



RETHINKING WAITING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WAITING AS A TEMPORALITY AND ITS LIMITATIONS IN UNDERSTANDING THESE PROCESSES AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENA

REPENSAR LA ESPERA: UN ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DE LA ESPERA COMO TEMPORALIDAD Y SUS LIMITACIONES PARA ENTENDER ESTOS PROCESOS COMO FENÓMENOS SOCIALES

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Abstract:

This article critically analyses the conventional conception of waiting processes, understood exclusively as temporality, examining their limitations in capturing the complexity of waiting as a broader social phenomenon. Drawing on the philosophical paradigm of Discontinuist Materialism, it argues that waiting time must be understood as more than a singular, ontologically negative, and necessarily detrimental phenomenon. The text underlines the intricate relations between waiting time and other aspects of social life, suggesting the need to broaden the perspectives of analysis hitherto employed. It reveals the need for a new analytical framework incorporating social, cultural, and historical factors when examining waiting processes. This article aims to take another step towards reconfiguring the temporal dimension of waiting, paving the way for constructing a more nuanced approach to this multifaceted phenomenon.

Keywords: Waiting, Temporality, Phenomenological Time, Ontologically Negative Time, Axiological Time.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza críticamente la concepción convencional de los procesos de espera, entendidos exclusivamente como temporalidad, examinando sus limitaciones para captar la complejidad de las esperas como fenómenos sociales más amplios. Basándose en el paradigma filosófico del Materialismo Discontinuísta, se sostiene que el tiempo de espera debe entenderse como algo más que un fenómeno singular, ontológicamente negativo y necesariamente perjudicial. El texto subraya las intrincadas relaciones entre el tiempo de las esperas con otros aspectos de la vida social, planteando la necesidad de ampliar las perspectivas de análisis hasta ahora empleadas. Revela la necesidad de un nuevo marco analítico que incorpore factores sociales, culturales e históricos al examinar los procesos de espera. Con este artículo se pretende dar otro un paso hacia la reconfiguración de la dimensión temporal de la espera, allanando el camino para la construcción un enfoque más matizado de este polifacético fenómeno.

Palabras clave: Espera, Temporalidad, Tiempo Fenomenológico, Tiempo Ontológicamente Negativo, Tiempo Axiológico.

INTRODUCTION

In literature, waiting is a recurring theme that highlights the complexity and depth of the human experience. In Dino Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe*, the protagonist, Giovanni Drogo, spends his entire life waiting for a never-occurred military invasion. In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The General in His Labyrinth*, the protagonist Simón Bolívar spends his final days waiting for death to come. Furthermore, in *No One Writes to the Colonel*, also by Garcia Marquez, the protagonist waits endlessly for his promised pension.

The experiences of these literary characters demonstrate that waiting is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that goes beyond simply passing the time. While waiting has been studied within the framework of temporalities, there is a need to expand this framework to encompass more aspects of these enriched and complex phenomena. Bandak and Janeja (2020), for instance, in their *Ethnographies of Waiting*, point out that, in studying waiting ethnographically, “[w]e seek to engage with a plurality of ways of being and inhabiting time as seen through the figure of waiting” (2020, p. 5), emphasizing the importance of engaging with the plurality of ways of being and inhabiting time through the figure of waiting.

This paper seeks to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature of waiting time by proposing a critical and dialectical analysis of the most used conceptions of waiting as a time or temporality. Drawing on the philosophical paradigm of Discontinuist Materialism (Pérez-Jara, 2022) developed by Spanish philosopher

Gustavo Bueno, we will explore traditional waiting analysis and provide a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon based on the problem of current interpretations.

Specifically, this paper argues that waiting can be understood in the opposite way as has been conceptualized until now. In other words, this paper proposes that waiting is more than just a singular time that is ontologically negative, experiential, or phenomenological, and axiologically determined generally in a negative way. By critically examining these notions and emphasizing the importance of understanding the material conditions that shape the time of the waiting processes, this paper aims to build the basis for an alternative approach to these phenomena from an entirely different perspective. Essentially, the most common notions about the role of time in waiting will be inverted, conceiving the time as part of the waiting and not the wait as a social or psycho-experiential time.

By adopting a critical and dialectical methodology and drawing on the philosophical paradigm of Discontinuist Materialism, this article aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of waits as phenomena that could present an experiential time but fundamentally shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. This analysis is hoped to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature of the time in the waits, providing a new framework for understanding these complex and multifaceted social phenomena.



WAITING AS TEMPORALITY

In many respects, the starting point for analyzing the waits has often been a philosophical/scientific analysis of the current theories of time. This aspect is considered crucial, as waiting is assumed to be a specific type of temporality, albeit with more or fewer unique characteristics. This perspective has led to existing analyses being framed within the epistemological structures of temporal analysis. This notion constitutes one of the primary issues in waiting studies across various social disciplines.

In this regard, Alicia Lindón observes: “Waiting signifies a pause in becoming or a deceleration, at least of certain aspects of life that remain inactive or immobile until the expected outcome is achieved. Consequently, the temporal dimension represents a crucial aspect in understanding waiting: strictly speaking, waiting is time” (Lindón, 2019, p. 46).

This conclusion must be revised, as waiting entails much more than time. However, it is acknowledged that this has been the ontological feature common to most analyses. The theoretical differences between the studies lie in other aspects, relating more to epistemological and methodological issues rather than ontological (concerning time) *per se*.

Based on this shared assumption, one can then discern the various modulations present in theories on waiting, specifically from the conception of time that these theories employ. Three general positions can be identified and summarized: a) a physical/naturalist or cosmological conception of time, b) a socio-anthropological one, and c) a phenomenological one.

The first conception (a) associates the origin of waiting processes with supposed ruptures or interruptions in natural or physical time flow. This temporal order would exist independently of people and their ideas. The second (b), although acknowledging the time and waiting objectively, locates their origin in social times, materialized in the variable temporalities imposed by society on the individual. The third and final conception (c) views time as a quality of the subjects in a Kantian or Bergsonian manner. They are the ones who confront the issue of temporal conflict as they experience a crisis in the waiting processes. In addition, a fourth position called the mixed perspective (d), establishes points of contact between several of these conceptions, with its stance on time varying according to the combinations it forms.

