

CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

Mainstream political theory has been experiencing an identity crisis for as long as I can remember. From even a cursory glance at the major journals, it still seems preoccupied either with textual exegesis of a conservatively construed canon, fashionable postmodern forms of deconstruction, or the reduction of ideas to the context in which they were formulated and the prejudices of the author. Usually written in esoteric style and intended only for disciplinary experts, political theory has lost both its critical character and its concern for political practice. Behaviorist and positivist political “scientists” tend to view it as a branch of philosophical metaphysics or as akin to literary criticism. They are not completely wrong. There is currently no venue that highlights the practical implications of theory or its connections with the larger world. I was subsequently delighted when Palgrave Macmillan offered me the opportunity of editing *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice*.

When I was a graduate student at the University of California: Berkeley during the 1970s, critical theory was virtually unknown in the United States. The academic mainstream was late in catching up and, when it finally did during the late 1980s, it predictably embraced the more metaphysical and subjectivist trends of critical theory. Traditionalists had little use for an approach in which critique of a position or analysis of an event was predicated on positive ideals and practical political aims. In this vein, like liberalism, socialism was a dirty word and knowledge of its various tendencies and traditions was virtually non-existent. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different. Strident right-wing politicians have openly condemned “critical thinking” particularly as it pertains to cultural pluralism and American history. Such parochial validations of tradition have implications for practical politics. And, if only for this reason, it is necessary to confront them. A new generation of academics is becoming engaged with immanent critique, interdisciplinary work, actual political problems, and more broadly the link between theory and practice. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* offers them a new home for their intellectual labors.

The series introduces new authors, unorthodox themes, critical interpretations of the classics and salient works by older and more established thinkers. Each after his or her fashion will explore the ways in which political theory can enrich our understanding of the arts and social sciences. Criminal justice, psychology, sociology, theatre, and a host of other disciplines come into play for a critical political theory. The series also opens new avenues by engaging alternative traditions, animal rights, Islamic politics, mass movements, sovereignty, and the institutional problems of power. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* thus fills an important niche. Innovatively blending tradition and experimentation, this intellectual enterprise with a political intent will, I hope, help reinvigorate what is fast becoming a petrified field of study and perhaps provide a bit of inspiration for future scholars and activists.

STEPHEN ERIC BRONNER

Published by Palgrave Macmillan:

Subterranean Politics and Freud's Legacy: Critical Theory and Society
Amy Buzby

Politics and Theatre in Twentieth-Century Europe: Imagination and Resistance
Margot Morgan

Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy
Edited by Jason Schulman

Hannah Arendt and the Specter of Totalitarianism
Marilyn LaFay

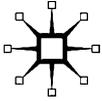
The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm
Kieran Durkin

Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom
Nichole Marie Shippen

Decolonizing Time
Work, Leisure, and Freedom

Nichole Marie Shippen

palgrave
macmillan



DECOLONIZING TIME

Copyright © Nichole Marie Shippen, 2014.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-36464-7

All rights reserved.

First published in 2014 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-47348-9

ISBN 978-1-137-35402-0 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137354020

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shippen, Nichole Marie.

Decolonizing time : work, leisure, and freedom / Nichole Marie Shippen.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Political science—Philosophy. 2. Time—Political aspects. 3. Leisure—
Political aspects. 4. Autonomy (Philosophy) 5. Liberty. I. Title.

