

Introduction: Untimely Bodies: Futurity, Resistance, and Non-Normative Embodiment

Joshua St. Pierre and Kristin Rodier



Sarah Allen Eagen, "A Universe Wrapped in Skin" (Mixed Media on Mylar 30" x 69"); <http://www.saraheagen.com>

Thinking is most at a loss when it tries to say what time is.

—Christina Schües

If you want academics to write the most abstract thing possible, ask them to write about the body.

—Cressida J. Heyes

This second epigraph picks out a central problematic of our special issue, with equal measures of humour and lucidity. The body is at the same time obvious and perplexing, mundane and enigmatic. This special issue of *Feral Feminisms* writes towards these challenges through the under-theorized intersection of embodiment, temporality, and resistance. We begin from the thought that time and embodiment are necessarily connected and thus an integral condition of the possibility of meaning, language, community, and resistance politics. Dominant orders of



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time structure our social, economic, and political lives in ways that often flatten the complexity and richness of lived experiences, and yet these temporal orders can be resisted and reformulated. Thinking through temporality, then, offers new ways of understanding how bodies resist normativity.

In our call for papers we asked how bodies that move, desire, communicate, fuck, laugh, stim, stutter, jiggle, give birth, and leak are possible openings for more hospitable, generative, and anti-oppressive temporalities. These questions require special attention to how time is lived. In the first place, there is not one time but many, an all-too-obvious fact for those of us dwelling within non-normative embodiments. Fat, for example, slows movement while quickening judgment. The moral imperatives surrounding fat embodiment point to a transient temporality: the “before” picture of a soon-to-lose-weight body. To use another example, a medical stroke resulting in cell death in the brain ruptures the sense of a unified experience—highlighting the differential rates of perception and agency within our bodies. The multiple rhythms within our bodies are only mobilized in immanent, partial, and contingent ways.

The multiplicity of time produces discordant rhythms or frictions. For example, there are frictions between corporeality and the demands of capital or between developmental milestones and neurodiversity. These frictive hesitations may be generative—breaking apart normative paces of meaning. Frictions can nevertheless also be an issue of survival. For a trans* teen seeking reassignment, the temporality of endocrine systems tenses in relation to the temporalities of bureaucracy, the medical-industrial complex, and transphobic violence. We live within and navigate multiple temporal rhythms, while rarely naming them for what they are. In this issue we ask: How can we bear witness to these temporalities while doing justice to those who inhabit them? What should be the goal of theorizing temporality? Undermining dominant temporalities? Fostering new and hospitable ones? Multiplying time? Sharing temporalities? Cultivating presents that are thick enough for non-normative bodies to inhabit?

The reason so much temporal difference and ambiguity is routinely hidden is in one regard simple: the Western social imaginary has been swept up in a myth of singular, linear, and unified time. Although somewhat anachronistic in contemporary theory, this monolithic drive might aptly be described as “progress.” For anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, progress is not a relic of the 19th century but has been “grandfathered” into our contemporary world through dreams of democracy, growth, science, and hope (2015, 21). The logic of improvement—whether manifest in terms of GDP, progressive politics, evolutionary unfolding, or historical materialism—smooths over temporal multiplicity and renders any elements incompatible with its dictates into a distant remainder. As Tsing writes:

Progress is a forward march, drawing other kinds of time into its rhythms. Without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns. Each living thing remakes the world through seasonal pulses and growth, lifetime reproductive patterns, and geographies of expansion. Within a given species, too, there are multiple time-making projects, as organisms enlist each other and coordinate in making landscapes. (2015, 21)

In this issue we seek to cultivate this type of attention to varied landscapes of temporality. Temporal patterns are indeterminate and patchy; one must be careful with perilous terms such as “timeline” or “the future” to describe the complex and cooperative project of time-making. There is not one time but many, and refusing the dominant march of time enables us to *notice*—something which the Western philosophical tradition with its love of universals is so often incapable of doing.