WAITING FROM A PHYSICAL/ NATURALISTIC OR COSMOLOGICAL TIME PERSPECTIVE

Numerous studies have ontologically conceived waiting processes from a physical perspective when considering them as a temporality (Crespo Díaz, 2017; Dwyer, 2009; Schweizer, 2008). According to Lucie Pickering (2016), that is situated in what “Gordon (2011) terms ‘cosmic time’ or ‘mechanical time of life, aging, and death’” (2016, p. 454). Due to its characteristics, this perspective separates time from any socio-cultural construction, although these may exist. Nevertheless, it establishes the starting point of the analysis in the objective existence of a unique and



universal time to which all existing phenomena must be subjected, independently of the more or less accurate interpretation at different moments of human scientific and technical development. This perspective could be referred to as an extra-somatic conception of time.

Although not all authors take their analyses to the extreme of the spectrum, the fact remains that if one uncritically follows some of the conceptions used, it is not always evident how one could avoid reaching the extreme of believing in a universal (physical) time for all things. Attempts have been made to overcome this obstacle by framing the analytical positioning in specific areas, fields of knowledge, or in some predetermined theoretical positions. Authors such as Ferrie & Wiseman (2019) associate many conceptual approaches with the literary or philosophical field, with a marked inclination towards objectification, both of time and waiting. The tendency here is to simplify subject autonomy and control waiting rhythms. This inclination is because these temporalities are prior to subjectivities. The idea suggests a predisposition to search for pre-given objective elements, metaphysical, as constitutive essences of time in these disciplines. These criteria are held in a descriptive rather than a genuinely explanatory or analytical manner.

For instance, Bissell (2007) and Schweizer (2008) attempt to approach waiting as temporality from presuppositions linked to factual, objective situations. In this respect, they are less metaphysical. However, they also suffer from the physicalist objectification of time and waiting. In both cases, a conceptualization referred to as chronometric can be observed, which is characterized by framing the analysis of waiting

within the frameworks of a supposed 'ideal time,' following a linear development pattern. This temporal dimension would be the purported time that waiting disrupts, stops, or directly breaks.

In summary, waiting as temporality is often studied from a physical perspective, leading to an extra-somatic conception of time that separates it from socio-cultural constructs. Some authors objectify time and waiting through a metaphysical lens.

WAITING FROM A SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL TIME PERSPECTIVE

Another way to analyze waiting as temporality is from the socio-anthropological perspective. This perspective considers time a socially constructed reality rather than an extra-cultural physical aspect. Time is seen as a social representation, with human groups creating explanations and institutions for various phenomena (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The social agency is analyzed within socially determined time, with actors moving between contexts and changing temporal orientations.

Bandak & Janeja (2020) emphasize exploring how waiting is experienced as passive or active, enabling ethnographic exploration to determine forms of action, thought, and social relations linked to time. Some authors, such as Auyero (2012) and Pierre Bourdieu (2000), view subjects as passive in these socially given times.

Lindón (2019) suggests that waiting confronts urban acceleration by stretching lived time, while



Auyero (2012) and Schweizer (2008) analyze waiting's specific impact on individuals as temporal flow disruptions. Temporal ruptures carry moral implications, with waiting persons being out of sync with time and expelled from the productive community.

Pickering (2016) explores productive citizenship construction concerning time-sensitive production¹. This analysis risks reducing social phenomena's complexity to the temporal dimension, potentially overlooking intricate relationships between time and other aspects of social life. This perspective may need more precise boundaries and account for diverse ways time interacts with other dimensions of social life.

Furthermore, analyses may assume rationality in the flexibility of various temporal spaces where the social agency is expressed. While social actors often play a passive role, they may find mobility between different temporal spaces, such as specific industries or organizations. Individuals have some agency in selecting temporal spaces by choosing actions like applying for jobs with particular working hours.

However, focusing solely on the temporal dimension might overlook the intricate ways waiting interacts with various other temporal and non-temporal phenomena. Adopting a dialectical approach would enable a more comprehensive understanding of waiting as a universal human experience, considering its temporal aspects and how it relates to and is affected by various other phenomena. This would lead to a more nuanced understanding of these processes.

In general, it is possible to say that the socio-anthropological perspective views waiting as a socially constructed reality, focusing on how individuals experience and navigate time within various contexts. However, the approach may overemphasize the temporal dimension, potentially neglecting the intricate relationships between time and other aspects of social life.

WAITING FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL TIME PERSPECTIVE

The third type of notion is the conception, which refers to those that conceive of waiting from a phenomenological temporal perspective, and that is to say, close to individual subjectivities. This position is particularly notable among Kantian philosophers, not a few anthropologists, some sociologists and, to some extent, among psychologists who deal with waiting. In all these, the "experience of waiting time" constitutes the fundamental category of analysis within this field of study. Hence, here it is called this intro-somatic conception of time insofar as it frames the temporal phenomenon, fundamentally in particular individuals' perception of it.

Here, it should be pointed out that, conceptually speaking, Philosophers have made the most significant contributions to temporal theories of waiting, particularly those that highlight subjective temporality as the framework for human waiting. Among the philosophers,

1. In the Cuban civil code, for many years, this attitude was typified as a minor crime, in the so-called "Law against Vagrancy."



Bergson stands out for his analyses of time and the relations between waiting and time. Bergson sees waiting as a temporal conflict between internal time or duration (*durée*) and the temporality of reality, which is analogous to the individual's but beyond their control. Waiting emerges as a conflict between different temporalities, with the individual's duration subordinated to the conditions imposed by reality and its given times. Bergson also believes that different emotional attitudes are directly related to time, and social time should not be equated with measurable time units but as an experiential dimension of social life. As Bandak and Janeja put it, social time is "not to be equated with measurable time units but rather as an experiential dimension of social life, which the watch and clock time may only partially measure" (2020, p. 18).

