

# Timing, Identity, and Emotion in International Relations

Written by Andrew Hom and Ty Solomon

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While time and temporality have been mostly neglected in social identity theory, the idea of timing is wholly absent in any substantive sense. It receives no mention in seminal critical works on identity in IR (e.g. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996) and even efforts specifically attuned to the interplay of identity, narrative, and temporality (Ringmar 1996; Hall 1999; Callahan 2006; Steele 2008),<sup>[1]</sup> do not engage with timing as a theoretical category or a core empirical phenomenon. This silence about timing echoes in broader International Relations (IR) scholarship otherwise concerned with time (e.g. Walker 1993; Hutchings 2008; Hom and Steele 2010; Berenskoetter 2011; Lundborg 2011; Stockdale 2013; McIntosh 2015) as well as in temporally sensitive identity scholarship outside IR (Campbell, O'Rourke, and Silverstein 2010).

To be clear, by timing, we mean much more than the intuitive or idiomatic sense in which one exclaims 'nice timing!' after an unexpected or intentional concurrence of two events that help things work out in a desired way. Referring to such occurrences as colloquial matters of timing implies that they require little further explication and, more importantly, that they hold little potential for advancing knowledge about social phenomena. Rather, we understand timing as a fundamental human activity, a basic means of synthesising pertinent changes for practical and political effect. In the course of this chapter, we argue that combining social identity theory with this sense of timing holds significant benefits for IR: in general, a better understanding of time and its relationship to various political processes; in particular, a clearer formulation of the laborious and fraught work by which social selves come into being 'over time'.

## Using Timing to Unlock Time and Identity

Although the absence of 'timing' in social identity research is understandable, it is also regrettable because a fuller and more explicit treatment of timing holds the potential to highlight important and interesting aspects of identity in international politics. In particular, it helps explain the desirous dimensions of identity, which in turn explain the central emotional element of timing as a basic human activity. By desire, we refer to the affective dimensions of subjectivity that stem from the subject's fundamental lack of foundations, which engender desire for a stable sense of self. This desire often constitutes the emotional 'grip' (Glynos 1999) factor that helps to account for subjects' identifications with narratives that offer a seemingly stable vision of 'fullness.' Taken together, emotion and timing help clarify the political implications of any temporal, constructed identity. Before discussing these issues, however, we need to explicate just what we mean by 'timing'.

## Timing

Following Hom's (2013, 2016) recent work on time and IR theory and drawing on the social theory of Norbert Elias (2007), we deploy 'timing' not merely as an intuitive matter of when something happens but as a substantive

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theoretical concept in its own right that is distinct from and indeed analytically and practically prior to 'time' and 'temporality'. Elias (2007:38–39) locates 'time' and 'temporality' as linguistic artefacts that emerge to symbolise a dynamic and practical timing activity, which is a process of creative synthesis that proceeds by reference to a timing standard. For him, 'time' refers not to an existential or metaphysical thing, object, or dimension, but to a socially established relationship between two or more changing phenomena, one of which has been used as the frame of reference for organising the other(s). More specifically, timing proceeds by integrating and coordinating pertinent changes according to the chosen timing standard.[2]

Although Elias (2007:43–44) focuses primarily on repeatable and natural changes as the standards for successful human timing, any change continuum can provide a standard so long as social agents can use it to successfully synthesise the 'when-aspects' of various change continua they care about.[3] The timing standard does so by establishing priorities (which changes matter, and which of these matter more/most?), indicating how integration and coordination should proceed (what should happen and when?), and suggesting what compromises and sacrifices will be necessary. When successful, the timing standard organises changes in such a way that we are better able to orient ourselves in the (social) world, direct our individual and collective actions, and exercise self- and social control. When we have timed them successfully, we understand the relations between and importance of various changes and can decide how and when to act upon them. Thus a 'good sense of timing' not only indicates that we have a kairotic sense of when to take a specific action (Hutchings 2008) but also that we occupy a qualitatively intelligible and perhaps predictable realm in which it is feasible to do so, as in *chronos*. Likewise, a breakdown in timing or 'bad sense of timing' robs us of the capacity for effective intervention but also destabilises our larger worldview and sense that things hang together in an orderly, manageable fashion. Two implications of this view of timing are worth highlighting here. First, timing is always relative and positional, insofar as the relevance of various changes and the timing standard chosen are intrinsically matters of perspective. Second, and flowing from the first, timing is always for someone and something—it has a positionally-specific purpose.[4]

