

The question of time has become a major concern in feminist theory and is proving to be a useful means of approaching gender and sexuality. By and large, feminist philosophers consider gender as not a stable identity rather as an identity taking shape through time. But – metaphysically speaking – might the opposite also be worth noting? Can gender and sexuality be used to rethink time?

In this paper, I will discuss sexual identity and its relevance to the metaphysics of time and the general question I will focus on is whether gender studies might have something to contribute to this topic. The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it is to offer a formulation – from an analytical point of view – of two different concepts: “queer” time and “hetero” time. Second, it is to defend a new way of understanding the non-normative temporality.

Accordingly, the paper is divided in two parts. In the first, I discuss the link between dissident sexualities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transsexual, and transgender) and heteronormativity (i.e. the view that only sexual relations between people of different sexes are normal and each sex has certain natural roles in life). In my analysis, particular attention is given to the philosophical questions raised by the phenomenon of sex reassignment. In the second part, I show why the concept of queer temporality makes clear how the sexed entities’ modes of experiencing time reflect and are reflected in their communicative interaction with others. My goal is (i) to argue that feminist insights into the problematic issues of “time” and “temporal” match with anti-realism about time; and (ii) to offer an ontological account to temporality that moves away from traditional “continental” feminist approaches. Here is a more detailed layout of my argument.

It is widely hold among continental feminists that there is a gender differentiation in the way people organize their life experience: women and men experience the passage of time differently (namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death) and there is a gender differentiated temporal order: men and women live in different temporal worlds because their social roles are temporally organized in two different ways. According to this view, the “hetero” time is a gendered vision of temporality – that looks back at a past and anticipates a future – characterized by the following theses: (i) there is a gendered differentiate nature of anticipated *future* participation in these roles; (ii) we have to turn to the *past* in order to make sense of our sexual identity; and (iii) our interpretations of our *past* sexual experience reflect in the way we understand our *present* sexual identity. By contrast, the queer sexualities are commonly delegated out of time (e.g.: via the promise of a *future* based on the negation of historical grounding and traditions).

These different features of “continuity” and “discontinuity” – I suggest – can be reformulated along analytic feminist lines as follows. “Hetero” time seems to imply a continuity of time (since *past* and *present* coexist rather than succeed each others) and the view that *past* and *future* are both real. According to this model of time, *past* and *future* are regions of reality determined, at any given moment, by our temporal perspective, as it is at that moment and there is no distinction between them in reality. In short, there is no *now* in reality rather a distinction between one temporal direction and the other. Otherwise, “queer” time seems to imply a discontinuous and instantaneous view of time and the idea that *only* the present is real. To this view, all that constitutes reality is how things are *now*.

By articulating and elaborating some cases of sex reassignment, I argue that such a way of characterizing “hetero” time and “queer time” do not faithfully represent the manner in which we in fact understand the past and present sexual identity. As result, by elaborating the way people that have changed sex see their bodies and their sexual practices in time, “time” is constructed – I conclude – through changing conventions that align human participants’ perspectives only towards a socially constructed “present” and this is compatible with the antirealist view according to which the past has no existence except as it is recorded in the present.

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