Schweizer (2008) argues that waiting is a fundamental temporal contradiction, where the acceleration of modernity accentuates the tedium of waiting. The constant social change leads to a contraction of the present, which painfully prolongs waiting. The experience of waiting is thus the experience of the impossibility of experiencing reality as space and time expand to flat, tedious dimensions. On the other hand, Heidegger, according to Han (2017), sees waiting as the solution to the temporal problem of modernity. Heidegger identifies being itself, in its temporality, with states associated with waiting, such as whiling, tarrying, and perpetuating. For Heidegger, temporal figures like "hesitation," "waiting," or "patience" have the purpose of founding a positive relationship with what escapes any readily available present. Therefore, Han's interpretation of Heidegger differs from those who

see waiting as a pernicious or harmful phenomenon.

According to Han, waiting is not a state of deprivation or anachronism but rather evidence of the temporal decoupling between subjective being and contemporary reality, as the age of haste and acceleration is an age of forgetfulness of being. Being permits lingering because it "whiles" and "perpetuates." Waiting does not expect anything concrete and refers to what evades any calculation, specifically temporal. It is a current of subtraction that does not have to be negative, and even if it were to arouse unpleasant feelings, these would only be the fruit of modesty in the face of the unrealizable. From this perspective, there is a certain objectivity in temporal processes, but in the Kantian way, as a subjective phenomenon of perception of reality prior to the will itself. The objectivity lies in the fact that it is a time apart from the actors as historical and social entities. Geißler (2002) highlights that subjective time does not pass evenly and has different perceptions and experiences, such as waiting, pauses, repetition, speed, slowness, etc.

The phenomenological conception of time tends to be spiritualist rather than voluntarist, although some authors take both positions. The fundamental difference from previous conceptions is that there is no stipulation of the univocity of time in its manifestations. It is not even ruled out that a human or psychological time of a zoological or anthropic type may exist. Moreover, social and natural times may converge or oppose each other, but these are not the ones concerning the "real" human's internal time. However, from these subjectivist perspectives, it is sometimes assumed that subjects have certain agencies over temporal



processes or how they are configured. Some approaches to waiting point out that it implies a certain “condition of possibility”, which can lead us to a future that is not necessarily pre-existent, nor closed to the intervention of the will. The temporality of waiting, as a disruption of the passage of chronological time, can revalue each instant of life, according to Saybaşılı (2011).

That is to say that human action could marginally modify both the time and the waiting. On the contrary, temporalities are phenomena quite open to change and transformation, and they can even play the role of spaces of psychological liberation. In this sense, it is pointed out:

Waiting is not simply a passage of time to be traversed. (...) [I]s more than merely an inconvenient delay. It is more than a matter of time. (...) we might think of waiting also as a temporary liberation from the economics of time-is-money, as a brief respite from the haste of modern life, as a meditative temporal space in which one might have unexpected intuitions and fortuitous insights. Waiting, as the French activist and philosopher Simone Weil advocates, must be relearned as a form of attention (Schweizer, 2008, p. 2).

The subjectification of time in this perspective varies from the previous positions, as time ceases to be an objective phenomenon of external reality. Instead, it is located in one or more other dimensions of reality, and there may be multiple subjective temporalities. John Rundell (2009) notes that we all wait for futures, yet not for the same ones in the same way or at the same tempo. The time that matters occurs in the social void, in

the individual subject as an echo chamber of the surrounding reality. It is readily accepted that a purely subjective time takes place in an individual vacuum, apparently depersonalized and socio-historically delocalized. Following this logic, given its subjective nature, time may be a source of analysis and inspiration.

This concept has been widely disseminated and intensively exploited in marketing and propaganda. Hence, the much-publicized ideas of the “value” of time (time is money) and the resulting possibilities for time-optimizing articles and objects. From this perspective, a car, a watch, a personal computer, etcetera would ensure optimal, rational, and efficient management, not of “time” but of “our” time.

From the DM perspective, these positions err, as the previous ones, but in reverse. Earlier, it was suggested that there is a way of metaphysics about things that “naturalizes” time and social waiting so that it almost loses contact with the subjects that make up society itself. In this case, time is subjectivized (“de-naturalized”) to become a quasi-psychological a priori category, which can only be explained to an approximate degree. In such a way, time is reduced to the empirical ego-case of each psychological subject. This approach leads to mentalism and essentialist psychologism, which ignores the factual dimensions that time also possesses.

Waiting is much more than just time, and there are multiple dimensions to consider when analyzing waiting phenomena. Ignoring this plurality means overlooking much of what constitutes waiting as a reality. This is not to say that temporality is not crucial to waiting, as it certainly is. Instead, this paper aims to re-evaluate

its importance concerning other dimensions to fully encompass the analytical field of waiting. However, a general reformulation of the temporal analysis of waiting can only be proposed after analyzing various positions on the issue.

In this regard, the position defended in this paper is clear. The operational criterion used is not based on psychological states, mindsets, or the loss of the sense of time. Instead, it is argued that time is very much present in the waiting processes, and the actors involved do not lose any sense of it. If there is a hyper-attention to time, actors are very attentive when structuring their proleptic plans and programs. In waiting, the very material operations of reality impose their rhythms based on multiple factors, always within the institutional logic where the waiting takes place. When changing institutional dynamics impose temporal relations different from those of individual actors, this only highlights the dialectics between the various institutions intersecting in waiting. These dialectics, also between temporalities, confront each other in the concave (social actors who wait) and convex (actors who participate in and manage the waiting but who are not waiting for themselves) perspectives within and between them.

In summary, the phenomenological perspective of waiting as temporality emphasizes the subjective experience of time and its relation to individual perception. However, this approach tends to overemphasize the subjective aspect of time, which can lead to overlooking the factual dimensions and the complexity of waiting as a multifaceted phenomenon.

WAITING FROM THE MIXED PERSPECTIVE

Alongside the previously defined positions, the fourth position within waiting studies analyses both times and waiting as phenomena that intertwine many aspects of the prior positions. These perspectives consider the mixture of temporal categories as a possibility that, to some extent, tries to establish a balance between the extremes.

In this regard, there is no absolute hypostatization of time and waiting. Likewise, full freedom is not given to human will as an element shaping temporalities, not even on a subjective level. This position is sustained because both extremes are impossible if one seeks at least a minimum of coherence with material reality. From these perspectives, time is never closed to socio-group intervention, but such intervention is regulated and coordinated within the social game. Hence, concepts such as capacity or agency prevail to the detriment of others, such as will or individual power.