How do such timing activities and experiences produce the various 'times' or 'temporalities' we often find in IR, including linear, cyclical, and national-state variants (e.g. Walker 1993; Edkins 2003:1–13)? The 'figural' qualities of symbolic language, which tend to work 'in terms of reifying substantives' rather than dynamic relations (Elias 1989a:193–96, 1989b:342), provide the key link. For example, we regularly refer to the 'wind blowing' or a 'river flowing' even though wind is inseparable from its constitutive quality of blowing and a river is characterised by flowing (Elias 2007:36). Much the same, symbolic language transfigures the constitutive or characteristic features of a given timing activity into the objective or 'thingy' noun 'time'. So when we hear about linear time in IR, an Eliasian perspective suggests that there is a timing activity behind it that synthesises changes as unique, sequential, and unidirectional; whereas a cyclical time refers to changes organised in a recurrent sequence that implicitly allows for progress or regress (as in 'cycles of violence'); while national-state time refers to the admixture of a particular origin story, national holidays, and the teleological promise of political perfection sedimented over time by successive iterations of collective identity.[5]

At the limit, our highly successful and widely institutionalised practices for timing a huge variety of activities using solar (clock) and lunar (calendar) cycles has, through symbolic language, produced the idea of a freestanding, existential dimension of 'natural time' (Elias 2007:96). Such linguistic reification serves the crucial purpose of transferring knowledge about a timing mode from generation to generation but it can also elide the dynamic and practical aspects of timing by convincing us that there are 'times' independent of human effort. If we want to better understand 'time', 'temporality', and their relationship to various socio-political processes, we need to foreground their dynamic and human origin in timing (Elias 2007:35) so that we do not unintentionally reify the very activities we are trying to unpack and in so doing elide the relative and positional character of any particular time or temporality, which only emerges to the extent that it ably serves some purpose for someone.

## Identity as a Timing Standard

Identity formation is one such process. It has already been noted that identity formation is a dynamic and social practice with temporal qualities (Berenskoetter 2012; Prozorov 2011). We take no issue with such observations, but think that the discussion can be pushed much further by scrutinising the constitution of selfhood as a timing process

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with identity commitments as its timing standard.

In any timing activity, changes are synthesised into a coherent and orderly whole according to the timing standard. Although the aforementioned clock-based time reckoning is by now second nature for most, when timing in this way we implicitly prioritise the mensurable, quantified, and regularised changes produced by an internal escapement or quartz crystal (Landes 2000:8–18) as the frame of reference by which to coordinate our actions and lives. ‘Let’s meet at 9:30’ has no functional meaning if we do not both possess an understanding of this way of timing—that the ‘9’ refers to a morning hour of day and the ‘30’ to minutes, or half an hour beyond—as well as clocks coordinated to the same time zone, which allow us to plan ahead in order to arrive at the café at the same time.[6]

Clock reckoning is the most prevalent and likely intuitive example of a timing standard today, but it is in no way exclusive. Narrative theorists like Paul Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988) and David Carr (1986) have shown how the theme of a story provides a synoptic vision by which elements of experience are chosen, combined, and ordered to produce a followable sequence of events or vision of time leading as if by necessity to a conclusion that marks the narrative’s chronological endpoint but also its hermeneutical fulfilment (see Hom 2013 chp. 2). In narrative, the theme provides the standard by which the story’s other components are selected, integrated, coordinated—that is, by which the story is timed into a workable ‘plot’ that unfolds a particular temporality.