JA71.S449 2014

320.01—dc23

2014010923

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: September 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*Dedicated to my parents, Roscoe Martin Shippen
and Elizabeth Margaret Shippen*

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvii
Introduction Decolonizing Time	1
Chapter 1 Reclaiming Leisure	17
Chapter 2 Criticizing After Dinner: Marx and the Fight for Time for Human Development	39
Chapter 3 The Reification of Time-Consciousness and the Fight for Time Reconsidered	73
Chapter 4 Critical Thoughts on Leisure	97
Chapter 5 The Culture Industry: The Extension of Work, Disciplined Leisure, and the Deterioration of Culture	115
Chapter 6 Developing a Politics of Time: André Gorz and the Domestic Labor Debates	139
Conclusion	171
<i>Notes</i>	183
<i>Bibliography</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	227

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

The original impetus for this project came from reflections on growing up in a working-class family, with parents who worked constantly in physically demanding jobs to make ends meet. Their work ethic made a deep impression on me that I did not question until a paid fellowship in graduate school gave me the time and resources to reflect on what I had experienced growing up. My working-class experience was refracted through political theory, but my reading of political theory was also informed by this experience. My father has worked on oil rigs most of his adult life. Being a “rough neck” and later a driller allowed him to make a considerable amount of money without a college degree, in comparison to other employment options in Wyoming. My mother worked as a house painter and roofer, a nontraditional job for a woman, but again with better pay without a college education. Given my parents’ traditional marriage, my mother’s Mexican-American background and my father’s patriarchal ways, my mother assumed primary responsibility for the domestic and reproductive labor in addition to her full time-employment outside of the home. My parents’ situation is not unique. It is historically an instance of the working-class experience to the extent that their lives have been governed largely by political-economic forces that they, at least as isolated individuals, have little to no control over.

Until relatively recently, my father commuted from Wyoming to the Williston Basin in North Dakota to work in the booming oil fields that have increasingly gained public attention, as we, as a nation, seek

to reduce our dependency on outside sources of oil.¹ My father's commute consisted of an eight to nine-hour drive for which he was not compensated despite the use of his own vehicle for means of transportation to and from the work site. Once he arrived at one of the "man camps," he worked 14 days outdoors, often in extreme weather conditions. To make working conditions more difficult, his hours shifted alternatively from days to nights every other work period. At the end of 14 days, he drove eight to nine hours back to Wyoming and did not work for 12 days. Upon arriving home, he usually spent the first three to four days sleeping to recover from complete exhaustion after working 14 days straight. Often he was recovering from illness.

These biographical details are political insofar as they describe the unjust conditions of working-class people who toil without any viable means of bettering their condition.² My parents are not politically active, but it is not without reason. Growing up in Wyoming, I was never made aware of the existence of labor unions let alone the history of labor struggles or working-class culture that continue to give workers a sense of dignity, self-worth, and class solidarity. When I was introduced to labor history in college, I was nothing short of amazed that such traditions existed, and I wished these traditions had been made more readily available for my parents. For the first time in my life, I understood not only class, but race and gender as political categories that offered alternative explanations for my family's lot in life that went beyond their individual choices to the political-economic forces that shaped their lives.

To know of a violation of the basic rights to human dignity and self-development is a grave injustice. Injustice is personal when those we know and love perform manual labor so strenuous that their lives are often shortened by the physical damage done to their bodies combined with the lack of health care, preventative or otherwise. Manual labor is dangerous and dirty work, but much more is at stake. What is at stake is nothing less than the development of humanity itself—not a one-sided humanity that is deformed by the working conditions of advanced capitalism, but a development of the uniqueness that each person embodies as their own seed of unrealized potential.

What a teleological understanding of humanity offers is an unfolding of human potential toward an undefined self-realization. When my father is not working, he reads literature and poetry, plays the guitar, writes songs, draws, works on building his garage, fishes, hunts, occasionally cooks, and spends time with family. In short, he most develops his unique human capabilities outside of work. When my mother is not working, she still takes responsibility for the domestic and reproductive labor that in part makes my father's discretionary time possible, but in her downtime she watches movies or reads magazines.³

When I learned about the history of the labor movement's fight to limit the workday, I thought of my parents and began to think deeply about the politics of time. I was struck by Karl Marx's insight, that under capitalism, people spend the majority of their time not participating in political activity, but working. Despite this fact, much of political theory does not treat work or time as politically significant categories. I was further persuaded by Marx's argument that democracy must be extended to the economic realm in order for freedom and equality to be meaningfully extended to all aspects of life. While the political nature of time under capitalism is readily apparent in the encapsulated phrase, "time is money," time is seldom recognized or treated as political. People may complain about their overall lack of time, but they do not necessarily recognize the political-economic factors that most contribute to this lack. Instead, as with capitalism in general, people tend to accept and negotiate the constraints as simply part of life without recognizing the structural and ideological root causes of these constraints. In this way, the politics of time is rendered largely invisible. This book seeks to demonstrate the various ways that time is *already* political, how it was depoliticized, and considers how to develop a politics of time by way of political theory.

