Introduction

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CAN A SET OF NUMBERS be a buzzword or a neologism? Although *24/7* offers no answer to this particular question, the specific arrangement of numbers, used typically to signify twenty-four hours a day for every day of the week, does seem to us appropriate for what it is we are trying to convey and for what the essays in this volume grapple with: our experience of time in the network society.

First it seems worthwhile, no matter how appropriate or taken for granted the term *24/7* may seem, to try to define or explain what it means. The designation turns out to be of uncertain provenance. Google wasn't much help to us in trying to clear things up. With characteristic overkill it located some 171,000,000 pages of possible relevance (in 0.17 seconds). After sifting through the first ten results, however, we were already discouraged. Predictably, perhaps, most of the results were related to media companies who for one reason or another had *24/7* in either their company name or as an indication of the time frame in which they promise to deliver their product or service. The only exception to this commercial rule was *24/7 Prayer* (www.24-7prayer.com), which offers "non-stop prayer across the nations."

The next near-to-hand alternative source of information on the term was from Wikipedia.com. This is a rapidly growing online encyclopedia for which anyone can write up the definition to any term or construct an explanation for any subject. Wikipedia currently has more than one million entries, among which a definition for *24/7* was duly found: "In commerce and industry, it

identifies a service that will be present regardless of current time or day, as might be offered by a supermarket, ATM, gas station, diner or restaurant, concierge service or manned datacenter." This is a disappointingly empty description. There is no sense of connectivity, of digital networks, of speed, of compressed time, and no sense of the fact that more and more of our "24/7" life is being *colonized* by the blandishments and the demands of "commerce and industry." Crucially, there is no sense that the goods and services that exist in the supermarket through to the datacenter are part of a flowing and ever-accelerating networked and globalized life where the time of the clock no longer schedules and meters our individual and collective existence in as predictable a fashion as it once did.

As theorists of time, we as editors envisage something of much stronger import in *24/7*, something more fully centered around the ideas that reflect a changing relationship with time. The stark entry in the Web site Dictionary.com offers a definition that comes closer to how we perceive the term. It says, simply, "continuously; unceasingly." These words suggest that *24/7* has more to do with individuals and societies being *driven* or pushed by a systemic temporal logic, as opposed to the mere availability of everything at our fingertips; things to be pulled toward us to satisfy our needs and whims at any "time" we want. At another level this definition indicates something more deeply *temporal* that goes beyond the mere designation of the hours and the days.

The emergence of the networked society has seen a revolution in the temporal dynamics of both our personal lives and society as a whole. The evidence is everywhere if we care to look and reflect. For example, if we consider the Wikipedia example a bit more closely, the fact that services are available "regardless of the current time of day" says something about what is now *expected* of people in a temporal sense. In order to be *flexible* and *efficient* (two buzzwords closely related to *24/7*), we may find ourselves working on a networked computer at midnight, communicating with someone half a world away, then stopping for a break to go to the local all-night supermarket to buy milk for the coffee we need to stay awake. This colonization of the night by industry is, of course, as old as the introduction of shift-working. What is different today, however, is that networked globalization pulls millions of people into the orbit of the "24/7" life, where what the clock on the wall says becomes secondary to the demands of "flexible accumulation." The old-fashioned notion of "shift-work" (a specific time and place) is giving way to the imperatives of "flexibility" and "efficiency" (any time, any place). The temporal bound-

ary of the weekend, similarly, morphs into becoming just another couple of workdays, where the computer, cell phone, PDA, and so on connect us to the "normal" concerns of the working week. To borrow a term from the purveyors of broadband computer services, *24/7* means to be "always on"—always connected or connectable—and always available to work or to consume.

The changing relationship with time that we experience through living and working in the 24/7 networked society is becoming increasingly documented. As the following examples in this introduction show, however, it is usually from a perspective on time that does not actually grasp or help reveal the important issues contained in a deeper level of temporal analysis. For example, at the empirical level of sociology Juliet B. Schor informed us in the early 1990s of something we intuitively knew when she wrote that workers in the United States were "starved for time" and that society more generally suffered from what she termed a "time-squeeze" (Schor 1992, 1993). There are not enough hours in the day, in other words, to enable us to do all the things we need to do. This was bad news, even if it was old news. From the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio, however, the tidings are even worse. Networked information systems, he argues, have brought us to such a point of acceleration (real time) that we experience a "loss of orientation" in the world. Cyberspace, or the "real time" of "instantaneous, globalized information flows," is driving humanity toward what Virilio sees as a "dictatorship of speed" (Virilio 1995).

Schor and Virilio both write about time—but at a surface level. Schor's sociological work is derived from tables and statistics that she interprets at a conventional level of analysis. This approach portrays people as feeling anxious or stressed about "not enough time in the day" and is connected to structural changes in the nature of work. This finding is true enough, but Schor's analysis remains on the surface level of describing and defining time. And in Virilio's theory-based perspective cyberspace is propelling us all to an unknown and uncertain future, a future in which machines "choke the senses" with the speed at which they bombard us with information. Speed is central to his thesis, but the profound connection of *speed to time*—and how high-speed networked technology has affected our relationship with time—is not explained. We are at a loss, in other words, to understand why speed has become so central (and so problematic) in society, other than as an effect of computerization.

There is truth and there is intellectual value in both of these arguments. If, however, we are to understand the nature of the network society, then a

deeper understanding of time is required. Schor and Virilio point to something that most of us recognize intuitively: our relationship with time has changed over the last quarter-century. This, not unconnectedly, as we will see, is the period of time that has seen unprecedented spatiotemporal transformation through the growth and spread of neoliberal globalization and the revolution in information and communication technologies. So as a precursor to the chapters that follow, let us look more closely at the subject of time and develop a tentative framework of analysis to help us understand (and possibly have some control over) the changing "timescapes" (Adam 2004) we encounter and experience in the network society.