This flexibility makes it possible to frame individual human action within a certain freedom regulated by social reality. Here, the idea of “expectations” is of vital importance. This idea comes after the theological inversion to replace the Christian concept of hope. In its current version, sometimes used as expectations or even as hope, it constitutes a critical factor in understanding the intertwining of sociological categories, such as class or status, with others of a psychological nature, such as longing, illusion, etcetera.



Bourdieu (2000) explains it clearly, trying to mediate the question of degrees of freedom and its nature:

I have so far argued as if the two-dimension constitutive of temporal experience –subjective expectations and the objective chances, (...) were identical for all; as if (...), all agents had both the same chances of material and symbolic profit (...) and the same dispositions to invest. But agents have powers (defined by the volume and structure of their capital) which are very unequal (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 216).

Here, the author of *The Distinction* clarifies the immanent existence of a framework of possibilities for action according to a given social reality. Even so, he does not take the subject's capacity for intervention as concluded, leaving room for individual action. These capacities are precisely expressed in the control certain social agents (political, economic, ideological) exercise over many elements that propel, coordinate, and, ultimately, determine social mobility.

Thus, waiting, as a social temporality associated with expectations in which hopes are placed, is not close to the capacity for individual action. The problem is seeing which individuals could "act" and which cannot. Moreover, to see under what circumstances these actions are possible or not. Here, the framework of an actor's possibilities, always socio-localized (in classes, genders, estates and castes), limits individual action within the social structure.

In this way, Bourdieu makes clear how these aspects can come together. Waiting constitutes one

of the multiple temporal phenomena that allow us to observe these disjunctions between the subjective and the objective of time, wherever they occur. According to Bourdieu, waiting is not the disjunction itself but a by-product of the situation of "rupture." In his view, the operative lines where the subject's will or illusions break down to give way to a reality quite different from the one imagined by the actor. Thus, waiting results from other anomic processes related to the projection into the future of plans and programs that some reality hinders. Bourdieu does not explain in this text what objective characteristics define these processes beyond pointing to the subjects' anguish, tedium, and boredom as unequivocal signs that they are going through one of these ruptures between expectations and possibilities of realization. Even though he is careful to clarify the matter by telling us that, although "subjective," these processes are not mental, it can be assumed that social, not biological-brain mechanisms would be involved. He leaves so many possibilities open that it is not surprising that, among those who cite Bourdieu in their research on waiting, the only identifiers of these situations are the individual testimonies where the "feelings" to which the author of the reproduction points are present.

This theory does not explain how, in this "universal mechanism," expectations tend to adjust to the actors' actual possibilities. Perhaps this is because expectations do not "adjust" to possibilities a posteriori, as Bourdieu suggests. In my opinion, there is no prior moment, no break, between this (psychological) "emergence" of certain expectations and their subsequent adjustment to reality. From the sustained

theoretical perspective, expectations constitute an aspect of reality itself, not individual consciousness. It is in this (social) reality, and precisely because of this reality, that specific hopes, expectations, and illusions take place and not others. These can be interpreted as readings, representations, plans, and interpretations coordinated with certain systems of ideas, ideologies, and maps of the world, which will be more or less effective in orienting the subjects on this plane of their reality. To admit otherwise would be to admit a more accurate “reality,” underlying or parallel, so to speak, to another. In my opinion, the scientific activity would be responsible for explaining the conditions of the possibility of these expectations and hopes. Besides, it should also consider the causalities involved in their realization or cancellation as an individual and social project.

In summary, the study of waiting, largely used as an explanatory tool for other phenomena, has traditionally been confined to the field of temporalities, despite notable exceptions (Auyero, 2012; Bourdieu, 2000; Day, 2019; Janeja & Bandak, 2020; Palmer et al., 2018) who have proposed treating it as an analytical concept. Most interpretations posit waiting as a time-related phenomenon, making its temporal dimension unique to take into consideration for building its conceptual proposals.

While the current analysis illuminates some general aspects of the waiting processes, a comprehensive exploration of all potential interconnections and the specific characteristics of this waiting time is still needed. These divining could illuminate the ontological basis of waiting

for a more coherent theoretical discourse. Additional research must focus on demystifying the transitions between time and waiting, as their associations with other realities often remain undefined. Despite these limitations, some existing studies hold value, offering research material useful to varied perspectives, including those dialectically differing from the authors. I what coming I will go deep into some of these approaches.

WAITING AS ONTOLOGICALLY NEGATIVE TIME

Another defining characteristic of the waiting as time is its attributed ontological negativity. As a result, waiting has been described as an “inactive activity,” a “temporal deviation” (Crapanzano, 1986; Schweizer, 2008), a “desynchronization of time” (Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2020; Brun, 2015), a time that fills the voids of our time (Gasparini, 1995) and a “temporal aberration” (Schweizer, 2002). It is commonly associated with “liminal” temporal situations, such as “intervals in-between-times” or more directly, with moments of timelessness, rupture, death, emptiness, and temporal suspension (Pickering, 2016).

Countless arguments, categorical concatenations, presuppositions, and concepts revolve around this idea. Most of these are based on philosophical arguments concerning certain temporal states that could be associated with waiting or even identified as waiting.

Byung-Chul Han (2017), analyzing modernity’s time, points to temporal intervals or “thresholds”



that constitute real zones of forgetfulness, loss, death, fear, and anguish. These are where all the aforementioned harmful feelings take place. However, he also points out that, because of their open-ended nature, these space-times could also give rise to longing, hope, adventure, promise and expectation, which need not necessarily be harmful.

For Han, phenomenologically, waiting becomes suffering (passion) “when the time interval that separates the present from the expected future is prolonged in the open” (2017, p. 43). It is here that it causes suffering. This is because fulfilling what is longed for, “the moment of the final possession of it or the final arrival, is delayed” (idem). The in-between is a time of transition between two defined situations or events. However, the in-between itself (in the middle of) cannot be defined. This gap generates feelings of unease, apprehension, and anguish, as it constitutes a kind of “step into the unknown,” a walking on the “threshold.” This in-between, which separates the departure from the arrival, “is an uncertain time (...). But it is also a time of hope or expectation, which prepares the arrival” (Idem).

