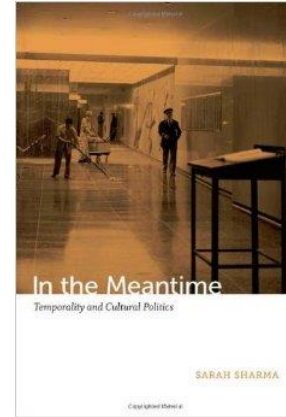


Sarah Sharma, ***In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics***, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014, 196 pp., \$23.95 (paperback).

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The world is speeding up, and in response, we just need to slow down. In her new book, ***In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics***, Sarah Sharma complicates and challenges both poles of this assumption, fleshing out the proliferating and contradictory temporalities that construct our current economic and political conjunctures. The book draws on a range of detailed ethnographies and discursive analyses to map out a number of different but interconnected forms of labor and technology—life coaches, jet-lag specialists, on-call taxi drivers, corporate yoga instructors—that produce an equally diverse array of temporalities, tempos, and rhythms of everyday life in the current conditions of global capitalism. In this way, Sharma develops what she calls a “biopolitics of temporality” attendant to these specific material practices. She offers this as an alternative to more abstract and transcendent claims about how particular periods or peoples experience time, which is often reduced to either a singular (i.e., “everything is speeding up”) or binary (i.e., “fast vs. slow classes”) mode. After presenting in the introduction her general theoretical and methodological framework, including the key ideas of “temporality” and “power chronography,” the rest of the book is organized as a series of overlapping case studies that illustrate, expand, and specify these underlying concepts. Along the way, Sharma brings into conversation several different theorists (Michel Foucault, Harold Innis, Doreen Massey, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others) and offers her own analyses as a way to productively intervene in the work of “speed theorists” like Paul Virilio, Zygmunt Bauman, John Armitage, and Joanne Roberts, who she suggests “have offered a too simple account of the acceleration of everyday life and temporal difference” at the expense of an account of the “complexity of lived time” (p. 6). Any scholars interested in the work of those theorists or who are engaging with issues of temporality, globalization, neoliberalism, governmentality, labor, and/or embodiment will find valuable insights and discussions in this book.

In her introduction, Sharma traces how discourses of “the culture of speed” and “speedup” have become hegemonic, especially over the last two decades, and she examines the ways in which the aforementioned “speed theorists” have contributed to their development and common-sense acceptance. Against this now taken-for-granted view of temporal experience, she provides a specific understanding of temporality as the “awareness of power relations as they play out in time” (p. 4). These relations are multiple and interdependent, and require a methodology attentive to the specific micropolitical and embodied technologies and techniques that connect and synchronize them. Pointing out the simultaneous occlusion and assumption of particular understandings of time within the context of the “spatial turn” of cultural theory, she elaborates a notion of “power-chronography” as an extension and complement to Massey’s “power-geometry,” calling for an understanding of time as multiple and relational, similar to Massey’s discussion of located but interconnected space. The perspective of power-chronography requires

attentiveness to “how different time sensibilities are produced” and to “people whose labor is explicitly oriented toward negotiating time and the time of others” (p. 15). The questions of who has time, whose time is valuable or worthless, who has to recalibrate their bodies to different temporalities and rhythms (i.e., the night shift, irregular hours), who gets to move through time smoothly and who has to wait, and who is “out of time”—in all the possible meanings of the phrase—are central to this chronography of power.

Chapter 1 explores the airport as a “temporal architecture” that coordinates and organizes drastically different experiences of time and temporal labor, with the figure of the global corporate “road warrior” as the ideal subject that this temporal architecture is constructed around. Sharma traces the emergence of the road warrior in business literature and self-help books in the late 1990s and demonstrates how these travelers are presented as simultaneously privileged (technically savvy, on the cutting edge of communications and capital, connected to a range of global cities and other global elite) and vulnerable (via the medicalization of jet lag, the fear of exposure to disease in transit spaces, etc.). These threats have to be managed through proper self-knowledge, new technologies, and an array of spaces and labor purposely designed to soothe the stresses of privileged global labor. Sharma also points out the spectacular elements of these technologies and practices, highlighting the ways that public performances of exhaustion, overwork, and busyness function as cultural capital.

Literally departing from the airport, chapter 2 examines the taxicab as mobile space and taxi driving as a form of labor that “maintains a temporal infrastructure while being cast outside it” (p. 57). Primarily drawing on ethnographic research, this chapter delineates how work schedules and everyday life for drivers are made irregular, precarious, and disruptable to facilitate a smooth experience of time for more privileged economic subjects. This type of “temporal maintenance” also characterizes the work of the corporate yoga instructors analyzed in chapter 3, in which yoga—understood by its instructors and practitioners as a mode of establishing an alternative, transcendent relationship to time, space, and one’s body—is mobilized to properly “recalibrate” workers to the rhythms of global capital. An emphasis on adaptation, coping, and positivity in these practices forecloses their critical or transformative potentials.

Exploring other modes of purported resistance that are actually complicit with hegemonic temporal and economic orders, chapter 4 offers a critical assessment of various forms of “slowness”—slow food, slow living, and so on. Sharma argues that the resistant or progressive claims of slowness are often based on a problematic equating of “slow” with a range of other qualities (i.e., local, authentic, natural, etc.). This in turn ignores how the ability to slow down is a form of privilege and how discourses of “slowness” prioritize an experience of time premised on withdrawal, privatization, and depoliticization. Against this individualized and detached understanding of time, the book concludes with a call for the acknowledgment and construction of new “temporal publics.” This term is meant to complement and complicate the idea of public space underpinning many theories of the public sphere, by emphasizing the unequal and transitory character of public space and time. It also opens up the possibilities of “reimagining time as a collective struggle” (p. 142) as opposed to simply viewing speed and transit spaces as “public space’s denigrated Other” (p. 147).

As should be clear from this brief overview, the book does an excellent job of expanding on some of the most prominent theoretical “givens” of the last two decades—speedup, slowdown, space-time compression, and the public sphere, among others. Methodologically, the book also provides a strong example of how the effective integration of ethnographic work with discursive analysis opens up unique types of conjunctural analysis unavailable to either approach on its own. However, with its focus on either the most privileged or most precarious temporal subjects—the road warriors and corporate time consultants on the one hand, the taxi-drivers, airport workers, and the homeless in Vancouver and New York on the other—a large swath of more ordinary chronopolitics goes largely unexplored. For example, in a work that so nicely articulates political economy, biopolitics, and technology, it would have been interesting to see a more sustained engagement with some of the proliferating technologies promising assistance in tracking, visualizing, managing, and maximizing one’s time. These technologies and techniques include biomonitoring devices like Fitbit, productivity software like Freedom and Pomodoro, and “lifehacking,” among others. There is also a question of what specific vision of chronopolitics is being advocated. While the book provides a thoughtful and thorough critique of discourses that alternatively lionize speed or slowness and directs us to the complicated polyrhythms that construct our everyday lives, the types of interventions that this understanding make possible are a little unclear. When offered, they seem to have less to do with time and the temporal specifically, and more to do with the familiar themes of living wages, reworking immigration policy, and so on. While these are obviously connected to Sharma’s temporal politics, what new insights her temporal perspective might offer could be specified and developed further. However, this development is enabled by the strong theoretical foundation set in the book, and she acknowledges as much in her closing lines—“I have gotten us only so far. What shall we do now with our entangled time?” (p. 150). Beginning to answer that question will hopefully be a project for another time.