

# Transdisciplinarity demands time

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The inaugural issue of *Time & Society* emerged at a historical interstice. A new millennium was on the horizon, the rate of technological obsolescence would soon grow exponentially, and the pace of global, digital communication would be upended as more and more people gained access to something novel called the World Wide Web. These developments tied to culture, technology, and communication were also central to changing norms around the production of work, community, and knowledge—three constitutive elements of a field of study. Therefore, in being invited to reflect on the state of time studies today—where it has been, what it has been missing, where the challenges lie, and where opportunities reside—I consider how societal changes that arose in this liminal space have shaped its journey. I hasten to point out that 30 years is still a beginning for most institutional journeys and that any field which can be measured in decades is still in its infancy.

In precisely the same number of years that have elapsed since *Time & Society* was first published, I have been studying time. Therefore, in many ways, I can trace its path through the contours of my own scholarly journey: In the same year that *T&S* began, I happened on the anthropological study of time. It was an accidental meeting (in an intercultural communication course), and I was not yet aware that an entire collective of scholars (i.e., the *International Society for the Study of Time [ISST]*) and a new journal had already formed to consider the same questions and more. I soon discovered a rich, exciting scholarly conversation held across many corners of the globe and every discipline imaginable. Notably, the conversation was typified more by its extraordinary quality than its comparable quantity.

The technological sea change that we would experience in the late-1990s expanded communication channels and knowledge borders substantially, supporting our awareness of each other and the growth of a community of scholars. To offer some sense of the speed and impact of these changes, just a few years earlier during graduate school, I consulted countless library catalogs (and rudimentary online search tools) to develop a command of time studies. Even as

a graduate student with modest means, I paid for a subscription to *T&S* because there was not yet enough interest for my university to carry it and no digital record of the issues existed. Once I completed my doctorate, I was honored to join *ISSST* and gain more access to this body of scholarship I treasured. However, knowledge acquisition was slower then: *T&S* contained only three issues a year during that period and *ISSST* met on a triennial basis (as it still does today). So, it took a relatively measured pace to access the field of time studies (not unlike searching the library stacks).

Technological advances in communication would speed this process remarkably. More efficient online search tools and the wide availability of digitized publications soon changed the means by which time studies was known and grown across disciplines and publication outlets. The arrival of a new millennium generated more topical interest in time, both in scholarly and popular circles. This was evidenced in a number of special journal issues devoted to time. Time scholarship now appeared in more and more disparate places and grew quickly. It felt like the turning point had arrived in which we would realize the transdisciplinary vision in Barbara Adam's first editorial. She described the need for eroding (although not abandoning) disciplinary boundaries and the development of transdisciplinary perspectives and non-dualistic modes of inquiry.

Despite the promise held (or hoped for) in the societal developments that accompanied the beginning of *T&S*, there were unintended consequences—as is the case with complex adaptive systems. Thus, three decades later, while the *work* of time studies as a field has experienced a period of great expansion, the *scholars and institutions* who produce the work have experienced radical compression. An institution once regarded as slow and stable has gradually become fast and precarious. Speed and quantification typifies the new academy: The number of full-time positions has shrunk while remaining full-time faculty are expected to do more, faster, better. So, while time studies has indeed grown and appeared in more and more places, ironically, fewer scholars have the temporal resources to be in conversation with each other, building the transdisciplinary body of knowledge and modes of inquiry envisioned for *T&S*. Transdisciplinarity requires time: Time to study, digest, and engage across disciplines.

The historicity of time studies has contributed to its challenges and its successes. While the last 30 years have given rise to substantial growth in time-related scholarship—afforded both by the historical period it occupied and its technological affordances—the transdisciplinary study of time has been somewhat arrested in that same period. The challenges in developing transdisciplinary perspectives lie in the increased rationalization of the academy. Disciplinary boundaries, evidenced in the practices of journal reviewers and tenure and promotion committees, remain rigid. This is not only based on disciplines but on journal citation metrics that favor larger fields and their disciplinary languages.

Despite these challenges, the promise and opportunities for new knowledge and understanding in time studies abounds: It resides in the work itself. For instance, the precarity of the academy has not unfolded in isolation from other institutions. The gig economy is an inherently temporal construction and understanding its impact is critical, theoretically and practically. Similarly, COVID-19 created a global conversation about time that fuels research across a range of topics, including remote work policies and renewed focus on gender inequities in the second shift. Acceleration is also likely to continue in the near future, begging questions of how attention to slower processes is maintained and supported rather than continually fragmented. The ethics and equitability of artificial intelligence accompanies this issue. Relatedly, climate change demands our attention as we seek to create urgency regarding the future amidst continually shrinking feedback loops in social media. And deeply contested relationships between the past and future are on display in global protests to end state-sanctioned violence, while some factions in American politics work to a return to a time when voting was restricted and the Southern Confederacy reigned. These issues and more call for deeper, sustained inquiry through a transdisciplinary, temporal lens.

Given the uncertainties we face, it is no surprise that time studies continues to develop and flourish. However, while time is a longstanding focus of research across disciplines, we are still quite young as an organized area of study. Therefore, as Fraser (1992) wrote in his welcome to the inaugural *T&S* issue, “pioneers can have no maps.” They simply inherit tools. As we mature in size and scope, exigencies of the work itself may demand that we return to these transdisciplinary tools with increasing frequency. We may even fashion a greater assortment of tools in an iterative, long-term process, guided by the wisdom that transdisciplinary demands time.

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## Author Biography

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