“Loading, please wait” – Temporality and (bodily) presence in mobile digital communication

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Abstract

Mobile digital communications, as currently the most complex forms of communication, offer a broad view on the phenomenon of communication. The last ten years have seen the addition of new forms of communication (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) and the restructuring of a (growing?) share of traditional communication into digitalized forms. Taking these changes as a guideline, this article examines the concept of communication in its temporality, (use of) technology, and physicality and attempts to adapt this concept to current forms.

Keywords

Mobile digital communication, waiting, (bodily) presence, temporality, digital technology

Introduction¹

One of the most remarkable aspects of contemporary societies seems to be their rapid transformation with regard to the ever-increasing use of digital technologies. Such a transformation has been at any rate diagnosed by Bunz (2012), van Dijck (2014), Kitchin (2014), and Stalder (2016), among others. Social media platforms, smart phones, and large-scale

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computational systems are used in a lot of social fields and mold social practices. These technologies have also given rise to new forms of sociological enquiry and social research labeled digital sociology (see e.g. Lupton, 2015; Marres, 2017; Selwyn, 2019; Süssenguth, 2015). As most of these texts focus on new methods and new ways of generating data, the discussion and adaption of existing theories or concepts seems to take a back seat. In my view, maybe the most outstanding feature of digitally enhanced, amended, or facilitated social facts and processes is their changing temporality. If the social world is “continuously in the process of making, remaking and unmaking itself,” as Abbott (2016: ix) puts it, we have to adjust the concepts for grasping and describing this world. Taking this as a starting point, I will try to enhance the understanding of the temporal constitution of communication in regard to those digitally assisted practices. As communication is only conceivable as a process – the unity of a “three-part selection process” as Luhmann (1995: 140) puts it or an “intersubjective time process” (Schütz, 1962: 364) – its temporal constitution is an essential part of the concept of communication itself. In order to do this, I would suggest to take its pauses, i.e. the phases of waiting, as a sensor for its temporal structure and therefore as an important component of the concept itself. Waiting is a theoretically neglected phenomenon, maybe because our expectations ignore unwanted interruptions and delays. Nevertheless, waiting occurs in a lot of social processes and structures them in a rhythmical way. So, even if there are no phases of waiting their potentiality at certain points of a process indicates the temporal structure of a specific sequence.

Mobile communication – facilitated through digital devices (smart-phones) that are usually carried around and operated manually and processed through complex server architectures or web-based communication portals (social networking websites) – in contrast to traditional analog telephonic communication is first and foremost text based.² This partial conversion of communication from speaking to “electronic writing” (“*elektronische Schriftlichkeit*,” cf. Wehner, 1997) is a core feature of digital media use in everyday communicative processes through which the presence of communication participants becomes limited to textual signs on screens. Bodily co-presence, as with the usage of most technological media in general, is unnecessary. In mobile digital communication, the differences between particular levels of communication (e.g. material-technological, bodily, and situational) become manifest more markedly than in face-to-face interactions. Based on these changes in communicative processes, I will analyze communication in relation to its autologicality, technology, use, corporeality, and subjective participation in order to

grasp the temporal structure of current forms of communication. These aspects are taken as different levels of observation of a complex course of events.

The forms of digital communication offer a good view on the phenomenon of communication because of their complexity. In the last ten years, first, traditional types of communication have been supplemented by new ones (instant messaging, social media, etc.) and second, a (growing?) part of traditional communication has become digital(ized). If the specificity of these forms is taken into account, the temporal constitution of communication in general can also be grasped more precisely and can therefore serve as the basis for a conceptual definition. To accomplish this, I will describe in a first step a seemingly antiquated form of communication that is characterized by great delays and pauses. In a second step, time and waiting are developed, after which I will analyze temporality on the different levels: the temporality of communication as an autologic process, of technology used in communication, of the corporeality when using technology, and finally of subjective time.

An antiquated form of communication?

