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UNEDITED

Review of Jens Kjaerulff. "Situating time: New technologies at work, a perspective from Alfred Gell's oeuvre"

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This is a complex, multilayered study that makes an original, important contribution to the social anthropology of time. The general, overall purpose of the study is to point to the importance of grounding anthropological studies of time in an ontology of time, and to provide an instance of one such theorization via an extended reconsideration and interpretive redevelopment of the late, well-known social anthropologist Alfred Gell's theorization of time in his *The anthropology of time* (1992), allied with certain aspects of Gell's work on art (*Art and agency* [1998]). This rethinking in itself is a contribution, but, as the essay's title suggests, the author's aim is to bring a theoretical analysis to bear on aspects of his field research on the deployment of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the work practices of two Danish villages. Because of this latter aim, the author gives considerable attention in the initial part of the study to situating the article's discussion in a commentary on—and critique of—classic studies on work time.

Pointing initially to modern sociological interests in time (such as David Harvey's well-known "time-space compression" among others)—and especially to those relating to problems in work time (such as E. P. Thompson's classic study on work time and industrial capitalism, in addition to more recent contemporary studies on this subject), the author notes that a significant part of the contemporary impetus for such interests derives from certain critical "transformations" in economic and work practices, including the proliferation of new ICTs in contemporary work worlds. He argues that "having a telework arrangement may animate a sense of prospect and potential . . . [in connection with] moral judgement where diverse aspirations, [e.g., in terms of work and family] are . . . difficult to reconcile and fulfill. It is the practices through which such animated prospects come into being that . . . [the author] conceptualize[s] as *practices of situating time*" (p. 237; emphasis mine). (I will come back to discussing this important part of his study later, in the context where what is meant by "situating time" becomes specific in terms of his ICT example). But to get a handle on the "temporal entailments" of these practices, the author argues, requires "situating time" at another, general theoretical level—that is, by asking/considering an ontological question about time in itself. Or, as the author puts it more mundanely, "what time amounts to." Yet, as the author notes, the multiplication of ethnographic studies in the anthropology of time has not been matched by concern with actually grounding these studies in an *ontology of time*.

Before moving on directly to Gell, however, the author introduces a section called "Changing times?" This section may seem at first to draw the reader away from the focus on Gell's work on temporal theory; however, it is necessary because it links recent studies on ICTs in relation to the earlier context of Thompsonian studies on task-time versus clock-time orientation, and suggests that while there have been various recent attempts to deal with changes away from some of the specifics of Thompson's notions of task-based vs. clock-based time, they actually draw us back to the author's critical point that "the underlying conceptualization of time in this critical literature shares much with the Thompsonian outlook: time essentially remains a matter of rhythm and social construction" (p. 238). The author suggests, however, that even explorations of "other tropes such

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as tropes of 'speed' " have paradoxically seemed to entail "sidelining a more basic engagement with 'temporal' ontology" itself.

"Alfred Gell's oeuvre"

The author's notion of how time should be ontologically viewed is grounded most specifically in an adaptation of Gell's deployment of the notions of A-series and B-series time, which Gell arrives at via D. H. Mellor's *Real time* (1981). [[Oddly, Mellor does not appear in the bibliography! Also, in this context the author should mention, perhaps in a footnote, that these notions of A- and B-series time derive originally from McTaggart. He should also clarify for the reader at this point, whether in the text or in a footnote, by giving some basic rough meanings of the code labels A- and B-temporal series. I'm suggesting it might be helpful for some interested readers who may not be familiar with the A-B coding to provide something straightforward, such as the following: A-series time is often called "tensed," centered in a subject for whom, e.g., event A occurring "now" or "today" will be tomorrow's "yesterday, etc."; while B-series time is, in effect, fixed. Event B always occurs after event A, and before event C (as in a dated time series, e.g., or any fixed sequence of events., etc., or however the author wants to state it). How Gell deploys these notions and the author's subsequent discussion of his position then become clearer.]]

