

International Society for the Study of Time, “Time and Measurement” at Yamaguchi University in Japan, June 26 – July 2, 2022

### **Visual methods in the study of social time**

Representations of social time are often visual geometrical metaphors, e.g., the cyclical time (as in Eliade's analyses of the archaic cultures), spiral (as in Kagame's study of the Bantu culture), zig-zag (as in Leach's pendulum-model developed to conceptualize ancient Greek views on temporality), linear (as in Le Goff's works on the secularized middle ages and modernity) or pointillistic (as in Bauman's inquiry of "liquid modern" societies). While such geometrical metaphors pertain to reflecting societies and cultures' states, they are arguably merely conceptual tools developed in scholarly imagining about those cultures. Critical anthropologists of time argue that applying such visual-spatial metaphors to understand various cultures indeed informs about the epistemological standpoint of the anthropologists who coin these metaphors rather than about the studied cultures themselves. This criticism requires a new inquiry into the methodology of the study of social time and social attitude towards temporality. We need to improve how to empirically grasp cultural representations of time and tailor the available conceptual tools to understand better what the respondents tell us about their genuine experience of time. In other words, we need to develop tools that genuinely give power to respondents. I want to propose that such a tool could be found in the very expressions of the interviewees, i.e., in the metaphors they spontaneously use to conceptualize and describe their experience. In this presentation, I aim to discuss the role and the use of temporal metaphors and drawings provided by the interviewees as a visual method in studying how people relate to social time. I applied this method to support qualitative ethnographic research involving 60 in-depth interviews. Furthermore, I show visual representations of time (drawings) created by respondents and put them in the context of their narratives related to the presented drawings, such as i.a., circle, triangle, spiral, fractal, zig-zag, line, point, graph, or even funnel, stain or lengthiness. I conclude by proposing the essential factors, categories, and characteristics of time that emerged from the interviews.

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