Given how important narrative is to a sense of self (Steele 2008; also Freeman 1993) we suggest that all this points to the idea that identity, or ‘who’ the social agent thinks she is, provides the timing standard by which to construct her self. In most autobiographies, the chronological conclusion also renders the subject in full. Inasmuch as the theme of a story is a timing standard and the theme of any autobiography is the self, we can think of identity commitments as the timing standard for the story of the self.

Along these lines, Solomon’s (2014:679) recent work on time and subjectivity shows social identities are not fixed, stable, and comprehensive attributes but rather fluid and ‘temporally decentred.’ This means they necessarily contain forward- and backward-facing perspectives that make sense of past experiences and future possibilities in a way that allows the subject to come into being by acting in the present. This idea of temporal decentring calls out the importance of timing to identity construction.

Identities are constructed through retrospective autobiographical or ‘self-reflexive’ monitoring of how various past events experienced and actions already taken ‘fit’ into one’s story of her self, where ‘fit’ refers to how consistent those actions and experiences are with her overarching idea of who she is (see Steele 2008:60–63). The overarching identity a social agent adopts also exerts a prospective or futural pull insofar as she envisions ‘how someone like me would act if/when certain situations arise’. For Solomon (2014: 672), drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the subject is continually constructed through a retroactive temporality, where the subject posits itself as ‘having always been’ a full or ‘whole’ self. Yet, this is a kind of ‘fantasy’ (in Lacanian terms), since the subject is always marked by a lack, a perpetual sense of incompleteness. Subjects are never fully self-present, since there is no extra-discursive or biological foundation upon which subjectivity ultimately rests. The subject is unstable, in this sense, insofar as it can never hook into a fixed foundation once and for all. This instability of subjectivity is part and parcel of the subject ‘not having fully been’ in the past yet ‘not quite yet being’ in the future. The subject only ever ‘will have been’ since it never fully reaches the future image of wholeness and centredness that it strives towards in its identity practices. As Lacan (2006: 78) puts it, the process of subject formation ‘is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation.’ The subject is thus an open self, produced at the ever-changing nexus of these ‘backward’ and ‘forward’ temporalities and constituted through identity practices simultaneously facing in both temporal directions (Solomon 2014: 674). Both retro- and pro-spection come together in an evolving present, where the subject takes actions or reacts to situations in accordance with her commitments. All of which is to say that the social agent’s identity poses the standard by which all the changes she experiences are integrated and coordinated into a coherent, consistent, and intelligible story of her life that produces and confirms who she is.[7]

By helping us determine what matters, how to (re)act, and when to do so, identity provides a timing standard. When successful, identity commitments help a social agent to produce a smooth and compelling account of herself that unfolds in an orderly and predictable manner—e.g. from birth through schooling to a successful professional career.

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When unsuccessful, the social agent's life may seem disjointed, unpredictable, and devoid of intelligible connections between her past development, her present state, and her future direction. All of these latter outcomes suggest some misfit, either between her chosen identity and her environment (e.g. a very slow runner who identifies as a sprinter) or her ability to integrate and coordinate herself to that environment (e.g. 'I should have known better' or 'I knew what to do but I just couldn't bring myself to follow through') and will thus require much more work to transform into a smooth and intelligible story of who she is. Most importantly, perhaps, unlike a wholly retrospective story, in lived experience the adequacy of one's chosen identity as a standard for timing her life is an open practical question, just as the stability of her sense of self is an ongoing and constant task of simultaneous retroactive and prospective (re-) production.