The theoretical argument and discussion of Gell that follows is complex and detailed, but in the end it leads to a significant move the author makes relevant to the later analysis of the ICT case study. I will lay out what I see as critical points in this part of the argument. The author argues that Gell initially uses Mellor's notions of time "as a way to make sense of phenomenological perspectives on time"—a move to phenomenology (which is what concerns Gell, who actually wants to develop a theoretically grounded move in a phenomenologically tuned direction). This then leads Gell from Mellor's approach to time down the interesting rabbit hole (my metaphor, not Gell's or the author's!) into a Husserlian phenomenological reading of time. The transition to Husserl (Kjaerulff, p. 240) leads Gell to reconceptualize A-series time (i.e., subject-centered, "tensed" time) in terms of Husserlian concepts of retention and protention, which themselves are "continuously modified [by], as well as relative to the moment on which they impinge" (p. 240). Hence, Gell is considering Husserl's subject-centered "retentions" and "protentions" as in part generated and informed by B-series ideas of time—that is, by this determinate, untensed reality (underlaid by "interests and values" [p. 242]), which people have to take account of, and which then continually modifies the subjective experience of the world and thus of time.

In short, for Husserl it was this continuous modification of "intentional consciousness" (as distinct from memory per se) that gives rise to the experience of a clearly delimited, if always fleeting, present (p. 240). Gell saw this, and some of the implications he develops from this view as providing a theory of time "indispensable for an anthropology of time" (p. 240). (The author also notes that Gell considers "the notions of retention and protention in sociocultural terms," [p. 240] and in other ways). In this respect, the author argues that an underlying dimension of importance for Gell "is Husserl's conception of the intentional relation between the process and object of cognition" (p. 240). It is especially through this explanatory summary of Gell's construal of B-series time and its relation to a Husserlian A-series (intentional-protentional) time that the author articulates A- and B-event series. This theorization then draws us into a notion of the practical world involving people's experience of time that is of particular interest to the author. To quote the author: "From the phenomenological perspective that Gell extends from Husserl, then, retentions and protentions are in part generated and informed by cultural B-series ideas of 'time,' because such ideas concern realities to be reckoned with (e.g., Gell 1992: 236–38). *The immanence of this aggregate external B-series reality entails doing things in a 'timely' manner (e.g., 1992: 173, 235), which for Gell is what the A-series sense of passing time is all about*" (pp. 241; emphasis mine). [[In my view, the author should dwell a little on this notion of "timeliness," marking it strongly in some way, so that the reader at this point is drawn into understanding that this ontologically based or derived notion will be important later in the discussion of ICTs.]]

There is much more to the author's theorization of Gell's time book, but I want to turn now to his introduction of Gell's later book, *Art and agency* (1998). The author sees this book as relevant to the time book, partly based on some ideas he (the author) has developed in relation to the time book involving "maps" (which the author relates to B-series time), and "images" (which the author relates to A-series time). I have not included

this interesting discussion here (for want of time!), but I will point simply to his consideration that in the art book, "'Images' . . . become more alive and public, so to speak." The author suggests that this "offers some interesting perspectives on the 'temporal' affordances of objects, such as new ICT's" (p. 242). While in the time book, Gell approaches time by deploying Husserl (to adjust Mellor's notions of A- and B-series time), in the art book he turns to Peirce's notion of abduction, "which like Husserl's thinking has informed phenomenological approaches more widely" (p. 242). In this context of art studies, Gell aims "to move beyond understanding art in terms of communication and aesthetics and . . . approach it 'as a *system of action*' (Gell 1998: 6)" (p. 242; emphasis mine). "Although his focus here was 'art,' Gell held that the perspectives he outlined applied to objects more broadly . . . [since] they allowed for the 'abduction of agency'—that is, served as entities from which the observer can make a causal inference . . . or an inference about the intentions and capabilities of another person" (p. 242). Moreover, the author also considers that what "Gell concentrated on was the 'cognitive indecipherability' . . . by means of which art and [[other?]] objects achieved something like agency" (p. 242). [[What I would *strongly suggest here* (and also in the later discussion of ICT artifacts) is that the author introduce some references to current discussions of objects as "actants" available in anthropological/sociological discourse—e.g., via Bruno Latour's many sources; but especially illuminating, I think, is the discussion in Jane Bennett's *Vibrant matter* (Duke University Press. 2010).]]