We know time is political because labor movements have historically included the fight for time as a central part of their political agenda of extending democracy to the economy. Understanding why the fight for time was so central to the labor movement is not only of historical significance, but also, much more importantly, of political

significance for developing a radical politics today. At the most basic level, the initial fight for time institutionalized a way for people to gain a greater degree of control over their time by limiting the length of the workday through legislative reform. This legislation was meant to prevent individuals from selling themselves into slavery, but it also created an important and necessary distinction between their time and the time they sold to their employer: “In place of the pompous catalogue of the ‘inalienable rights of man’ comes the modest Magna Charta of a legally limited working-day, which shall make clear ‘when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins.’”⁴ What the fight for time established were the necessary, but not sufficient institutional preconditions for developing the possibility for a more humane existence, one not overly determined by the production and circulation of capital, or the mere necessities of life.

The fight for time was no small feat. Marx informs us that the fight for the 10-hour workday took no less than 30 years to win in England, and with good reason. The functioning and profitability of capitalism continue to this day to depend on the ability to define and structure the overall meaning and general experience of time. The fight for time gave birth to what we casually refer to as free time, but free time was not the ultimate goal as much as self-directed time, or temporal autonomy, the ideal form being leisure. At present, free time, a contested concept, which uncritically assumes time left over after wage labor is free, and leisure, “a state of being free from the necessity to labor,”⁵ are used interchangeably to the detriment of the radical potential of leisure as a regulative ideal to resist the colonization of time by capital.

Unfortunately, the struggle for time is framed today not as a collective political struggle against the dictates of the capitalist system, but as an individual and ostensibly private struggle to balance the time constraints of both work and life, popularly referred to as the “work-life balance.” Yet, work-life balance is a misnomer and a means of mystification that keeps individuals negotiating time constraints from recognizing the political nature of time under capitalism that is largely beyond the control of isolated and unorganized individuals. Not only are severe time constraints normalized, but technology,

which once was sought to reduce the overall amount of time spent working in order to increase leisure, is now used to encourage individuals to work without limit, as work is integrated seamlessly with life, which is now referred to as “work-life integration.”⁶ Seldom do people make a political connection between their individual negotiations of time constraints, and the labor movement’s collective struggle to limit the length of the workday through legislative reform. The depoliticization of time is a result of the colonization of time by capital that determines the individual and collective experience of time to such an extent that severe time constraints are often experienced as normal, if not inevitable, rather than political, which is to say, a situation that can be questioned, challenged, and transformed. The depoliticization of time is reinforced by the political tradition of liberalism that frames time solely as an individual’s possession,⁷ rather than a collective and social resource. Further, liberalism suggests that time belongs to individuals who make rational decisions about how to allocate their time without taking into consideration the political-economic context they must negotiate out of necessity.

A theory of time in capitalist modernity is extremely useful because it demonstrates the political nature of time under capital, which may help people make sense of what might otherwise feel like an individual plight. To develop a radical politics, time must be re-politicized through a careful analysis of the historical practices and discourses associated with it. By developing a politics of time, I mean to address the political, economic, and social conditions that either enhance or hinder the ability to control our time in a meaningful way. The commodification of time severely limits the realization that there is a choice to be made between time and money, and that they are not one and the same. Yet, this choice is denied by the daily reality that time is severely constrained by the necessity to labor as enforced by dependency on the market for the majority of goods and services combined with the almost nonexistence social safety net in the context of the United States.