In his novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, Amos Oz depicts a telephonic communication in Jerusalem in the early 1940s:

For years we had a regular arrangement for a telephonic link with the family in Tel Aviv. We used to phone them every three or four months, even though we didn't have a phone and neither did they. First of all we used to write to Auntie Hayya and Uncle Tsvi to let them know that on, say, the nineteenth of the month [...] at five we would phone from our chemist's to their chemist's. The letter was sent well in advance, and then we waited for a reply. In their letter, Auntie Hayya and Uncle Tsvi assured us that Wednesday the nineteenth suited them perfectly, and they would be waiting at the chemist's a little before five, and not to worry if we didn't manage to phone on the dot of five, they wouldn't run away. (Oz, 2003: 7–8)

The telephonic communication described by Oz requires preparation to ensure that both parties are ready for the telephone call at the same time, as neither side has a telephone of their own (for the forms and norms of telephonic communication, see Marvin, 1988). This synchronization takes place in the asynchronous mode of communication by letter, which has its own form of temporality, including specific phases of waiting.

Anticipation of the call makes itself felt as early as four days before the appointed time among the family members living in Jerusalem and only increases in intensity on the appointed day:

We lived in Amos Street, and the chemist's shop was five minutes' walk away, in Zephaniah Street, but by three o'clock my father would say to my mother: 'Don't start anything new now, so you won't be in a rush.' [...] I didn't have a watch [...] and so every few moments I ran to the kitchen to see what the clock said, and then I would announce, like the countdown to a spaceship launch: twenty-five minutes to go, fifteen to go, ten and a half to go, and at that point we would get up, lock the front door carefully and set off. (Oz, 2003: 8)

The family's anticipation intensifies as the appointed time for the phone call grows closer. All activities are adjusted toward the appointment. Time is filled by regularly glancing at the clock; other activities are dropped. This turns it into empty time which solely recounts the family's increasing tension, a tension that is not alleviated but even seems to be increased by the son's physical activity of running into the kitchen. At the same time, the substance of the anticipated phone call remains surprisingly indeterminate. The text only describes the temporal difference's decrease but not its determining factor:

Sometimes the operator would answer: 'Would you please wait a few minutes, Sir, the Postmaster is on the line.' Or Mr Sitton. Or Mr Nashashibi. [...] After waiting a while, Father decided that the the Postmaster or Mr Nashashibi must have finished talking, and so he picked up the receiver again and said to the operator: 'Excuse me, Madam, I believe I asked to be put through to Tel Aviv 648.' She would say: 'I've got it written down, Sir. Please wait.' (or 'Please be patient'). Father would say: 'I'm waiting, Madam, naturally I am waiting, but there are people waiting at the other end, too.' (Oz, 2003: 9–10)

In addition to the line being busy, technical delays occur which further prolong the waiting period. At this point, the waiting father becomes emotional and he begins to show signs of impatience even if maintaining a level of politeness. The telephone line's limited capacity at this point of its technical development prevents the call from becoming established immediately. The scene pointedly ends with a call that is very brief compared to its extensive preparation:

And that was the whole conversation. What's new? Good. Well, so let's speak again soon. It's good to hear from you. It's good to hear from you, too. We'll

write and make time for the next call. We'll talk. Yes. Definitely. Soon. See you soon. Look after yourself. All the best. You too. (Oz, 2003: 10)

But this unexpectedly brief and seemingly inconsequential exchange after so much preparation contains the uncertainty of the future, the uncertainty whether Jewish individuals living in Palestine in the early 1940s would be able to talk to each other ever again in view of German troops gaining ground in North Africa, conflicts with the Arab population, and a possible war posing a general threat to the existence of all family members. As bodily co-presence cannot easily be established and communication by letter is slow, only the telephone remains as a medium able to alleviate this insecurity at least for a moment by transmitting the relatives' familiar voices synchronically. In this way, the "phatic communion" (Malinowski, 1923: 316)³ of the family is reestablished.