These backward and forward-facing orientations of the temporally decentred self also mimic the way in which timing enables the serial perception of time as such. Although we tend to think of generally linear time as something external to ourselves along or through which we move, this is a product of timing. Creative synthesis enables this when we recall 'distinctly what happened earlier and ... seeing it in [our] minds' eyes as a single picture, together with what happened later and what is happening now' (Elias 2007:31). In the case of serial time consciousness, this is a most basic sort of timing that coordinates the changing mind with a continuum of external stimuli and facilitates 'the perception of events which happen one after another as a "sequence in time"' (Elias 2007:31). When it concerns identity construction, we are usually interested in a more selective yet lengthier continuum of changes pertinent to who we think we are. Rather than the welter of immediate and often mundane experience from which we select and arrange elements such that 'time' seems to 'pass' one moment after another, our identity is based on more important and older recollections that we configure into a coherent narrative from which our sense of self springs.

The forward-facing temporality of identity similarly mirrors our basic prospective grasp of the continued flow of time (see Husserl 1964; Ricoeur 1984; Carr 1986). In basic time consciousness, we intuitively grasp what is likely to happen next based on our immediate context—e.g. if a ball is rolling along a table we expect it to fall towards the ground once it passes the table edge. If something novel happens instead—e.g. if the ball disappears or falls upwards—our 'sense of time' may falter.[8] If only one unexpected thing happens we may perceive that 'time stands still', but if many unexpected things happen at once or in quick succession we may perceive just the opposite, that 'time moves too quickly' or that 'chaos' replaces any apprehensible temporal flow. Once again, these possibilities and their implications for time are intensely relative and positional—that is, they pertain to our sense of time or feeling of chaos, which may not seem as such to others.[9] Much the same, our sense of who we are entails expectations about who we will become[10] and how we should and will react to future developments. If our expectations are confounded by events that are unprecedented or not easily accommodated in our autobiography, this may throw off our sense of time as well as challenge our identity because we do not know how to react, which in turn causes our well-ordered serial perception and our coherent, comprehensive, and clean vision of our self to falter.

These dynamics and tensions in identity construction and maintenance are well-known to social construction theorists, who often characterise self-identity as a sense of personal continuity or 'ontological security' that persists 'through' or 'over' time (Steele 2008; also Freeman 1993). However, in the account proposed here, both identity and time are matters of timing insofar as they involve a thinking subject who integrates and coordinates her personal change continuum with a variety of experiences in order to preserve or reproduce both a sense of orderly temporal continuity and a sense of coherent self. On this view, instead of understanding self-identity as a matter of establishing continuity 'through' or 'over time', it is more useful and accurate to approach it as a matter of self-identifying through timing. Similarly, the way in which a subject is 'stitching across' (Solomon 2014:675) multiple temporalities and constantly negotiating changes in the past and future that appear external to it underscores that subjectivity is an active, ongoing, and continuous effort to synthesise an autobiographical vision with multiple changes in the world of experience in a way which reaffirms one's self as consistent, 'full', and stable. In other words, it is an individual timing process that requires us to encompass our past and future in order to enable both action in an intelligible 'present' and an overarching, consistent, and coherent idea of who we are.

### Timing, Identity, and Desire

It is through the nexus of retroactive and anticipatory temporalities that the emotional element of desire arises.

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Following Lacan (2006), we understand desire as the continual longing for ontological stability and wholeness which, though ultimately illusory, the subject nevertheless continually seeks.[12] Desire emerges through the subject's 'lack' – that it is never fully present in a discursive or temporal sense. This lack of—and desire for—a 'whole' identity is what sparks the subject's identity practices, even in the face of continual frustration in never quite achieving the pursued sense of self-unity (Solomon 2014: 675). This is why Lacan terms such identity narratives as 'fantasies', in the sense that while they may seem to subjects to promise ontological stability, they can never fully deliver this since lack continually re-emerges due to the subject's absence of foundations. Since desire is an effect of lack, it can never be fully satisfied or extinguished. As such, the subject is always a subject of desire; desire is the propellant pushing the subject to continue its identity narrating practices.