Although subjective understandings of time are not reducible to a single experience, there remains an overarching framework and logic to time under capitalism that all individuals must negotiate regardless

of their employment status. A struggle over alternative understandings of time recently took place between elderly Koreans and a local McDonald's restaurant located in Flushing, Queens.⁸ The juxtaposition between the presumably retired Korean patrons' desire to sit for hours on end enjoying their coffee and the fast food industry's desire to make a profit could not be more illustrative of this point. Native Americans, among other historically oppressed groups in the United States, have also resisted standardized clock time by referring to their purposeful lateness as running on "Indian time." Despite these individual or even group acts of resistance, the overarching framework and logic to time under capitalism that individuals must negotiate is the subject of this book in its entirety, but I focus primarily on "abled, prime-aged people who are not involuntary unemployed."⁹ As Goodin notes, "Others such as the young, the old and the involuntary unemployed might suffer the opposite problem—too much time and too little to do . . . and the currency of time might not be the most relevant way of specifying what, in justice, they most need."¹⁰ In 2007, for example, a public library in Maplewood, New Jersey, made the decision to close down from 2:45 to 5 p.m. to keep middle-school students with no place else to be and nothing else to do from going to the library after school let out. The board wrote, "Having as many as 50 young people with nothing to do creates an untenable situation' . . . point[ing] out that many students did not use library resources but simply socialized in the building."¹¹ In each of these cases, discretionary time was available, but was not considered acceptable to either McDonald's or a public library.

In brief, the colonization of time for working people is related to the experience of time as loss or the feeling of not having enough time to be and do what we want in our lifetime. In the context of the United States, individual negotiations of time constraints are shaped by a range of factors related to the intersections of class, race, and gender relations. The service industry is evidence enough that some people are able to pay for personal services provided by others usually less privileged in order to "save time." In fact, the more recent history of capitalism might be read as the ever-increasing commodification of previously

uncommodified household activities including childcare, laundry, food preparation, elder care, etc. Despite the disparity between those with gainful full-time employment and those who serve them, usually in the context of part-time work devoid of health benefits, the fight for time appeals to people across a wide range of differences from the overworked to the unemployed as well as those in between, making it a potentially salient political issue. The ability to control one's time is very attractive to a wide spectrum of people for a variety of reasons, but the overall understanding of the politics of time is very weak. For this reason, I bring together a range of political theorists who have thought about time in a deeper and more meaningful way by connecting it to qualitative considerations of the human condition.

As this manuscript is going to print, the implementation of President Obama's Affordable Care Act has created some alarm that people might actually be able to choose to work less as a result: "The Congressional Budget Office originally predicted that the availability of subsidies for low-income Americans to buy health insurance would result in about 800,000 people leaving full-time work by 2023. The revised estimate increases that number to about 2.5 million."¹² Although this is an estimate, the reactions reported in this blog post do provide some indication of just how threatening the reality of reducing the necessity to labor is to business as usual:

Texas Republican John Cornyn took to the Senate floor with the same message. "The president's own health care policy . . . is killing full-time work, and putting people in part-time work," he said.

Obama's White House wasted little time responding, sending Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Jason Furman to the daily press briefing. There, Furman turned Cornyn's charge on its head, arguing that if some people are able to work part time and spend more time with their children, or if others can leave a job to start a business of their own without fear of losing health insurance, then these are good things happening because of the Affordable Care Act.

“This is a choice on the part of workers,” Furman said. “I have no doubt that if, for example, we got rid of Social Security and Medicare, there are many 95-year-olds that would choose to work more. I don’t think anyone would say that was a compelling argument to eliminate Social Security and Medicare,” Furman said.

Perhaps the Affordable Care Act indicates a possible way forward by creating less dependency on employment at least in terms of health care, which may enable people to work less if they choose to do so.