Even if existential insecurity of this kind comprises only a rather minuscule part of contemporary societies' communications, the temporal delays of the communication described by Oz still features some aspects, especially its pauses and waiting periods, that can contribute to an understanding and theoretical conceptualization of the temporality of present-day mobile digital communications.

Waiting and time

In the following, I will analyze the phases of waiting within communication, as the process of waiting for an answer also gains new dimensions within computer- and network-based communication.

Waiting here is defined as a purely temporal projection into the future that is derived from past procedures and processes, as the anticipation of an event quite in the sense of an empty anticipation or more or less "filled" anticipation in the sense of Husserl (cf. Husserl, 1973: § 8; for an elaborated phenomenological definition of waiting, see Göttlich, 2015). Therefore, waiting is a function of human (or social) memory (see Sebald, 2014). Waiting however is only oriented toward an event's occurrence, not its substance, and thus must be differentiated from a waiting an event (anticipation). Waiting thus is the temporal difference between the (first) anticipation of an event and its occurrence. As such, waiting is not tied to an individual's actions but can also be decoupled from it and, triggered by social processes, occur in social memory. Decoupling here is defined in such a way that a specific event, while necessitating individual participation in the social process in question, does not enable participators to intentionally influence this social process, and furthermore does not equal the sum of these individual participations. The social process proceeds autologically (cf. Srubar, 2007), i.e. it has its own

(temporal) order, and to participants appears as social fact. In this sense, the process of communication itself can wait for a particular connection or can, under specific conditions, generate a trans-subjective atmosphere of waiting. Subjectively, on the other hand, the temporal difference of waiting can manifest in different ways: on the one hand, through emotional excitement such as tension and impatience, on the other through emotions connected to or derived from either the anticipated event (e.g. pleasant anticipation or apprehension) or absorbed from the situative atmosphere. This emotionality also manifests through the more or less specific bodily movements, activities, and practices of waiting. The intensity of waiting can be gauged on the subjective level by the degree of emotional-bodily tension (in Oz's story, running to the kitchen clock or the father's politely expressed impatience on the telephone); determining the intensity on the social level is more difficult and can at best be gauged by an atmosphere of tension, e.g. in exam situations. As Barry Schwartz (1974, 1975) has shown, to let someone wait can also be an expression of power and waiting therefore a consequence of power relations.

I expect that it should be possible to detect the temporal structures of communication in the various forms of waiting on the various levels of this process. Time, with Elias, can here be understood as "a symbol of a relationship that a human group [. . .] establishes between two or more continua of changes, one of it is used by it as a frame of reference or standard of measurement for the other (or others)" (Elias, 1992: 46). A frame of reference is generated and used for converting separate events into "continua of changes" (*Wandlungskontinuen*). Time in this sense is a (social) phenomenon of regulation through which separate events are tagged with and sequentialized by a temporal index. The temporal frame of reference thus becomes social fact and obtains validity through the recollective synthesis of sequences of events as a relation generated through implicit or explicit practice. If the potential for recollective synthesis can no longer be solely ascribed to human memory but also becomes possible through the presentifying potential of social memory, e.g. through media technologies, it becomes possible to view the highly differentiated societies of modernity as a conglomerate of differentiated sequences of events with their own inherent logics and temporalities that orient themselves situatively toward a valid temporal frame of reference but through their specific sequencing or measuring at the same time form temporalities of their own.⁴

Through the phases of waiting, the temporal order and structure of communicative processes is brought into focus:

It is of the essence of language that normally any linguistic communication involves a time process; a speech is built up by sentences, a sentence by the

step by step articulation of successive elements. [...] Speech is, therefore, one of the intersubjective time-processes. (Schütz, 1962: 324)

Not only verbal/oral communication but also every other form of communication is a temporal process. Analyzing these temporal processes, however, indeed is a complex undertaking because at least four levels of observation need to be differentiated and if possible described: apart from the inherent temporality of communication, which will be covered in the next section, these are the technological measuring of time, the temporality of use, and the subjective temporalities involved.