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Phenomenology is the obvious caveat to the claim that philosophy remains ill-suited to the art of noticing time. This method enters at the level of embodied time in its contrast with clock time and normative temporalities. Temporality is for phenomenology something first *lived* in our bodies before abstracted and standardized by a clock. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, “In every moment of focusing, my body ties a present, a past, and a future together. It secretes time, or rather it becomes that place in nature where for the first time events, rather than pushing each other into being, project a double horizon of the past and future around the present and acquire an historical orientation” (2012, 249). Phenomenologically speaking, time emerges as singular in experience before it is carved up into meaning (e.g. past, present, and future) by reflective consciousness. Time is a field of presence and we live in a “now” through our bodily engagement with the world. We commonly say that an evening with a friend “flies by” while a hot afternoon class “drags”—yet this is neither a poetic flourish nor a psychological trick. Time is embodied and it is lived. Phenomenology thus provides a means of attending to our most intimate and global experiences of time and the relations between.

Yet while phenomenology is useful as one method of noticing temporality, it is not always the only or even best way to do so. Certain modes of phenomenology have been justly criticized for reproducing a limited and problematic view of the self and agency. The danger of the phenomenological method, which always starts from embodied experience, is subordinating and erasing non-human agency, as well as ignoring pre- and supra-individual elements of our experience.

We thus start with the assumption that temporality always exceeds the human. There is a wild interplay of temporal patterns that construct our feminist worlds, oppressive or enabling, and we will inevitably miss these patterns if we simply focus on “bodily time.” Alison Kafer writes that as a self-identified “crip” (a radical reclamation of a disabled identity), “the future is written on my body” (2013, 1), a statement that is true not because the human body is a bounded canvas, but rather because the lines that inscribe the (lack of) future on disabled bodies are past the skin. The human body is a *meeting*, a knotted and unstable junction of temporalities. The act of noticing thus requires a process of unknowing, of watching without expectation and making space for indeterminacy within precarious assemblages of time.

Recognizing that the experience of temporality lived within our bodies is always an unstable junction of heteronomous forces demands careful attention to the temporal make-up of neoliberalism and late-capitalism. More specifically, if “progress” represents one horizon of contemporary time-making projects, “precarity” (a mode of socio-temporal instability) is assuredly another that must be recognized in tandem. These horizons both conflict and collude.

Modernity is predicated upon “the future,” which itself is a project, a projection, a fabrication of continual improvement undertaken by *homo faber*—“man,” the maker. The future is entangled with globalized capitalism and Western colonization since, as Franco Berardi argues, “as long as spatial colonization was underway, as long as the external machine headed toward new territories, a future was conceivable, because the future is not only a dimension of time, but also of space. The future is the space we do not yet know; we have yet to discover and exploit it” (2011, 24). Modernity promised stability and amelioration on the backs of the *lumpenproletariat*, women, disabled peoples, the “sexually deviant,” racialized peoples, and other marginalized subjects who could be exploited. Yet, the myth of a brighter future and its continued expansion and accumulation of wealth can only be sustained for so long. “Now that every inch of the planet has been colonized,” continues Berardi, “the colonization of the temporal dimension has begun, i.e., the colonization of mind, of perception, of life. Thus begins the century with no future” (2011, 24). According to Berardi, the future conceived of as a

continued and stable expansion has necessarily begun devouring itself. Marginalized bodies are the first to feel these effects.

The unraveling of progress erodes dominant time orders, which has an important affective dimension: the future was once a clear-sighted (well-earned) reward, but has now given way to a fragment of fears, aporias, complicity, part-time jobs, and debt. Fordism (1920s-70s) promised a stable career and living wage for all; our generation is not sure the air and the oceans will survive 30 more years of this long-abandoned pledge (read: conceit) of continued growth for all. The futures are so multiple that they become noise that we choose to and now habitually ignore.



Sarah Allen Eagen, "And Then They Touch You"
(Mixed Media + Glitter on Mylar 30" x 69") with
detail; <http://www.saraheagen.com>

This unstable temporality—in other words, precarity—is undoubtedly violent; yet it would be a mistake to understand it as an aberrant phenomenon within human history. Globalized capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2000) has created an irregular and temporary shelter from precarity for a small portion of the geopolitical population. To say this shelter was “created” is, of course, duplicitous since the future has only ever been possible by enslaving the lives, bodies, and temporalities of other beings. This includes the temporalities of land,



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community, and desire. Precarity is a characteristic feature of cooperative life throughout history. The difference, of course, is that the contemporary stakes of precarity resonate through patterns of globalized crisis. More than ever, we must learn to live and survive within unstable temporalities.

