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## **Time in International Relations theory**

*Forthcoming in the Oxford Handbook of Time and Politics*

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### **Abstract**

Temporal phenomena like power shifts, wars, and confounding events characterize international politics. Yet for decades academic International Relations (IR) did not consider time worthy of research or reflection. Recently things have changed, especially in critical IR, where scholars developed numerous arguments about time's political importance. However, none of this work pursued a synoptic account of time in IR *theory*. This chapter does so, using an ideal typology of closed and open time to understand realism, liberalism, constructivism, English School, feminism, Marxism, and critical theory. In each, tensions between open and closed time distinguish the theory from its competitors but also animate explanatory and normative debates amongst its proponents. The historically overlooked issue of time – our assumptions about it, visions of it, and claims about how it impacts politics – drives theoretical development *across* and *within* IR theories, which we can understand as attempts *to time* international political life.

### **Keywords**

International Relations theory, open and closed time, explanations, normative theorizing, history, timing

### **Introduction**

Time occupies a strange position in International Relations (IR). Temporal phenomena like epochal power shifts, chaotic wars, and a steady diet of surprising and confounding events run through the international political record. But for much of its disciplinary history, IR did not take time especially seriously, either as an object of analysis or an assumption or embedded logic informing various theoretical perspectives. Over the past decade or more, things have changed. Mainstream approaches to institutions and statistics have made room for historical institutionalism (Pierson 2004; Hanrieder 2015; Fioretos 2017) and Bayesian methods (King and Zeng 2001; Western and Kleykamp 2004; Park 2010), and there has been

a veritable explosion of time studies on the broadly critical side of IR. Overall, IR is becoming more and more aware of its intimate relationship with time.

However, none of this recent time scholarship develops a synoptic account of *IR theory* (IRT). Kimberly Hutchings' (2007, 2008) touchstone work includes some IRT as part of her analysis of how *international political theories* instantiate the classical temporalities of homogeneous *chronos* and opportunistic *kairos*.<sup>1</sup> Tim Stevens (2015) develops a general framework of 'emergent sociotemporality' from celebrated time scholar J.T. Fraser, but applies this specifically to cybersecurity. Christopher McIntosh (2015) highlights mainstream security studies as 'theories of the present', and a host of other scholars bring distinctive temporal perspectives to bear on particular debates, topics, and empirical phenomena (Berenskoetter 2011; Blaney and Inayatullah 2006; Debrix 2015; Edkins 2003, 2013; Gallagher 2012; Helliwell and Hindess 2011; Hindess 2007; Hom 2010; Hom and Steele 2010; Hom 2017b; Klinke 2013; Lundborg 2016; Shapiro 2001, 2010, 2016; Stephens 2010; Vij 2012). However, none of them pursues a holistic perspective on the question of time in IRT.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter develops such a view by scrutinizing time in various IR theories. I argue that, while most do not acknowledge this explicitly, IR theories are deeply bound up with issues of time and temporality. In particular, we can distinguish and understand them by examining whether they take a more *open* or more *closed* view of time and how this view impacts their substantive accounts. Put briefly, more open accounts understand time 'as fundamentally indeterminate, constituted from contingency and novelty, and as such resistant to any moves that might close down future possibilities in the interest of ideological mobilization, hermeneutical assistance, or theoretical affect' (Hom and Steele 2010, 274). By contrast, closed temporalities constrain time using intuitive, often spatial metaphors, which lend a sense of order, manageability, and predictability to complex and interpenetrating social processes that are often quite contingent (Hom and Steele 2010, 274). Two familiar variants of closed time are unilinear-progressive and cyclical accounts (e.g. see Walker 1993), which

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<sup>1</sup> Lundborg (2011) applies this same framework to terrorism. Walker's (1993) seminal treatment of time purposefully reads IR *as* an instance of political theory, highlighting presumptions about states as containers of unirectilinear progress with cyclically violent interrelations.