The temporality of communication

The basis for the following reflections is a social situation that nowadays has become typical. Person A types a text message into a smartphone (a WhatsApp message, a Facebook status update, a tweet, a text message, an e-mail, etc.) and sends the message via various servers to (depending on the application) more or less specific recipients that usually are not present. This results in an incomplete communication within the network architecture's technological "framework" ("*Gestell*," cf. Heidegger, 2007). Persons B and/or C–E, etc. are required to receive and read this message for communication to be achieved. Person A in the meantime is waiting for a follow-up communication, i.e. for an answer. Such a situation of asynchronous communication can also serve as the model for so-called "real-time" applications such as certain online video games or live streams. Even when the phases of waiting are approaching zero, we still have a temporally structured sequence of communication. In a first step, I would like to analyze the temporality of communication. If we proceed from Luhmann's notion of communication as the unity of the three selections of information, utterance, and understanding (cf. Luhmann, 2012: 113ff.), then a level of communication with its own inherent logic emerges that is detached from individual intent (or coupled to it structurally as Luhmann frames it) which in its sequence of selections also develops a temporality, a relation to the past, and expectations of future continuations of its own. This inherent temporality is a sequentialization of the meaningful selections that take place within the communication stream. Schütz's notion of communication is similar in that it differentiates between the meaning, enunciation, and comprehension of a communication. In Schütz however intentional access to communication as intersubjectively shared meaningmaking is not problematized. As shared patterns of relevance and typification, however, always partially diverge, comprehension and continued communication can only be partially controlled intentionally and thus also only partially

anticipated. In this sense, an interaction order emerges (cf. Goffman, 1983) which is detached from individual intention and which processes communicative sensemaking according to its own logic, even if it still relies on individual action and interpretation competence. Although subjective and communicative sensemaking are closely tied to each other, a distinct form of sensemaking is generated through subsequent selections and the integration and correlation of communicative acts which at the same time is always tied to its context, the current situation and its horizons (cf. Sebald, 2014: 115ff.; Srubar, 2007, 435ff.).

In addition to this threefold selection in Schütz, there is also a basic relation that is the necessary precondition for any communication: the relation of orientation ("*Einstellungsbeziehung*," cf. Schütz, 1964, 1967: 151ff.):

All communication presupposes the existence of some kind of social interaction which, though it is an indispensable condition of all possible communication, does not enter the communicative process and is not capable of being grasped by it. (Schütz, 1964: 161)

For Schütz, this basic "we-relation" is preconditioned on a shared experience of the present and thus is tied to an interactional relation that is characterized by bodily co-presence and mutual awareness. This requires that there are "persons within range of hearing whose bodies are within range of grasping" (Kieserling, 1999: 15, my translation). Mutual awareness must be established on these fundamentals for communication to be possible. According to Schütz, bodily expressions in particular can directly, if not instantaneously, be perceived and interpreted. This physical dimension is absent in media-based forms of communication.

But here too an equivalent indeed can be found, specifically communication readiness, which is physically brought about for example by activating one's smartphone or by arranging a telephone call as in Oz' novel. The first form of waiting that can be derived from these reflections then is waiting for the other to be ready to communicate. In this respect, readiness to communicate could constitute a higher-level category encompassing the relation of attunement.

It is only on this basis that communication then can develop according to its own temporal rhythm. The rhythm develops from the specific temporal sequence of selections. While in face-to-face communication information and utterance coincide and understanding usually follows immediately afterward, in computer-based communication these selections can diverge considerably. A tweet for example can be read and commented on days or weeks after

having been posted in a, by then, changed context, and its hashtags can be used years later. Waiting thus on the level of communication is situated between particular selections: Waiting for information to be selected, waiting for selected information to be communicated, and waiting for selected and communicated information to be understood or at least received. These phases of waiting are in the above sense decoupled from the act of waiting performed by the participants. Waiting, on the level of communication, furthermore is situated at another important juncture: comprehension or at least the reception of a communication is important especially in regard to the follow-up communication, i.e. the answer, even if it is only a thumbs up on Facebook that makes visible the understanding, reception, and processing of communication. The specific temporality of communication emerges from the specific temporal differences between the particular selections and especially from the temporal relations established therein as the presentification of past and future events.