Based on Han’s distinction between intervals and waits, he does not categorize the “in-between time” as waiting but acknowledges that it could result in waiting. Although Han does not explicitly define waiting as a negative ontological time, he implies it occurs in indefinite temporal spaces. This amplifies the slowed-down temporal sensations arising from these pauses. When there is no temporal control, nothing happens or is foreseen. According to Han and other authors, this creates one of the most unsettling sensations in

contemporary times: the feeling of missing out on time or being disconnected from it, which is akin to being dead without actually being dead. “Between points there necessarily yawns an emptiness, an empty interval in which nothing happens, in which no sensation takes place (...). These intervals in which nothing happens cause boredom [*Langeweile*]. Or they appear threatening, because where nothing happens and where intentionality can find no object, there is death” (2017, p. 26).

Similarly, in his classic essay on the perception of time, R.C. Larson (1987) notes that William James argues that “the filled time appears to pass more quickly than empty time” (Larson, 1987, p. 897).

Some authors view waiting as a possible state within temporality and as the very temporality that generates these intermediary states. Bissell (2007) and Schweizer (2008) characterize waiting as a temporal rupture where slowed and deadened rhythms coexist with faster events and practices. Drawing on Harvey’s (1994) notion of time-space compression, they argue that modernity’s temporality is fast and accelerated, a perspective shared by Massey and Bernal (1998).

Waiting is often an unwanted event that forces slowness in the average speed of modernity. In extreme cases, waiting can lead to paralysis, as Crapanzano (1986) noted. Janeja and Bandak (2020) consider it a “time gap or pause” where humans must also navigate their lives. According to Rebecca Rotter (2016), waiting causes the present to lose its focus on the now, resulting in derealization and a loss of vitality and creative force. Bourdieu (2000) describes waiting as the



“endless present,” where actors feel trapped, and alternative futures seem unattainable, leading to a lack of motivation to work towards distant goals.

Andrew Benjamin (2013) also views waiting as crossing a threshold where futurity is introduced as made possible by the present’s potentiality. In Bissell’s (2007) view, waiting is a container of chronological time that can be filled with “profitable activity.” Based on these states, a lucrative and thriving industry aims to avoid or eliminate these sensations. This will range from entertainment in waiting rooms in shopping malls and cinemas to euthanasia capsules that would help us to hasten death by not having to wait².

According to William Walters (2020), waiting time is inactive, meaningless, and liminal, causing terrible anguish for those who go through it, such as immigrants. This is the reason why their study is ethnographically justified. Rebecca Rotter (2016) shares this idea, noting that the indeterminacy of waiting often receives little attention in social research. Existing research on asylum processes typically focuses on events such as travel, interviews, and appeal hearings, with little attention given to the everyday life of waiting between these events, perhaps because it is assumed that something of interest could only happen during these periods.

Palmer, Pocock and Burton (2018) argue that waiting attracts more ethnographic attention when activities revolve around waiting, such as economically profitable times. They suggest that this approach prevents waiting from being

analyzed from a temporally open and omnivorous perspective that encompasses aspects beyond its pernicious features, such as the percussive features of the entertainment industry. The author of this paper suggests that critical analysis of waiting should not be limited to a particular temporal framework such as contemporaneity. Rather, it is proposed to expand the range of dialectical relations associated with temporal processes of waiting and observe their connections with spatial and operational dimensions of the process itself.

This idea suggests that any analysis of waiting in the context of modernity must always be grounded in the specific socio-historical dimension, including temporal, spatial and operational dimensions. It is possible to fully understand waiting by considering these aspects, as modern temporal phenomena occur within a particular socio/anthropological time. It is important to ask whether the context in which each particular research takes place is temporally modern or whether it must fully assume the dynamics of modernity. These aspects must be understood to include all the material dialectics occurring in each operational space where the temporality of waiting occurs. The context imposes certain characteristics and limits on waiting, even in a temporal sense, determining one interpretation over another.

Regarding waiting as indeterminacy, it should be noted that states of total indeterminacy do not correspond to waiting as such. For waiting to exist as a process, even temporally, it must be constituted in a defined operational framework

2. In this regard, some companies offer services selling euthanasia devices on a commercial basis, where individuals can hasten their end by accessing a “quick and painless” death in a completely autonomous manner. See: <https://www.xataka.com/otros-dispositivos/sarco-capsula-suicidio-asistido-que-promete-muerte-rapida-dolor>.



where the referent is known to the waiter, even if they never reach it. The time of waiting is the biographical (tempographic) fragment where this planning takes place, and operations are carried out in the function of this finality. Waiting or the time it takes place, if ontologically negative, would only concern the time that precedes it or will succeed it, but it cannot be said to be negative.

In conclusion, the significance of waiting can be understood partially or even mainly through its potential for understanding the ethnographic experiences of actors. However, from the perspective presented in this paper, waiting is an ontologically positive phenomenon that is identifiable and analyzable. It is important because waiting processes are material social institutions in the ethnographic field. Therefore, waiting should be incorporated into anthropology and all other social and human disciplines as part of a general categorical analysis of waiting in all its richness and complexity. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of waiting as a social phenomenon beyond its instrumental value in providing valuable information about the specific experiences of actors.

WAITING AS AN EXPERIENTIAL OR PHENOMENOLOGICAL TIME

Once we have explored the ontological negativity attributed to the time of the wait, we will delve into the critical analysis of waiting time as a phenomenological or experiential concept, exploring the relationship between the temporal experience of waiting and several phenomena. In this matter, Esslin (2001) and Gordon (2011), for

instance, view waiting as a constantly changing experience of time. Bandak and Janeja (2020) discuss the “poetics of waiting” as uncertain outcomes within temporal relations, gaps and intervals and waiting as temporality focuses on social actors’ subjective time experiences within these processes.