Slavoj Žižek offers a political example of how these temporal dynamics help to elicit subjects' desire to reach stability via narratives of the nation-state. He (2002: 197) argues that the 'basic paradox of the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy consists in a kind of time loop—the 'original' fantasy' is always the fantasy of the origins.' Here, one of the most common political narratives is the foundation myth of the nation. A nation's politics often revolve around efforts to re-narrate the nation's 'origins' in order to co-opt them into contemporary agendas. Yet as Žižek (1993: 127) points out, national origins 'are never simple given facts: We can never refer to them as a found condition, context, or pre-supposition of our activity. Precisely as presuppositions, such narratives are always already posited' by us. Tradition is tradition insofar as we constitute it as such' (Žižek 1993:127). The national desire for ontological stability via collective unity leads to the positing of a 'fullness' that never in fact existed at the supposed point of origin (Solomon 2014: 675).

These insights can be extended to more fully draw out how the entanglements of desire, temporality, and identity often function at collective levels. For example, the social construction of the post-9/11 war on terror can be more comprehensively analysed through a temporal-desire lens. Many constructivist studies of the war on terror have emphasised longstanding themes of identity in IR, such as the argument that the war on terror was a historically contingent discourse rather than a natural one, and that the language of 'evil,' 'civilization,' and 'barbarism' produced a series of identities that were relationally structured through binaries of self/other (see Croft 2006; Holland 2009; Hülse and Spencer 2008; Jackson 2005). Yet, it is the interweaving of timing and desire that can provide a more comprehensive picture of the social construction of identity in the war on terror.

The social construction of the subject 'America' in the war on terror points to not only the contingency and othering processes involved. It also reveals the role of this retroactive temporality and desire that helped to pull subjects to identify with its narrative.

In a 20 September 2001 speech before a special joint session of the U.S. Congress, President George W. Bush offers a narrative of the events nine days before. Here, the collective subject of the nation ('America') suffered a 'wound'. Three thousand lives lost is recognised as a tragedy, yet throughout the discourse there seems to be something else that was lost on 9/11. Bush alludes to it several times and in several different ways, something beyond the loss of lives: 'Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered a great loss'; 'night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack'; 'a threat to our way of life.' 'These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life.' 'Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity. They did not touch its source. America is successful because of the hard work, and creativity, and enterprise of our people.' 'This is a fight for all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.' (Bush 2001) These discursive attempts to pin down exactly what was lost – yet without ever definitively doing so – illustrate the prospective fullness that is seen as desirable. 'Our way of life' and so on is discursively as close as one can get to the perceived 'essence' of the nation. Yet, these are ways of covering over the incompleteness—the lack—of a 'whole' nation by re-synthesising, that is, re-timing 'America' as a coherent and complete entity intelligibly oriented and capable of effective action in a ruptured world. Bush's numerous attempts to discursively 'button down' what exactly 'we' are points to the very indefinability of that which must be defended from the terrorist enemy (Solomon 2014: 677-78; Solomon 2015). The war on terror narrative (re)constructs the fantasy of a 'whole' 'America' (the subject of the discourse) that is partially represented in discourse, yet is also 'missing' something that is posited as central to its 'sense of self'.

The ideal of a 'whole' nation free of threats and ambiguities is an image that covers over the constitutive lack of such an entity. A unified 'America' is posited as lost, yet, such an 'America' did not, in fact, exist before 9/11. This retroactively projected ideal of 'America' is posited as having been lost at the moment of trauma, yet it had never

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been fully constructed before then. It must be assumed to have existed, though, in order for the war on terror discourse to be meaningful. In this sense, the retroactive presupposition of the ideal drives the desire for it, and helps to account for the 'pull' factor that elicited audiences' identifications with the war on terror discourse in the wake of 9/11 (Solomon 2014: 679).