This specific temporality of course relies on the communicative acts of the participators but still cannot be controlled by them, as the phenomenon of waiting especially makes clear. The temporality of communication neither simply is the aggregation, sum, or average of actors' specific temporalities or waiting periods because the means of communication, the technological media used, and the social context enter into it in a particular way, for example as different positions of power which also determine communication and its temporal structure (see again Schwartz, 1974, 1975). The social context, the social situation in which a communication occurs, the organization, the closed realm of meaning, and the social system or subsystem all set at times rigid temporal frameworks which enter into the communicative process as social facts. Behind all this is an institutionalized global temporal frame of reference, Coordinated Universal Time, which has been introduced in 1972 for coordinating purposes.

As a result, there are five phases of waiting on the level of communication: waiting for the readiness to communicate, waiting for the diverging selections of information, utterance, and understanding, respectively, and finally waiting for the follow-up communication. In this way a particular communication is sequentialized and gains its own particular rhythm. The waiting phases however are also dependent on the media technology used, as has already become clear through the difference between communication by letter and communication by phone in the introductory example.

The temporality of technology

Media technologies therefore are another factor entering into the formation of the specific temporality of communication.⁵ Media presentifications of

information, i.e. acts of communication, are always repeatable and can be communicated without the intentional control or access of the original provider of the information. On a technical level, it is possible to produce and disseminate algorithmically controlled patterns from information, e.g. page rankings in search engines or recommendation lists in webshops (cf. Esposito, 2017). Here, the particular logic of communication and its decoupling from the subjective level become notably evident. If waiting occurs in these cases, then as the temporal difference between temporal patterns stored digitally or in social memory obtained from past communicative processes on the one hand, and the occurrence of an event on the other.

The importance for the processes of communication of technology, or the temporality of technical procedures, respectively, should have become clear by now. This is true not only for the technical provision of communication readiness mentioned above but also for the sequentialization of the digital communication stream, which at least in part is facilitated by processes within the technological infrastructure. Communicating by electronically written text on a technical level requires time for processing the input via a keyboard or another input device (coding/decoding), time for delivery via various, potentially globally distributed servers (routing/sending), and time for rendering the message on the receiver's device (decoding/coding). In this sense, the temporality of the technological *Gestell* always enters into the temporal structure of digital communication, too.

Waiting due to technical delays as a specific form of technology-induced waiting occurs in digital communication especially when data, e.g. the response to a search query, arrive below the browser's processing speed because of server overload or a suboptimal net connection. This form of waiting as the difference between potential and actual processing time can occur at any point of the technical substructure, but considering the performance capabilities of current microprocessors is located primarily at the nodes of data processing and distribution.

The time delays of particular processing and transmission processes may in the case of many communications be minuscule because signals run through the conduits and circuitry at lightspeed. This holds also true for so-called real-time applications, such as online video games or live streams. Real-time applications, understood as the relation of information processing and of experiencing the processed content, promise immediate information, i.e. information without delay. But it is a technically constructed "realtimeness" (Weltevrede et al., 2014), as software, as a kind of "pacer," tries to compensate for rendering times and other delays e.g. by buffering (a kind of short-term memory). So, even in real-time technology there are technical delays, although they may sometimes occur below the users'

perception threshold (see also Berry, 2011: 142ff.). Technical delays become especially noticeable in the case of malfunctions. As the complexity of hardware and software make such occurrences by no means unlikely, we do expect them, i.e. we indeed do ascribe delays to a certain extent to problems of transmission, which is also confirmed by the machines, be it by an hourglass icon, a progress bar (“Loading, please wait”), or any other symbol signifying delay. This technically caused waiting period constitutes another form of waiting: the temporal difference between the expected error-free, smooth functioning of the technical infrastructure and its actual occurrence.

