about which young people they could support, and which ones would have to remain without help, since there simply was not enough time to deal with them all. PAs struggled over these dilemmas, and sometimes responded to them inconsistently. Since their targets were to get young people off the 'NEET' register and into employment, education or training destinations, they often felt under pressure to dedicate shorter amounts of time to a larger number of young people who had the least severe problems and were most likely to allow the PA to 'tick the boxes' in achieving 'positive' outcomes. However, PAs also resisted this boundary as unethical in terms of their personal and professional values, and on occasions would cross it to spend a lengthy process working to support just one young person in dire social straits, without any prospect of getting them out of 'NEET' status. This underlines the notion that policy formulators often have a very different, more instrumental and less humane definition of success than the front-line practitioners implementing policy (Wilson, 1999).

### **An ethical shift in the living space-time, from care towards control**

This leads us to consider a final illustration, concerning the way in which the historical time-space conditions, and consequent tensions between abstract and concrete time-space, shift the ethical boundaries of educational work away from care and towards

control. Many of the PAs we talked to objected strongly to the fact that they had virtually no resources at their disposal to address the social and economic problems their clients faced: they had no facilities to provide housing, drug rehabilitation, mental health support and so on, other services often refused to take referrals because of their own overload, and even places in training, education and employment were frequently unavailable. In short, PAs resources for providing care were extremely limited.

The main resources they did have were tools for the tracking and surveillance of young people. These were perceived as deeply alienating. PAs complained about the increasing amounts of their time demanded by these activities, reinforced by more or less overt disciplinary action on the part of their managers in the pursuit of targets. One former PA explained how he was sent out to ‘knock on doors’ to try and coerce young people to engage with EET, but felt like he ‘worked for the Gestapo’. Similar stories were told by others, and their refusal of this ethical boundary shift from care to control was closely associated either with decisions to quit the service or with PAs losing their jobs as their short-term contracts were not renewed. In this sense, a further temporo-spatial boundary was crossed as they did ethics work: PAs have left Connexions in order to pursue career guidance work in other sectors (e.g. further or higher education), or to find different employment altogether in the future.

The risk from this perspective is that boundary work may result in an isolated, individualised form of resistance which is unproductive of any ‘politics of we’, or at best a conservative one that retrenches educators in a defence of professional boundaries that are themselves abstracted from the needs and experiences of service users. As Brooks (2006, 2009) and Allman (1999) note, alienation can lead to either a compliant or a transformatory practice.

There is an important coda to add here, then, from evidence generated since the close of our original project. As further cuts hit Connexions since the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government this summer, scores of PAs threatened with redundancy, and the entire service placed at risk, the trade union UNISON has been orchestrating a campaign to defend the service as one that meets young people’s needs. They have involved not only PAs, but young people themselves, in protests and publicity campaigns. These demonstrate how the practitioner-client boundary may be transcended to create a new political and ethical time-space with transformative potential – however successful or otherwise these particular campaigns may be.

These provide just a few examples that support the theoretical analysis I have elucidated in this paper. Much else remains to be discussed elsewhere, not least the link between ethics work and emotion (cf. Banks, 2009), which was a powerful theme in the data, and experiences of alienation – but we approach the temporo-spatial limits of this paper. There remains but time and space for some brief conclusions.

## Conclusions

This paper has broached an ambitious (perhaps overly so) attempt to analyse from a sociological perspective the complex inter-relationships of time, space and ethics; and to suggest how contemporary shifts in that nexus might drive the re-ordering of human service work – and teaching as part of that sphere – in particular ways. Its purposes have been to argue a number of key points:



- that time cannot be considered in isolation from space, and *vice versa*: the most productive perspectives are those which account for their dialectical unity
- that time-space comprises a series of registers – historical, abstract, and concrete – which also stand in dialectical relationship to one another
- that any consideration of time-space necessarily entails a consideration of ethics, particularly in the deeply gendered ‘living space-time’ of human service work
- and that the current configuration of time-space in globalised economic and social crisis is re-ordering teaching in ways that generates alienation, but also provokes boundary work – including, importantly, ethics work – among practitioners.

In addition, I have used the example of career education and guidance work for young people in England to illustrate this re-ordering process and its consequences of boundary work for one occupational group in lifelong learning

As Harvey (2006) powerfully reminds us, this context will mobilise debates and active struggles around the re-ordering of work, for which the outcome is not certain. PAs in Connexions have already had to expand the boundaries of their resistance from individual transgression or refusal, to political activism in solidarity with their young clients. It is here that the difference between Harvey’s and Massey’s analyses of spatio-temporality and related ethics and politics is posed most clearly, since Harvey’s perspective demands an explicit recognition that our lives are currently lived within capitalism’s space-time regime. This does not invalidate Massey’s perspective on space-time and the political-ethical project she wishes to derive from it; but it does mean that we have to be attentive to two very important questions: what are the ways in which capitalism tries to subsume space-times of resistance? And if these space-times retain ethical integrity, how can they be put to work to generate the positive differences and socially just outcomes that Massey so rightly calls for (Castree, 2009: 53-4). It is perhaps in addressing these issues that teachers and other human service workers may find ways to go beyond alienation, and engage in boundary work that is genuinely productive of transformative change.

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