<sup>2</sup> I make closely related arguments about IR *theorizing* in (Hom 2018a) and Andrew R. Hom 'Reckoning Ruin: International Relations and the Problem of Time', Edinburgh, book manuscript in preparation; but these concern the *processes* of theorizing rather than the finished products of *substantive* IRT.

posit either the consistent march of progress or a sort of ‘eternal permutational’ recurrence to knit together the past, present, and future in a meaningful and well-ordered continuum.

This distinction does not exhaust ideas about time and international politics. I deploy it in ideal-typical fashion, as a ‘deliberate reduction’ or ‘one-sided accentuation’ of perspectives that gathers together and draws out some of the dominant intentions and tensions animating IRT (Jackson, in Hom 2017a, 700; Jackson 2017). Its value lies in ‘intellectual utility’ rather than ‘descriptive accuracy’ – the open/closed distinction should be ‘sparse enough to be useful but rich enough to allow its extension’ to central examples of each theory (Jackson 2017). Indeed, in addition to picking out key differences *between* various IR theories, I show that the question of open/closed time also informs individual tradition’s *internal* debates and developments.<sup>3</sup> I cover IR realism, liberalism, constructivism, English School, feminism, Marxism and critical theory. Each section notes key temporal distinctions across and within the theoretical tradition. This helps avoid treating each –ism as a monolith and allows us to develop a more nuanced account highlighting ‘complex arrangements with internal differentiations and fuzzy boundaries that nevertheless produce an identifiable “pattern”’ of thought we have since come to know as one –ism or another (Kessler and Steele 2017, 11). In the conclusion, I discuss the emerging contours of recent and more explicit engagements with time and reflect on the implications of this temporal typology for the broader question of how we can reinterpret IRT as an intrinsically temporal domain of inquiry.

## **Realism**

IR realism initially differentiated itself against the postwar American trend toward a unified view of science. International politics was distinct and distinctly un-rational, primarily due to the workings of power under anarchy. Hopes that war and other dilemmas would submit to general knowledge or a naturally harmonious solution were dangerously ‘idealized’ (Carr 2016, 12–14; Herz 1950, 1959; Morgenthau 1946). Instead, politics *always* involves an irreducible clash of perspectives and commitments, which can only be addressed in their concrete particularity (Morgenthau 1945, 1948; Niebuhr 2008). These realist positions were closely attuned to the issue of time. Early or ‘classical’ realists admonished claims about social prediction and control underwritten by the idea that enlightened reason reliably replaced the theological foundations of society. Instead, realists acknowledged contingency,

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<sup>3</sup> That is, IRT displays a loose fractal similarity on the question of time (Jackson 2011, 211; and in Hom 2017a, 700).

the unknown, and multiple worldviews as basic features of life ‘under an empty sky from which the Gods have departed’ (Morgenthau 1948; Hom and Steele 2010, 274, 279; Guilhot 2017, 99–107). Classical realist time was fundamentally open, ‘elastic and incommensurable with itself’ (Guilhot 2017, 19).<sup>4</sup>

IRT must address open time with nuanced and dynamic concepts. Morgenthau’s ‘struggle for power’ expressed the existential need to temporarily fix fluid situations so as to understand and act upon them (Petersen 1999; Hom and Steele 2010; Rösch 2016). The balance of power referred to ongoing efforts to delimit competition and thereby forestall another world war (Guilhot 2017, 91–99). And the security dilemma (Herz 1950) typified realism’s ‘tragic vision’ (Lebow 2003) of politics in time, elaborating how non-belligerent states in uncertainty might descend into arms races and unintended wars.

However, while they decried rationalism and embraced open time, classical realists also occasionally promised a ‘scientific’ IR theory concerned with ‘general laws’ (see the transcript in Guilhot 2011, 240–53; Wolfers 2011, 282–83; also Guilhot 2017, 54–56, 40). While such comments were more an apology to the fashions of the day than a deep commitment to nomothetic theorizing (Williams 2005a, 82–127; Guilhot 2017, 28–68), they nevertheless afforded an opportunity to distill a more rationalist version of realism. ‘Neorealists’ welded classical realist sensibilities to an economistic mode of theorizing. For instance, Kenneth Waltz (1959) argued that a properly scientific and parsimonious IRT should look only at international or systemic causes. In particular, structural factors like anarchy and power differentials could explain the most important political outcomes once these had been abstracted from the ‘reality of international practice’ (Waltz 1979, 68).