Assessing identity as a timing project locates the driver of desire as part of the process of the ongoing drama of the subject, i.e. the timing agent. His desire for fullness is precisely a desire to comprehensively coordinate his own personal change continuum with those changes that impact him and thereby gain a whole 'sense of self' and a 'sense of time'. We might say here that a sense of self and sense of time are co-constitutive products of effective timing. On this view, desire cannot be reduced to some primitive id or biological drive, nor does it depend on some subject-independent and antagonistic past and future (see Solomon 2014:675). Instead, desire wells up from the challenges of internal, subjective, and identity-based timing, a difficult and continuous work that, when less successful, leaves us feeling incomplete, 'partly present' yet 'partly missing' (Solomon 2014:678) or, when more successful, grants a sense of closure-in-wholeness, of consistency with the world around us, and of 'being present'. As Johnston (2008: 260-1) argues, desire arises from the subject's construction through these overlapping temporalities. 'Drives and desires aren't simply quotas of energetic force welling up from the brute corporality of a primitive id. Rather, they are the aftershocks generated by the repeated collisions of incompatible temporal dynamics' (Johnston 2008: 260-1). In this sense, the subject's attempts to stabilise its self-narrations is a form of timing in its own right. Crucially, such fullness or completion is always temporary. Good timing never lasts and we are never fully timed due to uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and emergent changes that require further synthesis—while we desire closure, we remain engaged in an open-ended project to time our self to the world disclosed to us through experience.

In these ways, a theory of timing helps locate emotion and desire within the dynamic construction of the self. Emotion and desire reflect back on timing, helping to further clarify the stakes and challenges of timing as a basic human activity. Because timing is never finished so long as meanings remain fluid or change continues to occur, the issues that impel timing in the first place are ever-present, namely: complexity, puzzles about how things hang together and how we relate to them, concerns about novel changes, and a variety of questions about who we are. Successful timing reduces complexity, proffers a working model of how things hang together and where we fit in, accommodates novel changes in a smooth trajectory, and helps establish our sense of self. However, if any of these issues present intractable difficulties—if complexity shades into utter chaos, if we cannot explain a surprising development, or if we cannot establish clear links between our sense of self and our environment—timing falters and with it our sense of wholeness, so we must re-interpret or 'retro-fit' the problematic experience, revise the timing mode, or search for a new standard altogether.[13] As may be apparent, these possibilities entail significant effort and—as we move closer to jettisoning our timing standard in search of an alternative—pose the limit possibility of an utter breakdown in timing: the possibility that no standards or modes of synthesis can be found that are adequate to all the pertinent aspects of a developing situation. In such a setting, our sense of time as well as any confidence about who we are comes under severe threat.

These intimate links between a solid sense of self and a stable sense of time highlight the emotional and desirous nature of timing in general. It makes sense that identity commitments produce a desire for stability and fullness in the sense of a consistent, synoptic, and coherent sense of self. However, we think this sort of desire can be scaled 'up' from the individual's conception of her own self to her model of how the wider world in which she finds herself hangs together. After all, it is not just that the self must remain stable and coherent 'through time'; time as such must also seem to flow in a manageable way or else it threatens to overwhelm the self with unremitting flux, disorder, and chaos.[14] Put differently, it is not just that we want a stable sense of who we are, we also desire a stable and full sense that the time we inhabit is consistent, reliable, and orderly rather than some onrushing and untamable river of unintelligible events. Thus, just as acts or experiences that confound our sense of self may engender identity crises replete with emotional facets, unexpected developments may signal breaks or ruptures in the smooth flow of time that engender fear, anxiety, and dread in us. This is because both augur an utter dissolution of timing, the thoroughgoing failure of a chosen standard to provide orientation, intelligibility, and control by synthesising relevant environmental changes with our own personal continuum. Such a problem can only be resolved by colossal efforts and may require us to completely change our understanding of how the world works and/or who we actually are. No wonder, then, that we desire a fullness of self in a manageable flow of time, for both are necessary conditions for a social agent to go on

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in life.