Our futures will thus be precarious, whatever else they may be. As Tsing suggests, “Indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening, but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible” (2015, 20). The possibility of life within our contemporary world, marked by a time both precarious and hegemonic, demands that we cultivate alternative conceptions of time that foster pockets of collaborative survival and reclamation. As Kafer writes in the context of disability, “The task, then, is not so much to refuse the future as to imagine disability and disability futures otherwise, as part of other, alternate temporalities that do not cast disabled people out of time, as the sign of the future of no future” (2013, 34). This imagining is first and foremost a noticing.

Or better, insofar as our relation to time is never passive, imagining futures otherwise is a type of *engaged* noticing. Temporality is an immanent site of resistance. If temporalities are rooted in and lived through one’s body then so is the capacity to resist dominant time orders. Reclaiming the possibilities of “untimely bodies” thus requires that we attend to how the multiple and impure ways in which bodies that are cast out of time simultaneously reconstitute these socio-temporal relations. That is, resistance within the state of precarity takes on the impure character of *salvaging* time and energy from within dominant orders. Bodies are never passive receptacles but have the power to act in concert with other beings. It is from within the various relations that give shape to resistance—for example, public and personal, deliberate and unwilling—that we can find the collective power of untimely bodies to disrupt hegemonic temporalities and carve out radical enclaves.

“Untimely Bodies: Futurity, Resistance, and Non-Normative Embodiment” folds many experiences together in the effort of noticing, reimaging, and salvaging time. **Kelly Fritsch** opens the issue by calling out the material and discursive practices within neoliberalism that render the future unintelligible for disabled children and disability more generally. What Fritsch terms “neoliberal futurity” reinscribes the hope of a future without disability. **Katie Aubrecht** creatively layers this discussion through a poetic exploration of disability and parenthood. The experience of disability is located here in the transient yet enduring relations between bodies. **Tosha Yingling** explores fat embodiment through the discussion of digital avatars and the ways in which embodiment and identity are malleable and communal. How are times and spaces entangled? What is the political character of these entanglements? **Ros Murray** approaches this cluster of issues through a queer existential reading of Chantal Akerman’s *Je tu il elle*. Engaging with Simone de Beauvoir and Jack Halberstam, Murray explores a queer existentialism that attends to the personal and the particular and leads towards a “phenomenological generosity, explored through a celebratory opening out onto the world and its queer potential.” **Sandra Alland** takes the issue of the political entanglement of space and time in a slightly different direction, using stop-motion photography, prompting a reflection on how ability is created through structural barriers and how bodies are made (and made unlivable) by recreating the complex experience of inaccessibility. How, Alland asks us, are mobility and temporality produced and restrained by (in)accessibility? Weaving between these two projects, **Sofia Varino** highlights the danger of mobility and movement as related to the visibility of queer bodies and spaces through a reading of *The Artist is Absent*, an exhibition of Marina Abramovic reperformances at CPW25 Gallery in New York. **Eunsong Kim** closes the issue, exploring not only the production of desire spread through time, but also the gaps of



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meaning left open by desire and the dangers and possibilities lurking therein. Lastly, we wish to thank **Sarah Allen Eagen** for contributing the artwork in this issue that explores the haunting relations between bodies in the twenty-first century.

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JOSHUA ST. PIERRE is a PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Alberta. His current research examines the relations between speech, embodiment, and disability, looking specifically at the generative breakdown of speech as a performance of rational human and posthuman identity within political economies.

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SARAH ALLEN EAGEN is a New York-based artist exploring contemporary notions of beauty, obsession, and intimacy. Inspired by bio art, body architecture and biological surrealism, her art practice explores the sensual, vulnerable and alienating aspects of contemporary. Her work quivers on the knife's edge of seduction and repulsion. Eagen is originally from Toronto Canada. She holds an MFA from Parsons the New School of Design. Her work has been exhibition at The Kitchen, New York and was featured at the Toronto's 2011 Nuit Blanche Contemporary Art Festival. Her most recent solo exhibitions have been at Vitrina Gallery, Chashama's 461 Gallery and The Beacon Room in New York. Her artwork can be seen at <http://www.saraheagen.com>