These explanatory commitments required modifications of classical concepts. Anarchy moved from the absence of world government to a systemic organizing principle granting structure to relations between states, which were ‘black-boxed’ as functionally identical and strategically rational entities analogous to firms. Power shifted from an epistemic capacity to the more readily measured material strength. Instead of a dynamic holding operation, the balance of power became a cycling regularity or equilibrium imbuing the international historical record with a reliable shape (Waltz 1979; see Hom and Steele 2010, 275–76).

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<sup>4</sup> For elaborations of many themes and links summarized in this section, see (Hom, 2018c).

In these ways, neorealists propounded a powerful and closed vision of time as an orderly continuum of ‘continuities and repetitions’ that ‘*defeat*’ woolly theorizing and normative aspirations alike (Waltz 1979, 67 emphasis added). The lynchpin was reducing the possibilities of uncertainty (a *prima facie* open view of the future) to a singular rational response: states ‘worry’ about relative gains and losses more than anything else (Waltz 1979, 105; see Hom and Steele 2010, 275) and the aggregate effects of such worry produces relatively stable equilibria. In this sense, neorealism ‘rejects the flow of time altogether’, producing “‘a uniformity of outcomes despite the variety of inputs’” (Hom and Steele 2010, 275). This temporal closure helped quell Cold War thermonuclear anxieties. While classical realists despaired that the nuclear revolution made a world state normatively necessary and practically implausible (see Craig 2003; Scheuerman 2010), Waltz (1981) argued in the other direction: because states were rational and nuclear weapons made wars too costly, ‘more may be better’ because they would cultivate more cautious behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

Even sympathetic scholars find neorealism too puristic. Neoclassical realists therefore bring individual- and unit-level considerations back in, using insights from psychology, bureaucratic and organizational studies, state-society, and domestic institutions (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 59) to construct ‘intervening variables’ that can explain empirical variations in foreign policy (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 58–79, ix). Yet while these efforts relax neorealism’s explanatory standards, they do so only to wear down the novelty of unexpected events (see Mead 2002, 43), filling in the gaps of grand theory with scientifically warranted explanations. Time opens up just enough to allow scientific truth through.

Against these scientific renderings, more recent ‘reflexive’ readings of realism seek to recover its distinctive ethical (e.g. Cozette 2008) and open temporal sensibilities (see Hom and Steele 2010). Temporal variation inflects the meaning and implications of every political dilemma and research puzzle. It drives ‘ontological doubt’, requiring ‘*constant* engagement with empirical reality’ (Stullerova 2017, 13). Responding primarily to a disastrous decade or more of counterterror wars in which some IR accounts were complicit, reflexive realists highlight the cross-contamination between research and political practice and draw from this

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<sup>5</sup> Although Craig (2003, 137–65) notes that the ‘later Waltz’ beat a ‘retreat from parsimony’, encouraging ‘great power management’ to forestall just what he had said was unlikely – thermonuclear war.

stark lessons about scholarly reflexivity (Lebow 2003, 310–59; Williams 2005b; Steele 2007a; Amoureux 2015). The social and political nature of social science means that concepts and theories can never be safe from the vicissitudes of open time, and so we rely on the ‘tragic self-denial’ of the politician *and* the theorist: ‘In a world without foundations, the heroically responsible individual is one who overcomes the desire for such foundations’ (Williams 2005a, 195). The result is a more prudent vision of IRT bound by an ethical responsibility to reflect on the limits of knowledge, its relationship to politics unfolding in open time, and how both recommend a ‘politics of limits’ that ‘maximises its positive possibilities while minimising its destructive potential’ (Williams 2005a, 7, 69–114).