This framework can be scaled 'up' in a second sense, from the individual agent to the sort of collective selves from which international politics is composed. The earlier discussion of 9/11 shows how a state works to reconstitute its sense of self and of time after a shocking experience. Indeed, if anything, timing of a collective self is much more difficult and politically fraught than timing an individual identity. The timing standard of identity commitments must synthesise a much larger quantity and range of change continua, the potential sources and sites of novel changes that disrupt a collective self and its sense of time are far greater,<sup>[15]</sup> and the backward and forward temporal views often extend much further than in an individual life since the nation is both older and more durable than its constituent citizens (see Niebuhr 2001). All of these features proliferate the complexity of the timing challenge involved in identity formation and maintenance. They also up its stakes inasmuch as both political practitioners and subjects, on the one hand, and the international system itself, on the other, depend on *raison d'état* for their *raison d'être*.

## Conclusion

In making the case for the emotional/desirous aspect of timing, this chapter hopes to raise a few key issues for the study of time and identity in IR. First, despite the recent interest in time and temporality in IR, the notion of timing can be viewed as the more primary process through which various conceptions of 'time' are produced. The use of language contracts our notions of time and transfigures the constitutive aspects of a particular timing activity into the noun 'time'. This holds insight for understanding processes of identity and subject formation. While IR scholars have long interrogated the social construction of identity, and although others have recently pointed out the importance of time to identity, we suggest that timing may prove to be a more fruitful avenue through which to investigate the temporal politics of identity. Viewing identity itself as a timing process, we argue that identity poses the standard by which changes the subject experiences are integrated and synthesised into a coherent and intelligible self-narrative. Identity, then, is not merely an image of a self in relation to an other (Wendt 1999). Rather, it is able to function in such a manner because of its prior function as a timing standard by which the self initially coheres.

Second, the chapter draws together this understanding of time and timing with the emotional element of desire. Although IR has recently shown much interest in emotions, we contend that examining the relationships among timing, identity, and desire offers a richer account of the social construction of subjectivity than most extant accounts. Drawing upon insights from psychoanalytic theory, the chapter argues that not only is timing a key element of identity, but also that this timing process occurs alongside (and likely because of) multiple overlapping temporalities. In this view, the subject's decentring is partly due to its construction at the nexus of these retroactive and anticipatory temporalities. It is this decentring – along with the subject's ontological lack – that sparks the emotional pull of desire. Subjects desire identity narratives that promise a closed timing mode in the form of a 'whole' or 'complete' identity, even if such wholeness is ultimately illusory. In short, the subject's efforts at stabilising its self-narrative in the face of continual decentring at the point of multiple overlapping and conflicting temporalities is a crucial form of timing. Timing, time, and emotion/desire, in this sense, compound a much more complex relationship than is normally recognised. This relationship is politically challenging because it is intrinsically positional, holds implications for others (either within or without this identity), and is contestable by them.

Finally, this understanding of the entanglement of timing, identity, and desire suggest a different strategy of critique of dominant discourses than IR usually recognises. Much of critical IR's understanding of critique lies in the general notion of de-naturalisation – that is, that effective critique must aim not at engaging a problem or issue necessarily on its own terms, but rather to show the historical and contingent constitution of the problem itself. In other words, critical IR often aims (rightly so) at demonstrating the contingency of contemporary arrangements – that since things could have been different, they can change and be changed. Cox's (1981) distinction between problem-solving and critical theory comes to mind here. Yet, as sensible as this seems, critiques of dominant discourses often fall flat. This chapter suggests instead that criticism should incorporate the temporal and desirous dimensions of identities. Criticism should be aimed not merely at pointing out the historical contingency of an issue. Rather, it should also aim at displacing the emotional investments in the identity narratives in question from wholeness and closure to an explicitly open politics of identity and timing. If social subjects can only ever engage in the open-ended timing of the Self, then we should explicitly develop a politics from this rather than pining for its impossible alternative (see Hom