After further commentary, the author concludes this section by noting that "*objects may impinge . . . upon our sense of time* in more profound ways than commonly acknowledged, and indeed be *engaged* . . . to 'situate' time" (p. 17). The implications of this part of Gell's discussion become relevant in the next section when the author comes to considering ICTs as focal artifacts.

"Situating time"

This section discusses aspects of the author's fieldwork in two Danish villages in which teleworking was alleged to have "contributed to transformations" both in "village life" and "the working lives of people engaged in this way of working." The author followed "people engaged in different forms of paid work, in domestic and village environments, and also in [part time] workplaces beyond the villages" (p. 243). [[This draws attention to issues involving the way work-time becomes problematized in connection with the workplace and it also raises issues.]]

The author then discusses one such workplace he calls Universal Computers (UC), a firm that was involved in diverse ICT-related hard- and software products, and (among other specializations) "know-how and turnkey solutions" (p. 243) [[Query 1: What are "turnkey solutions?]] [[Query 2: The author speaks here of UC as a workplace. But is there a single actual workplace for UC telework—say, of all residents in a given village? Some teleworkers work entirely at home (as in example later in text) and others seem to work at home due to time pressures, but ordinarily in the office—which is where? I found aspects of the problem of work location at times unclear—see queries later in text. NB: Location is not simply "space," but a theoretical concept of its own, which becomes important. See further later on.]] UC Workers widely practiced part-time teleworking. Since UC is a leading competitor on the international stage (and during the author's fieldwork UC sales were booming), competition was intense. Hence at this time, the author's UC informants often pointed out to him, the *pressure* this exerted on them. The author emphasizes: "It is this pressure I focus on here" (p. 244).

Although Danish legislation prescribes a thirty-seven-hour work week, in fact "employees were measured (and rewarded, or not) in terms of the percentage of their tasks they finished 'on time' relative to deadlines specific to those tasks" (p. 244). Another dimension affecting time here is that "tasks could quickly shift and accumulate with newly arising business opportunities" (p. 244). Furthermore, as the author emphasizes (also in line with an aspect of his theoretical argument), it is important to consider the social dimensions of temporal pressure: "Much of the work at UC unfolded between teams of employees who continuously exchanged, compiled and processed . . . [a complex] array of information. Since information constantly travels . . . bottlenecks holding colleagues up are the last thing people want to cause" (p. 244). Furthermore, since employees interacted largely via computer networks, pressure among them was "often objectified in concrete quantities of email." This meant that "I can sit at home and over the course of the weekend I receive ten emails. There is thus an expectation set up that you do your part during the weekend" (p. 244).

However, the author now brings Gell forward again. He points out that looked at via the perspective he has

outlined with Gell, one can "conceive of UC's formal measures of work (in terms of work hours and deadlines) as concrete specimens of B-series maps of time" (p. 244). The author further suggests that "an important element in the pressure perceived among UC employees . . . [involved employees' sense of their] need or desire to act in a timely manner both with respect to formal measures and to colleagues' expectations—that is, what Gell argues comprises the A-series sense of passing time" (p. 244). [[The author doesn't seem to explicitly emphasize "expectation," noted in the previous paragraph, as a temporalization. An expectation (ego's sense of an aspect of the future) would obviously be of Type A-time series, centered in the subject—part of what the teleworker's experience of his situation portends for him.]] However, what the author does stress here is "the way digital entities such as email appear to constitute . . . part of *the images* informing UC employees' continuous navigation of their work land and time-scape" (p. 244; emphasis mine)