Acknowledgments

If there is one individual who has been there from the inception of this project to its completion, and I do mean (nearly) every single step of the way, it has been my long-time mentor and dear friend, Michael Forman. He has both challenged and encouraged me in equal measure with his insightful comments and consistently good politics. Whatever I miss, he catches. His support over the course of my intellectual development has been a lesson in the meaning and practice of solidarity.

There were two scholars and friends who read my final chapters in a timely and generous manner despite their own demanding schedules: special thanks to Carolyn Craig and Alex Welcome. Craig has been an enormous source of help in making my work more accessible by pretending she knows little about political theory. She has been a very important source of support throughout the project's many stages. Welcome and I share an appreciation of Hegel, but disagree in our interpretations, which made his insights particularly useful. I very much look forward to reading his future work.

In terms of scholarship, I would like to thank the following friends and established colleagues for their incisive feedback: Judith Grant, Steve Bronner, and Dennis Bathory. Their comments haunted my writing in a way that forced me to further develop my ideas.

For moral support, friendship, and intellectual conversation, I am very grateful for the time extended to me by my friends, Amy Linch, Giselle Datz, Kris Grey, Linda Earley, Michael Neiman, Kenny Grand, Kate Bedford, Emily Grabham, Brian Stipelman, Meredith Staples,

Karey Leung, Geoff Kurtz, Eric Radezky, Crystal Lawson, Krista Nethercott, Mark Engler, Melissa Brown, Sara Angevine, Emily Cohen, Laura Tanenbaum, Jayashree Kamble, and Karen Miller. Thank you to everyone who supported me along the way; you know who you are.

A special thanks to the community that keeps the ideas and ideals of the democratic socialist tradition alive, including the *Democratic Socialists of America* (DSA) and the *Young Democratic Socialists* (YDS) that allowed me the privilege of presenting my ideas at their annual winter conferences where I met other like-minded folks from across the country and abroad. Thank you to Maria Svart, the National Director of DSA, Joseph M. Schwartz, Jason Schulman, Michael Hirsch, and Cornel West for continuing to make democratic socialism relevant to contemporary politics. Thanks to Heidi Chua Schwa at the *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, New York, for being an excellent resource for the Left. Thanks also to Bhaskar Sunkara for establishing the online journal, *Jacobin*, which often provides lively debates about the politics of time. Finally, thanks to John de Graaf, the executive director of *Take Back Your Time* for bringing a variety of people together to fight for the qualitative aspects of life.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of presenting chapters of this work in various stages on New Political Science Panels at the American Political Science Association and the Western Political Science Association. I would like to thank some of my fellow panel participants—Douglas Kellner, Katherine Young, Bradley Macdonald, Michael Forman, and William Neimi—whose comments and questions helped me to strengthen my ideas in ways I would not have done otherwise.

I had the privilege of working with an excellent group of thinkers in two writing groups at LaGuardia Community College: *The Literacy Broker's Program*: Alex Welcome, Irwin Leopondo, Habiba Boumlik, Ruhma Choudhury, and Maria Jerskey; and *The Faculty Scholarship and Publication Workshop*: Nancy Berke, Patricia Sokolski, Linda Chandler, and Hara Bastas. Thank you to all the participants for their critical but supportive feedback that encouraged me that this project was worthwhile.

Thank you to my past and current LaGuardia Community College students, in particular, Jonathan Gomez, Joanna Trimble,

Kimberley Morales, Amir Khafagy, and Alex Arancibia of People Power LaGuardia, and Tabares Guerrero and Brian Brown for fighting to make the world a better place.

My family—Roscoe Martin Shippen, Elizabeth Margaret Shippen, Rachael Shippen, and Colton Shippen—and Shay Leseberg and Kaia Leseberg—have been extremely supportive, patient, and unconditional in their love. Thank you for reminding me of where I come from and how far I have traveled to arrive here. Finally, I am grateful to my younger brother, Roscoe Anthony Shippen, whose untimely death taught me that life is short, grief is long, but love is longer.