From a phenomenological perspective, time is linked to individuals’ sensations, thoughts, and experiences during waiting. Modifying these operations can provide control over this often-empty time. Saybaşılı (2011) proposes that obligatory waits can offer creative opportunities if resources are used wisely. However, he warns that certain resources, like mobile phones, can become addictive rather than helpful in controlling temporality.

Waiting occurs within social frameworks that shape its form and interior. While personal creativity in waiting is not entirely regulated, objective limits exist, especially when no guidelines are available for operations required during the waiting process. These guidelines are connected to anthropological space and time, with waiting taking place in institutional, characteristically anthropological contexts.

Schweizer (2008), referencing Bergson, suggests conscious time coincides with a portion of one’s duration but is difficult to scrutinize. Duration appears more as a thought than a reality. Subjects may wish to lengthen or shorten their duration, but one becomes aware of duration in the frustration of these attempts. Waiting, according to Schweizer, is more than time. It cannot be easily manipulated and is more than what we perceive.

Bourdieu (2000) posits that waits create temporalities when disruptions occur between plans and reality. This leads to tensions between the present and the anticipated future, causing dissatisfaction and a propensity to avoid the present.

Bandak and Janeja (2020) suggest “poetics and politics of waiting” to study the subjective and objective aspects of waiting. Poetics refers to individuals’ experiential mechanisms in understanding waiting. Following Herzfeld (2016), waiting is considered a process where individuals must navigate signs, social actions, and ambiguities. Poetics and politics of waiting can be coordinated with chronometry and chronology, where poetics relates to phenomenological interpretations of waiting, and politics concerns organizational and institutional mechanisms. However, these categories assume experientiality as a starting point and may not be suitable for analyzing phenomena requiring a more holistic approach.

Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen (2020) propose categories to account for the interplay between subjective waits and objective processes. They suggest a liminal/passive axis for subjective experiences and an objective/active axis for surrounding processes. The balance between these axes varies depending on the waiting form. If waiting time is filled with social time and the objective is achieved, waiting can seem productive. Otherwise, it is perceived as a waste of time and energy.

A common idea in waiting research is that changing perceptions of waiting situations can transform the experience itself. O’Kane (2008)

suggests that waiting de-instrumentalizes time, opening up new ways of experiencing reality. Ann Lauterbach (2008) explores this idea, questioning the meaning of “wasting time” and suggesting waiting as a form of resistance to institutionalized operations of reality. Explained in the DM terms of “resistance” to the institutionalized operations of reality. Schweizer (2008) points out that it is possible to think of waiting as a kind of “temporary liberation from the economics of time-is-money, as a brief respite from the haste of modern life, as a meditative temporal space in which one might have unexpected intuitions and fortuitous insights” (2008, p. 2).

Thomas L. Dumm contends that waiting can be a volitional act, representing a “powerful will” and an act of protest and rebellion for those resisting societal expectations (1998, p. 76). He believes waiting demonstrates an unbidden faith in the eventual fulfillment of one’s desires and that self-chosen waiting can be a devotion to finding a renewable resource for democracy among those willing to wait.

Despite their poetic appeal, the issue with these perspectives is the assumption of a reality outside the material, institutional world, where individuals can “escape” and be their true selves. Waiting is seen as a mechanism of liberation, a temporary pause in social control, and a break between institutionalized operations. However, this view should be examined and clarified within the context of this paper.

Waiting is not an evasion, avoidance, or interruption of reality, including temporal reality. In its institutional form, waiting is simply one of many aspects of social reality. Despite being



distinct from one another, waiting processes are part of institutionalized operations. Waiting processes can be considered *anthropotechnical*³ institutions in the two senses attributed by Peter Sloterdijk (2006).

Regardless of the reason, individuals in waiting processes are not exempt from following socially instituted rules. Even if they voluntarily wait, they are still subject to institutional regulations that may benefit or disadvantage them, requiring adherence to guidelines, including behavioral ones.

If individuals choose to evade or rebel against these guidelines, they are merely reacting in a dependent manner to a part of socio-anthropological reality. They remain within this framework until they transcend it by following the guidelines that reality demands, whether they like it or not.

A classic example of the subjectivist interpretation of a waiting process is found in certain views of Penelope's wait, considered the paradigmatic canon of the exemplary waiter (2008, p. 127). Some scholars, like H. Schweizer (2002, 2008), suggest Penelope develops a strategy to prolong her wait by unraveling her knitting every night in the last three years. Schweizer claims Penelope's nightly unweaving symbolizes the "intimate and immeasurable aspects" of waiting, often overlooked in public accounts of her waiting time that focus on her daily weaving of Odysseus' death cloak.

However, this interpretation neglects the

materiality of Penelope's waiting. She does not wait in isolation but is surrounded by institutions that guide and perhaps enable her waiting process. Weaving was a known institution in ancient Greece, allowing a wife to weave the mortuary cloak for her husband, who died in battle. This ceremony ensured the marriage and its responsibilities remained intact and were respected by the community. Penelope weaves not to fill the waiting time but because it is the very form, normalized by her society, in which she can wait.

Without adhering to this institution, Penelope would be what the suitors desired, a widow accessible for marriage proposals. Penelope's waiting is not isolated; she deals with suitors, protects her son, fortune, Ulysses' status, and herself. She survives in her socio-political circumstances, and her "creativity" lies not in weaving but in ingeniously choosing the most convenient institutionalized wait to hinder those who intended to prevent it.

It is crucial to note that Penelope is not a declassed woman but a mother, queen, or consort of the regent of a clan. She must represent the institutional canon of a faithful wife and protective mother while the men are at war. Her high-ranking position objectively allows this particular waiting as long as she performs the prescribed operations, such as weaving.

Therefore, Penelope's waiting is not just a matter of personal experience or subjective perception but is fundamentally shaped by her

3. Sloterdijk (2006) differentiates two artificial human behavior production forms. The first involves producing some people by others, termed "letting oneself be operated" (*Sich-Operieren-Lassen*). The second form involves humans producing themselves, akin to "practices of subjectivisation" or Foucault's "technologies of the self."

social status and position within the institution. Her ability to wait and weave is enabled and even demanded by her institutional context. This example illustrates the importance of recognizing and considering the institutional plane when examining waiting processes from a phenomenological or psychological perspective.