But the author does not simply want to emphasize "the social dimension of the experienced pressure of what animates emails as images" but also that emails in their own right [[i.e., as a certain type of concrete artifact in which one communicates]] might also have contributed to this sense of pressure (p. 244). "It is here that Gell's argument about the *agency of art and objects* begins to *complement his argument about images* in the context of time" (p. 244; emphasis mine). That is, it is here that the author sees email as an actant *of a certain kind*. The author bases this point especially on the view expressed by "Edward," head of a UC department of more than thirty employees. For example, Edward stressed that emails were to be used only "for facts," not to "express attitudes." The latter, he viewed as creating problems, "propelling email warfare," because emails "stripped interaction from the kind of metacommunication conveyed through body language"—that is, in contrast to what the same expressed attitude might have occasioned in face-to-face communication (p. 244). The author moves on to suggest other characteristics of email as Edward discusses it—for example, that "precisely because of the 'poor' quality of email communication as Edward conceived of it (even for mail stripped of 'attitudes'), email may have nourished the widespread *perception* among UC employees about others' perceptions of work" (p. 245). In this context, the author sees as a key difference between Gell's argument about "abduction and art's agency" and the agency of this artifact, and the email system, while at the same time emphasizing that the email's "*lack* of virtuosity [as against the virtuosity of art objects], along with quantity, are the technical means by which email achieves . . . indecipherability, captures the imagination and impinges on the sense of time" (p. 245). [[Point of information: Would it be more accurate to say that email achieves "an aspect of indecipherability," or something like that? If it were experienced as totally "indecipherable," presumably it couldn't communicate anything of significance in this context at all?]]

[[I also have a question about the account of Edward's way of dealing with the interference between home-life and his computer-centered telework-life.]] This particular case is an important part of the discussion of how Edward resolved the tendency of his computer-centered teleworking work-life to take over the time spent with his family at home. It is also part of the author's point derived from his reading of Gell regarding the way objects—here, technology—may impinge upon our sense of time [p. 245]. [[When Edward's family objects to "his head" being "in the computer" even when he is at home, I first inferred that they meant he was simply thinking about his teleworking obligations and possible failure of the timeliness of his work when he should have been engaged with his family. But later on, I gathered from another account that he could or would actually have been working from home—i.e., presumably with a technological device actually located at home so that he was working there (or could work there) during the weekend during what was supposed to be family time. If so, then one can understand better how, once he stopped teleworking, and confined his work to the office so as to control for these interferences, others might assume (erroneously) that the way he was getting his work done still involved him in some telework at home.]] However, this is an important issue that needs to be clarified, for it brings into focus the importance of the location of the technology, which, as the author argues, is critical to the argument about situating time (see, for example, p. 245). That is, Edward is trying to gain control over the relation between work time and home time—keeping work time out of home time.

Part of the author's conclusion to his discussion of Edward's situation draws the reader back to the treatment of Gell's temporal argument in order to consider the question of whether the author has overdrawn the concern of Edward (and also his colleagues') with "time rather exclusively, where [in fact] more complex and

composite matters were at issue"(p. 247). He addresses this argument in part by reminding the reader that

> the point with the temporal ontology I adopt from Gell is precisely that the sense of passing time arises from the process of perception *as such*. The concern with timely behavior [i.e., in this case example, doing work in the office and keeping it out of family time at home] is an undercurrent cutting across a sensual vortex that eventuates from any situated worldly engagement, whether in terms of economic interest or in terms of wider social and cultural values—for example, of parenting or partnering, and indeed from "working things out," as Edward put it, across a diversity of commitments, that may be experienced to "clash." (p. 247)

This argument is crucial in part because it also draws in the author's perspective on issues such as "intent, interest, and value" that have been commented on earlier in his essay. The author argues, in this respect, that "such notions in substance exceed the simplistic kind of mindset (cultural, or rational calculative) with which they are too readily associated (cf. Kjaerulff 2015). Our conceptual categories in this regard are glosses for complex social and emotional forces at work and for different shades of conscious engagement" (p. 247).

Overall, I see this strong statement supporting the author's concept of and focus on situating time, as a crucial part of the general conclusion (more fundamental to the essay than what appears under "Concluding Remarks"—which are in fact, just that—diverse "remarks.") However, the author then inserts another example from their research after this statement on situating time and *before* the Concluding Remarks. This example concerning the management of location in relation to work time argues that this set of problems is also mediated by another teleworker's successful attempt to gain control over where she locates her telework by in fact doing something like the opposite of what Edward does—getting her employer to set up all her work technologically for her at home. This solves certain concerns she has about family time—concerns that derive from issues that are different from Edward's.

In sum I consider this an exceptional paper, which confronts complex theoretical issues, laying them out in a grounded fashion. I highly recommend that *Hau* publish it.

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