However, reflexive realism is not immune to temporal tensions. In the process of recovering ethics, some reflexive realists read open time in an Augustinian sense, as the secular ground of humanity’s ‘existential reach for transcendence’ still located ‘under’ the moral promise of God (Russell 1990, 157; see Hom and Steele 2010, 284). Other, more Nietzschean realists understand time itself as ‘devoid not only of worldly meaning but of any transcendental foundation’ (Hom and Steele 2010, 280–84). This temporal distinction informs dialogues about the national interest (Williams 2005b; Tjalve 2008; see Hom, 2018c), humanitarian intervention (cf. Russell 1990, 169; Murray 1997, 124; Lang 2002, 11–18; see Hom and Steele 2010, 293–96), and whether IRT can ever move beyond a ‘series of informed hunches’ (Morgenthau, quoted in Guilhot 2011, 255). The issue of open/closed time shades each of these reflexive discussions, just as it does with major variations within realism more generally.

## **Liberalism**

Liberal IR theory presents more consistently closed temporal visions. This is not especially surprising since liberal IR springs from two quintessentially modern efforts to tame the vagaries of time after the death of god: liberal democracy and science.<sup>6</sup> Liberalism confronts realism’s insistence on power political necessities with arguments about the conditions for cooperation under anarchy (Doyle 1983, 206). This marks an explanatory opening (Hom and Steele 2010, 274–78): instead of recurrent conflict, ‘liberals cultivate firmly linear and sometimes unidirectional conceptions of history’ (Jørgensen 2017, 67) based on a harmony of

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<sup>6</sup> Proponents understood democracy as a means of addressing ‘the issues raised in the flow of time’ so that ‘at length, a system of justice and order is educed out of chaos’ (Lord Macaulay, quoted in Dickson 1919, 17).

interests, a simple “belief in progress” (Sterling-Folker 2015, 41), and/or a ‘hegemonic faith in the “Kantian triangle” of democracy, capitalism, and international institutions (Sterling-Folker 2016, 255).

Differences within liberalism’s overarching progressivism reflect temporal distinctions. Early on in IR, ‘Schumpeterian pacifism’ attended only to economic factors and so presented international politics as ‘homogenized. ... [A]ll states evolve toward free trade and liberty together’ (Doyle 1986, 1153–54). Complex interdependence complicated the picture, proffering a manifold of links between states, economies, and societies as drivers of cooperation (Keohane and Nye 1977; Richardson 2008, 223). Neoliberal institutionalists treat states as rational actors and argue that in some cases institutions reduce uncertainty and thereby steer outcomes away from conflict (Martin and Simmons 1998, 730–31; Keohane and Martin 1995, 50; see Stein 2008, 217; Richardson 2008, 229–31). In the latter case, although research originally was circumspect about institutional effects, it gradually embraced a sense of almost inevitable cooperation, either as a matter of ‘integration’ driven by rewards and attitudinal changes or interpretations of institutions as ‘efficient or efficiency-improving’ regimes (Martin and Simmons 1998, 735–39; see Keohane 2005). Alongside these, absolute gains offered neoliberals a consistent ‘micro-vision of temporal progress in which rational actors “learn” to improve their collective lot by cooperating under conditions of anarchy (Hom and Steele 2010, 276–77; see Baldwin 1993, 4–8). Such seemingly robust causal mechanisms make institutions seem like an action frameworks that “will usually determine for itself” what is the best possible state of affairs” (Richardson 2008, 226). These shifts imbued institutional research with unilinear-progressive trajectories.<sup>7</sup>

Partly due to dissatisfaction with these rationalist approaches, institutional research recently took a historical turn (Martin and Simmons 1998, 749–50; see Pierson 2004; Fioretos 2011, 2017; Hanrieder 2015). Historical institutions change (Stein 2008, 215) and often confound equilibrium assumptions or rational expectations. These acknowledgements place them on more open temporal ground, but historical institutionalists also struggle with this terrain. ‘Historical’ signifies a range of non-rational or suboptimal outcomes caused by the flow of time, including unpredictability, inflexibility, ‘nonergodicity’, inefficiencies (Fioretos 2011,

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<sup>7</sup> A normative attention bias complemented this shift. Neoliberal institutionalist research emphasized institutions deemed ‘welfare promoting, not exploitative’, which helped erase problems of global inequality implicated in institutional processes (Richardson 2008, 226–27).