Moreover, waiting is not always seen as emancipatory from a psycho/phenomenological perspective. Instead, it is often viewed as constraining individual capacities and possibilities, acting as a mechanism of coercion of individual time by entities of “panoptic control” in modern societies (Foucault, 2011). Bourdieu (2000) suggests that waiting is one of the primary ways individuals experience power and the link between time and power. He recommends analyzing and inventorying behaviors associated with the exercise of power over the time of others and the instances that exercise such power. Behaviors like procrastination, delaying, stalling, postponing, putting off, and arriving late are part of this power dynamic.

For Bourdieu, waiting implies submission from the one who waits, as their interested intentions and desires will modify their behavior while the expectation remains. “Taking one’s time” or “giving time to time” are linked to the dynamics between those who hold a specific power over the time of others in particular situations. Making people wait, which, in Bourdieu’s words, would be “deferring by giving hope,” “postponing,” “delaying,” etc., is an integral part of the exercise of power over the time of others, particularly in specific situations.

Vanstone (2020) suggests that dependency and

passivity are common due to modernity’s complex interdependent relationships, where individuals play minor roles while waiting for others. Vanstone asserts that “we have no alternative but to wait, as we are embedded in processes with their temporalities” (2020, p. 19).

The issue is that this conflicts with the supposed individual freedom or “own time” that actors seem to have before social time. This prior time lacks clarification regarding its origin and characteristics. It is assumed to exist without specifying its nature. Critics do not realize that “subject” times are social times in which individuals are immersed.

Social processes and dynamics are not just or unjust based on their time or rhythms alone but on their material structure and function within the social system. Other relations determine the justice of existing social institutions, not their temporality.

Anthropologists have observed social temporality’s plurality, but this needs clarification. Many authors view this plurality as quasi-essential, non-historical, attributing it to multiple analytical perspectives. However, this view is not entirely agreeable.

Different subjects may have varying perceptions of the same phenomenon, but social temporalities’ plurality is better understood as resulting from diverse socio-historical and cultural developments. These developments are not static, like animal species in Linnaean conception, but rather dialectical and often conflictual.

The temporalization of reality is a dynamic, changing, and often non-peaceful cultural process intertwined with other cultures and temporalities.



Clashes may occur between different, similar, or antagonistic temporalities within a cultural sphere's institutions. Recognizing temporal plurality's historical and cultural dimensions is essential for a nuanced and accurate perspective on time and culture's complex interplay.

The phenomenological understanding of waiting does not support temporal monism or essentialist distributive plurality of temporalities. It refers to a subjective conception in a double sense, for both the subject experiencing it and the entities provoking it. Several studies linking waiting and power suggest relations in this sense, implying that waiting is a domination mechanism produced in a quasi-psychological sense, a desire for control.

The impulse to exercise control over those waiting, for the sake of control itself reduces any social phenomenon to top-down relations between rulers and subordinates. This formalism, rooted in Foucauldian panopticism or quasi-Freudian psychology, does not offer a heuristically positive explanation of why domination and control often involve waiting processes.

To understand waiting as a mechanism of domination, we must look beyond these formalistic views and explore the complex interplay between power, control, and waiting in a more nuanced and critical manner.

While psychological processes may be involved in the relations between those who wait and those who make people wait, they cannot be reduced to their psycho-phenomenological dimension alone. The central question is how this domination is produced and why it is possible in only one way. Understanding the material mechanisms beyond the executor's intentions, which allow the "time of

others" to be "controlled" by waiting, is necessary.

Exploring the limits and reasons for controlling this time is also important. To understand the dialectical relations framework, we must examine the precise institutional gears in which this domain operates. These gears are never random and do not respond to the dominant entity's chance or whim.

In conclusion, we have critically examined common conceptions of waiting time as phenomenological or experiential, analyzing the complex interplay between waiting processes and phenomena such as power, control, agency, and personal freedom. This approach allows us to understand the different approaches to this topic better, providing a solid foundation for further analysis of axiological conceptions of waiting time in the following section.

WAITING AS AN AXIOLOGICAL TIME

Concerning the axiological attributes of waiting, its most distinctive feature is its classification as an axiologically negative phenomenon. Waiting is commonly perceived as a harmful and damaging experience, often described as "a temporary aberration" (Schweizer, 2008, p. 8) or "an unwanted event" (Bissell, 2007, p. 287), among other terms, by those who endure it. Nonetheless, recent research is beginning to challenge this bias by focusing on certain aspects of the waiting process that can be recuperated and given a positive value. However, this perspective is mostly limited to academic research, as common

perceptions of waiting emphasize the negative aspects of the experience. The crucial issue, therefore, is not to determine the axiological quality of waiting but to identify the specific factors that, in each case, shape a quasi-moral conception of it, which is often negative. Richard Larson (1987), regarding queuing, notes that it can be a highly negative and frustrating experience unless concrete measures are taken. In some instances, Larson asserts, queuing can even constitute a genuine social injustice. This would be the approach of Laurence Morrow, a Time magazine essayist, who wrote in 1984:

Waiting is a form of imprisonment. One is doing time-but why? One is being punished not for an offense of one's own but for the inefficiencies of those who impose the wait. Hence the peculiar rage that waits engender, the sense of injustice. Aside from boredom and physical discomfort, the subtler misery of waiting is the knowledge that one's most precious resource, time, a fraction of one's life, is being stolen away, irrecoverably lost (Morrow, 1984, para. 3).

Kevin Gray (2009) highlights that the personal toll of being stuck in the temporal "limbo" of waiting is intensified by the inherent sense of degradation in waiting and the heightened awareness that "time, a fraction of one's life, is being stolen away, irrecoverably lost" (2009, p. 172). Some authors argue that the axiology of waiting is contingent on the capacity or willingness of particular actors to participate. Thus, two types of waiting can be distinguished. Firstly, there is patient, creative, and voluntary waiting, in which time disappears and is

experienced in a conscious and pleasurable manner. Secondly, obligatory waiting is almost always beyond our control (Saybaşılı, 2011), and is typically perceived as harmful and detrimental.