Technically caused delays on the other hand also stretch the present, which could be called “specious present” with William James (cf. James, 2007 [1890]: I, 608ff.), a present extended by the interconnected performances of cognition and memory. This extension of the present beyond the punctiform now (“no knife-edge but a saddle-back,” James, 2007 [1890]: 609) is constitutive for particular temporalities on the individual level (described by Husserl with the terms retention and protention, cf. Husserl, 1991) as well as on the communicative level. Technically induced, short, predictable, and thus protentionable delays find their way into the in this sense expanded present just as do short delays caused by technology use. The aforementioned buffering could be seen as an extension of the present on the technical level, the specious present of technology, used to enable the experience of “realtimeness.”

But the technological framework of the smartphone frames communication in yet another, wholly different way. Just as one of its ancestors, the telephone, it too has quite an “imperative” or “appellative” side to it (cf. Ziemann, 2011: 137ff.): If a device is turned on, a signal, be it acoustic or vibratory, may disrupt the receiver at any time, requesting that communication be accepted. Technology in this regard is also an aspect to which the particular temporality of communication is structurally linked and whose significance has become clear only with the advent of technological media of distribution: Beyond the relation of orientation, i.e. generally ensured communicational availability, a demand to accept offers of communication is imposed as well. This appellative aspect of technology possibly reduces waiting periods but can also be ignored more or less stubbornly (if only because the device has been left at home) and can also produce a shared present, or connection to it. In this sense, it also offers a basis for the synchronization of different temporalities.

The technological substructure thus acts upon the temporal structures of communication in several ways: through the temporality of the technological processes themselves, through technology-induced waiting, through

technical malfunctions or delays, and also through the appellative aspect of particular technological notifications.

The temporality and corporeality of use

The presence of communication becomes tangible through the temporality of use or the practical performance of communication, i.e. the actualization of information, messages, and understanding, and the production of synchronicity or connection to a valid temporal frame of reference, respectively. The time it takes to enter a text into a device of course not only depends on the operational design of the media technology (key size and spacing, monitor size, etc.) but also on individual adeptness at using these input/output devices, dexterity, bodily available patterns of movement, and the implicit knowledge actualized when using these technologies (cf. Ernst and Paul, 2013). This is true not only for typing, but also for reading and the application of interpretive schemata, e.g. for deciphering emoticons and abbreviations or compensating for typos (cf. Gross, 1994), all of which make for specific but by all means predictable and expected delays.

At this point, the corporeality of digital and network-based communication becomes especially visible. In face-to-face communication, the bodily articulation of sounds and the perception of articulated words functions on an implicit level and corporeality thus functions, outside of special cases of speech impediments and hearing loss of various degrees, as a transparent medium that stays invisible during communication. This also and especially applies to expressive behavior accompanying communication, which usually is interpreted implicitly and thus operates on a sub-symbolic level. Even if prosodic elements or bodily expressions might be highly relevant for the interpretation of an utterance they will usually not be related to the body. The body nevertheless, despite or even because of proliferating media technology, still is the only way for humans to access the world.

Media technology changes the form of use and thus the form of bodily participation. In place of the organs of expression and perception used in face-to-face communication now the hands as organs of communication become especially important for operating keyboards, and the eyes become even more important for the perception of texts and pictures. The status of corporeality in digital communication stays implicit to such an extent that some have even referred to it as “bodiless communication” (cf. exemplarily Duval and Welger, 2005: 251), but this occurs, as I would emphasize, because of the distance created by keyboards or touchscreens.