About Time

The question of time is a rather odd one. Time's passage, to paraphrase J. T. Fraser (2003, 15), is both intimately familiar and strangely elusive. For many people in everyday social life, time tends to be viewed as something that just "is," a backdrop to our being in the world and something we deal with almost without conscious thought. As we will see, its elusiveness was perhaps too easily "solved" by accepting the clock as the reification of time's passage. This acceptance has left a debilitating legacy as far as how theorists in the social sciences—in politics, economics, sociology, and so on—have dealt with the subject of time. This is evident in the one-dimensional treatment of time by social scientists such as Schor and the more elliptical perspective from social theorists such as Virilio.

The tide seems to be turning, however, in this respect. Journals such as *Time & Society*, *KronoScope*, and others have become intellectual poles of attraction for a growing academic interest in the nature of time—an interest that looks to disparate thinkers such as Schor and Virilio for either guidance or evidence of where more work needs to be done.

Much more focused and reflective thinking has been done within the humanities into the nature of time. And this philosophical literature constitutes the foundation for the critical thinking on time that has been making inroads into the mainstream of social science, helping to transform the discipline with the added emphasis on time. In respect of the foundational thinkers on time, we need to begin with two who wrote during the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth and opened up profound insights onto the subject: Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl.

Bergson's philosophy was aligned with a countertendency to the Enlightenment that included (most notably) Sade, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. He was concerned, along with others such as Alfred North Whitehead, to create an alternative metaphysics to that generated by the overly mechanistic and scientistic view generated by strict rationality. Bergson's fields of inquiry, consequently, were concerned with those subtle and hard-to-pin-down areas that escape rationality's forensic gaze, such as irrationality, becoming, memory, and intuition.

Our day-to-day perception of what constitutes time, according to Bergson, comes to us courtesy of the Enlightenment and its creation of the physical sciences. This view apprehends time mathematically, as a series of fixed states that can be separated out and measured. Alternatively, he argued that time is not something that can be wholly understood by numbers but is something lived (internal, not external) and having duration—*durée*. For example, he notes in his *Time and Free Will* that durée "forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another" (Bergson 1913/2001). Time, for Bergson, was a state of becoming and a process of living duration. Intuitions of the "indeterminate" states of time were central to Bergson's philosophy. In *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson described intuition as "thinking in duration," a process that reflected the flow of reality (Bergson 1946). Conceptual thinking and intuition were a necessary combination to perceive and understand the flow of temporality. Time, then, is not made understandable through a simple rationality that taxonomizes, calculates, divides, measures, and dissects. According to Bergson time is indivisible and flows. This fluidity is accessible and may be intuited as a lived reality. The value of Bergson's work is that he sought to separate out the qualitative temporality of the lived durée, the temporality of experience, intuition, memory, and consciousness from that of the quantitative temporality of a rationalized time based on science, measurement, and invariant rhythms. Such a perspective opened up a way of explaining another, more evanescent and nonrational, aspect of time that most of us experience (the way in which our experience of time does not easily fit with the ticking of seconds through minutes and hours) but have difficulty in reconciling with the mathematical ordering of duration that classical science takes as the measure of temporal reality.

Husserl was an almost exact contemporary of Bergson, and, indeed, their works share certain features that serve to complement each other and take

the perspective on time to a higher synthesis. Husserl is the founder of phenomenology, a philosophy that takes intuitive experience of phenomena as its starting point and tries to extract the fundamental features of experiences and the essence of what we experience. Like Bergson's durée, Husserl's phenomenology is opposed to Enlightenment-derived concepts of objectivism and positivism. His philosophical system was thus a descriptive analysis of subjective processes that may be described as the intuitive study of essence.

Again, like Bergson, Husserl did not accept the idea that time could be perceived (measured and categorized) as a series of successive nows. He argued that the essence of time is derived from our subjective experience of time (Husserl 1964). In other words, the essence of time is how we perceive it, not as a universal and absolute process as Newtonian-based thinking would have it. As Scott Lash writes, "Husserl enjoins us to begin not with the thought or the 'I think,' but with the 'I experience'" (Lash 2002, 102). Time also needs to be understood as having certain subjective qualities, what Bruno Latour (1993, 172) has termed the "feel of time." In contrast to scientistic conventions, Husserl conceived of the present as a "living present," a flowing present, a "now" in which impressions and perceptions stretch the mode of being through memory and expectations (retentions and protentions). "Immanent contents," he explains in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, "are what they are only in so far as during their 'actual' duration they refer ahead to something futural and back to something past. . . . [W]e have retentions of the preceding and pretensions of the coming phases of precisely this content" (Husserl 1964, 110).

Like Bergson, Husserl utilizes the metaphor of music to make his point on the durational and flowing nature of temporal experience. Memory and expectation, the stretching of the lived present into the past and the future, are central to the process of listening to music or playing it. Each note has a musical quality that depends on the location of the note in a whole flowing sequence of notes, the lived present, where the music is perceived. The isolated note does not have the same quality. As part of a flow of notes, the previous note retains its presence without actually becoming present. Similarly, with speech, or text, the word or sentence comes alive only when the preceding words are retained in the present and the future words, the "coming phrases" (the expectation of future words), make the speech or text comprehensible. The past and the future dimensions of time are always in some sense in the present in Husserl's subjective experience of time.