Giovanni Gasparini (1995) analyses the issue of waiting regarding its material costs, including its economic costs, to the individuals who wait. He notes that waiting is a source of irritation, not only because it can be tiresome, boring, and annoying, but also because it increases people's investment to obtain a service. This, in turn, increases the cost of the process and decreases the benefit derived from it. Therefore, the loss for the "waiter" is related to the fact that time, as a finite resource, becomes a normally disposable resource in waiting. For example, Lucy Pickering (2016) points out that waiting is often not considered an essential or productive use of time. Hence, exercises on the value of waiting are not typically recognized.

Likewise, Harold Schweizer (2008) contends that waiting, as an "undignified" situation, arises from the negation of instantaneity in a "culture of the instant," where being out of sync with this socio-productive time implies social death. Waiting, Schweizer argues, constitutes a temporal chasm that opens up between a hyper-accelerated society and an individual suddenly slowed down. Such a condition is far from morally neutral, as "the person who waits is out of sync with time, outside of the 'moral' and economic community of those whose time is productive...The waiter's enforced passivity expels him from the community of productive citizens; his endurance of time strangles him from the culture of money and speed" (2008, p. 8).

This reflection underscores the commonly held notion that waiting is unproductive time, which in



modern capitalism, is seen as a waste of time to be avoided at all costs. The adage "time is money," attributed to Franklin by Weber (2001), places waiting at the center of the ethos of capitalism as one of the primary impediments to the reproduction of goods or gifts and thus as an obstacle even to the salvation of the soul.

In this regard, time has followed a path similar to that of culture, from being subjective to becoming, for the most part, an objectified or objective phenomenon. Depending on one's perspective, the sacralization of time, particularly work time, and the establishment of consumption or leisure time as an axiologically positive time are clear indications of this trend. Conversely, waiting is often represented as a negative, "dead, lost, liminal" time.

The quality of human will, involved in temporal processes, is often the standard reference for establishing the nature of a temporal sequence. In short, if participation is conscious and desired, the temporal process will be considered positive, whereas if participation is unconscious, undesired, and unplanned, temporality is considered axiologically negative.

However, not all authors assume the axiological negativity of waiting. As mentioned earlier, several studies now recognize the possibilities and benefits associated with the temporal characteristics of waiting. Bandak and Janeja (2020) note that waiting can be studied as a mechanism of "disempowerment" that is structurally and institutionally imposed but also as a period of hope, reflection, and engagement (Appadurai, 2013). Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen (2020) point out that waiting can be transformed into active time if it can be filled with meaningful

content. These authors demonstrate how migrants in waiting situations sometimes adopt strategies to turn empty waiting into an activity open to unknown possibilities. Valeria Procupez (2015) suggests that the modalities of waiting are shaped by "those who make people wait and those who wait." Therefore, the valuation of these modalities is linked to both the position of the participants in the process and the particular balances of these relations in each waiting process. In both cases, it is noted that the attitudes within the waiting processes are, in several instances, determinants of the axiological and even morphological condition of the waiting.

Hassan Hage (2009) argues that waiting can not only be the opposite of boredom but can also be full of satisfying activities. Hage suggests that waits can be data-oriented processes that signal the passage to the next stage of the life trajectory. For example, traveling before university or starting a new job could be "a temporary respite from the everyday hustle, such as resting on a station platform for a few minutes before a train arrives" (Coleman, 2020, p. 47). Byung-Chul Han argues that when waiting constitutes a patient time, it does not represent a liminal or empty time but instead creates "stable bonds across large periods" (2017, p. 80). For some ethnographers, within ethnographic research itself, the value of waiting is not about actively and productively filling waiting time but rather about "valuing the wait as a learning (and hence productive) time" (Palmer et al., 2018, p. 5). Seen this way, waiting leaves space for the "unscheduled" to occur, enriching the researcher's ethnographic understanding.

In conclusion, adopting the abovementioned positions from the perspective employed here is

impossible. However, it is acknowledged that waits are not de-axiologised phenomena due to the institutional condition attributed here, which already imposes specific socially recognized axiological values. Moreover, it is not assumed that this must be of one type (good or bad) or another, determined by the waiting's temporality, a subjective interpretation of these, or even the waiter's operative attitude. The axiological classification of waits exceeds their temporal structure and the psychology of the actors linked to it. Therefore, as a social codification, the axiological contents of waiting do not refer to the ontology but to the epistemology of these processes. According to Jeffrey Alexander (2004), the fact that waiting has a specific (axiological) valuation has more to do with the relational contexts that involve the process in each case than with the waiting itself. These contexts involve multiple factors that must be determined in each situation. In any case, waiting implies a positioning of the waiting process within the anthropological space and concerning other institutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has critically examined various perspectives on waiting, drawing on the philosophical paradigm of Discontinuist Materialism. Various perspectives on waiting as temporality have been critically examined, including physical, socio-anthropological, phenomenological, and mixed perspectives. We have emphasized the importance of considering the intricate relationships between

time and other aspects of social life while acknowledging the limitations of purely temporal analysis. Additionally, we have explored waiting as an ontologically negative time, highlighting its potential for understanding ethnographic experiences while advocating for recognition of waiting as an ontologically positive phenomenon deserving further analysis in anthropology and other social and human disciplines.

Moreover, we have scrutinized waiting as an experiential and phenomenological time, analyzing the complex interplay between waiting processes and phenomena such as power, control, agency, and personal freedom. Lastly, we have addressed waiting as an axiological time, acknowledging that waiting processes are not devoid of axiological values due to their institutional condition. We have emphasized that the axiological content of waiting is shaped by the relational contexts that involve the process in each case rather than by the waiting itself.

This work demonstrates that waiting is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon warranting a more comprehensive and multidimensional approach beyond exclusively temporal analysis. Future research should consider the intricate interconnections between multiple characteristics of waiting time. Although previous studies have often highlighted this complexity, only a few notable exceptions have pointed to the need to transcend the centrality of the temporal perspective in the analysis. This paper aims to serve as a first step toward



reconfiguring the understanding of the role of time in waiting processes. As such, the first step has been a critical and dialectical analysis of existing approaches and results, paving the way for constructing a more comprehensive theory on the time of the waiting processes.



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