Use as a practical actualization or operational relation also points to the subjective level: Alfred Schütz emphasizes this level especially in regard to the synchronization of temporalities:

The stream of articulating cogitations of the speaker is thus simultaneous with the outer event of producing sounds of the speech, and the perceiving of the latter simultaneously with the comprehending cogitations of the listener. [...] two fluxes of inner time, that of the speaker and that of the listener, become synchronous one with the other and both with an event in outer time. (Schütz, 1962: 324)

This means that through these practical acts the level of communication and the subjective level are coupled to a valid temporal frame of reference or that this frame of reference is established, which is always done only through the corporeal forms of perception and articulation. Schütz describes this coupling of corporeally based cognition streams first and foremost as a temporal one, as the production of synchronicity (cf. Schütz, 1964: 162ff.).

This holds true also in technology-based communication, even when sharing the same space is not necessary, and synchronicity is only technologically possible in the context of a specifically expanded presence. Such digitalized forms of synchronized communication (e.g. Chat, Skype, TeamSpeak, with certain reservations also WhatsApp) or organizational contexts require permanent or at least at specific times guaranteed availability and thus expect relatively instantaneous, within the technologically expanded or buffered present, synchronous communication. This requires being bodily present at or near a communication device or carrying it around on one's body.

Overall the temporality of use in its dependence on implicit knowledge and bodily presence also enters into the temporal structures of communication. The synchronization and consolidation of the various temporal forms and structures furthermore occurs mostly through the practical execution of communication. But does not the phenomenon of waiting show that even if synchronicity is achieved the temporal structures are not synchronized completely but only partially? If so, this would require a subsequent interpretation or translation of the temporal difference on the subjective level of meaning as well.

Subjective time

If we decouple the conscious acts in Schütz's theory described above from the external events of communication and posit alongside a merely selective

synchronization, an interpretation, translation (cf. Renn, 2006), or structural coupling (cf. Luhmann, 2012: 49ff.), then the formula of the “intersubjective sharing” of temporal structures and structures of relevance dissolves into its components. The respective specific temporalities of communicators then become apparent, which can, and do, differ. They are constituted by the processes of the mind, in the sequence of conscious events on the one hand, and in the sequentialization of bodily processes and states such as the beating of the heart, breathing, wakefulness, and motion sequences on the other.

This particular, incorporated temporality is constituted by the specific sequence and interconnection of psychological and physical events: thoughts or the stream of consciousness, respectively; movements; and particular, biographically generated structures of generalization and expectation. Perceptions and bodily operations such as hearing, seeing, and feeling allow for irritations and information from the outside to be received reflexively, i.e. to be processed by conscious operations or bodily reactions. This also results in a sequentialization and thus temporal structuration of psychic and physical events. However, it cannot be taken-for-granted a priori and every time that synchronicity with external events will be more than partial. Here, the relation of orientation also becomes relevant on the subjective level as potential perception and attention. The integration (or interpretation, translation, or structural interconnection) of a communicative event into subjective time also sequentializes it in a way, but only according to the subjective temporal structures which are not least determined by particular structures of relevance and selection. Waiting then manifests not only psychologically but also physically through the specific bodily expressions of waiting and impatience: rhythmic movements, repeat glances at one’s device to ascertain whether communication readiness has been signaled, running to the kitchen again and again to glance at the kitchen clock, pacing, or even withdrawing behind involvement shields (cf. Ayaß, 2014; Goffman, 1963: 38ff.). Subjective time is also bodily constituted, with the body functioning in this regard as well as through use and practice as an important part of the constitution of social temporalities and thus also of ever-so-incorporeal digital communication. Technological developments have made bodily presence in the sense of co-presence, i.e. a sharing of the same space unnecessary quite a while ago, but bodily presence in synchronized or variously expanded presences still is vital for the practice of communication.

The decoupling of the subjective and the communicative sequences in communication allows for integrating the phenomenon of multitasking into the description. In using several applications at the same time, it is possible

to minimize “waiting” as the only relevant activity. Attention is diverted to other tasks and becomes fragmented. In many situations of waiting, media are used for distraction and as involvement shields (Ayaß, 2014). The intensity of waiting then depends on the relevance of the awaited communication in relation to the other activities; but as long as the sequence is not completed or forgotten, waiting still occurs.