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and Steele 2010; Hom 2016). By disrupting the timing standards and concomitant modes of coordination and control that implicitly underpin dominant identity narratives for the positive purpose of fostering a politics of open timing, and also thereby helping to shake up the investments of desire that fortify their hegemony, social criticism may be more able to make some headway against discourses of violence and control, such as the war on terror. If we enrich our models of subjectivity and identity by integrating notions of timing and emotion/desire, our critiques may be more effective in shaking these very elements that help to constitute the power and pull of identity.

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## Notes

[1] Ringmar (1996:125), Hall (1999:126), Callahan (2006:404), and Steele (2008:77–83) do mention timing but none engage it as a theoretical resource or conceptual category in its own right. In later work, Steele (2010 chp. 3) focuses on timing as a key component of *parrhesia*, speaking truth to power.

[2] Timing's analytical priority to 'time/temporality' complements Elias' historical account of the rise of social time consciousness. Elias' argument is that timing first emerged as social groups developed agricultural practices that benefited from coordination with seasonal variations. Agricultural civilisations subsequently attached religious significance to both recurrent and unique changes in the natural environment due to their impact on timing, which concomitantly became the concern of priesthoods (Elias 2007:42–44). As timing became necessary to societal survival and development, 'time' came to feature more and more in symbolic systems. This was abetted by the figural qualities of human language (more on this below) (Elias 2007:43, 1989b:342). In other words, human capacities for symbolic language transposed features of timing activities into attributes of the noun 'time'. Over centuries these transpositions settled into a multifaceted conception of 'time'.

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[3] Although he does not spend any reflection on the difference, Elias (2007:39) suggests as much when he discusses the use of a human lifespan—which is non-repeatable and unpredictable—as a timing standard.

[4] This connects timing with the critical IR of Robert Cox (1981).

[5] In IR, 'the time of the nation-state' has often been used less precisely to refer to some nebulous but generally unilinear-progressive promise thought to adhere to the sovereign statist way of doing politics (see Shapiro 2000; Edkins 2003:xiv; Stephens 2010:34; Lundborg 2011).

[6] Elsewhere, Hom (2010, 2012) has dubbed this 'Western standard time'.

[7] While we do not argue that this is the *only* temporal account of identity formation, we do suggest that it may travel beyond the particular issues that we examine here. Many disciplines, for example, have productively drawn upon Lacan's theories of subject formation, including geography (Kingsbury 2007), urban planning (Gunder 2005), and organisation studies (Contu, Driver, and Jones 2010).

[8] Although the example posed here is utterly banal, this relationship between novel change and time consciousness lies at the heart of trauma research, which argues that acts and experiences so unprecedented and violent as to be 'unspeakable' actually 'rupture' our sense of time because we cannot accommodate them in our ongoing perception of how things fit together (see, e.g. Edkins 2003).

[9] For example, a surprise attack might 'sow chaos' through a military base and cause soldiers to feel that time is 'rushing by' but also represent the orderly unfolding of a temporality planned and executed by the sneak attackers.

[10] For a related discussion, see Berenskoetter's (2011) investigation of the temporal qualities of visions.

[11] While IR has recently shown much interest in affect and emotions (Crawford 2000; Fierke 2013; Hutchison and Bleiker 2014; Ross 2014; Solomon 2012), little of this work has explored the relationships between time, timing, and identity.

[12] For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between desire, discourse, and subjectivity, see Solomon (2015).

[13] See Hom (2016) for further discussion and an example of retrofitting drawn from scholarship of the 'Arab Spring'.

[14] These problematic qualities are some of the oldest attributed to time's natural essence or force (see Brandon 1965; Hom 2012).

[15] This includes 'internal' sources in the form of domestic actions or challenges to the state's authority (see Steele 2010:133–64).

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