Looking at the subjective pole(s) of communication also opens up the question of how to interpret pauses in communication. Meaning could be ascribed to any and all of them, but their interpretation will be different depending on whether we attribute the cause for the delay to a technical machine or to our human counterpart. In the first case, the technical failure would have just to be endured, in the second hesitations could be taken as a sign for hidden intentions or, as in the case of Oz’s father, ascribed to an operator’s lack of good will. A fourth possibility would be to interpret technology itself as a “quasi-other” with its own intentionalities, as Ihde (1991: 97ff.) has done (in the case of waiting, mostly as having a kind of ill will). Such interpretations take time and influence follow-up communications or trigger references to former sequences of communications. Here, we get back to the observational level of autologic communication and its own temporal rhythm.

Conclusion

Waiting – periods when nothing seems to happen and tension is rising – is much more than empty time. Taken as the temporal difference between the anticipation of an event and its occurrence, it can be used analytically as a sensor for the temporal structures of a communication or course of action and more generally of every social process. I hope and expect to have made clear the complex temporal structures of mobile digital communication. The temporal model outlined along the phases of waiting can be used for the analysis (of the temporality) of communication in general. There are several levels of observation with their own temporal structures and thus also with their own particular forms of waiting: the autological level of communication, the level of technological processes, the level of use, and the subjective level. It has been my aim to analyze these levels separately so as to elucidate their particularities. These levels become explicit to varying degrees in the different forms of communication and exert a varying degree of influence on the actual temporal structure of a particular communicative process, which can be described in the abstract as the practical translation of various temporalities or as the practical generation of selective synchronicity between different levels.

Thus, communication is a complex course of events that can be separated for analytical purposes into different levels but remains an integrated process from each point of view. An analysis of its temporal structures

could lay the ground for an adjusted concept of communication and helps to reassess the descriptive merit of existing concepts for a society relying more and more on digital technologies. For example, every reduction of the process of communication to only one of the observational levels remains partial: e.g. Luhmann's definition of communication as a threefold process of selection applies perfectly well to the autologic level. Mobile digital communication seems to be the prime example for such a conception, but the analysis of the temporal structures shows the necessity of integrating the body into a definition of communication. Furthermore, as communications are one of the most important forms of social processes, the dissection of its temporal structures could help to back (or to refute?) the diagnosis of an acceleration and de-synchronization of the social (Rosa, 2003). Precisely because of its dependence on a complex substructure or framework mobile digital communication calls attention to the changed meaning of temporality and corporeality in (the culture of) digital communication, which otherwise would get lost all too easily in the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life. Therefore, right after this essay has been sent off for print, I will begin to await its critiques.

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Notes

1. A shorter version of this article has been published in German in *Sociologia Internationalis* 2016; 54: 47–62. Both versions of the text have been shaped by intense discussions with Matthias Klemm and Ronald Staples (cf. Klemm and Staples, 2015a, 2015b). Additionally, I wish to express my appreciation for the translation of the text by Sebastian Schneider and the in-depth comments and suggestions of the reviewers, which have greatly improved the text.

2. Digital pictures or videos are also text, as they consist of combinations of zeroes and ones or the energetic equivalents of their states of operation, respectively, even if they appear as pictures to the senses. This textuality is relevant in their production, processing, storage, and distribution.
3. For a linguistic perspective on phatic communication, see Jakobson (1981), for a transfer of the concept to digital communication, see Radovanovic and Ragnedda (2012).
4. Cf. Nassehi (2008: 237ff.), where the focus is solely on the societal level, with organizations and interactions explicitly not being taken into account.
5. Media also shape the meaning or information of a communication (cf. Kittler, 1986, 1993; McLuhan, 1995 [1964]), but the semantic level is only of secondary importance for inquiring into temporality.

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