371), and ‘pathologies’ that keep outcomes suboptimal (Martin and Simmons 1998, 749; see Pierson 2004). A key takeaway is that IR scholars should ‘attempt to specify the conditions under which unanticipated consequences are most likely’ (Martin and Simmons 1998, 750). In these ways, historical institutionalists position temporal elements and dynamics as impediments to institutional rationality and social scientific knowledge warrants.

Democratic peace theory (DPT) closes down time even more decisively. It wed a seemingly robust empirical observation – the correlation between increasing numbers of liberal democracies and the decreasing frequency of war (see Russett 1993) – with explanatory claims about how democratic culture, electoral consequences, and deliberative institutions pacify political behavior (e.g. Owen 1994; Doyle 1986, 1151). Although it has come under fire for its definitions of war and democracy (Spiro 1994, 55–62), its facile and cozy relationship with US foreign policy (Oren 2003), and for ignoring the perils of *democratization* (Mansfield and Snyder 1995), DPT also captured the imagination of scholars who viewed it ‘as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations’ (Levy 1989, 88). In DPT, rationalist social science confirms that the *natural* order of politics reflects liberal normative inclinations about the links between democracy and security. It marks an apotheosis of liberal IR, providing settled interpretations of events that confirm given normative positions. There is little wiggle room on its unirectilinear path to progress (Hom and Steele 2010, 277). Such temporal certitude helped authorize post-Cold War interventions – most notably the Iraq fiasco (see Russett 2005; Steele 2007b; Ish-Shalom 2013), where DPT’s promise to transcend time induced chaos out of relative stability.

Finally, ‘liberal international order’ (“LIO”; Ikenberry 2001, 2011) research offers a slightly more flexible temporality than DPT. LIO relaxes the empirical record, admitting that liberalism contains intrinsic tensions, is currently in crisis, and not for the first time – ‘liberal internationalism, 3.0’ (Ikenberry 2009). And while it remains entirely rationalist, it also acknowledges that liberal order flows not from fixed principles (Ikenberry 2009) but instead from ‘imaginative and supple responses to a changed global environment’ (Simpson 2008, 256). LIO thus seems a more dynamic and contingent liberalism. However, normative foreclosure delimits these openings. The current LIO faces an ‘authority crises’ but its underlying logic and character remains sound (Ikenberry, Parmar, and Stokes 2018, 2; Moravcsik 2008, 247) and ‘there is simply no grand ideological alternative’ (Ikenberry 2018, 23) – a conclusion asserted rather than historically or comparatively defended. These

normative and temporal closures aid policy relevance by framing LIO as an issue primarily of execution rather than of political deliberation and indeed politics *per se*. LIO scholars write about, for, and move amongst the US foreign policy establishment (Brown 2016, 46), a disciplinary context reflected in their nuanced theoretical embrace of American leadership and exceptionalism (Richardson 2008, 231; Lebow 2016, 59) and more coarse treatment of other possible ordering forms. Just as the LIO remains unsurpassed, so to, on this account, the US remains a ‘liberal leviathan’ exemplifying, driving, and directing political progress (Ikenberry 2011, 2018, 13). In these ways, LIO recapitulates a unilinear and triumphalist vision of time that denies any radical alternatives or incommensurable differences (Levine and Barder 2014, 876–79).

No IR theory typifies the relentless impulse to discipline open time like liberalism. Its complementary normative and scientific certitudes discourage any enduring ‘sense of indeterminacy’ (Williams 2005a, 123). Indeed, liberal IR offers the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 2006) or more precisely the decisive closure of time itself: ‘rational desire’ mediated through liberal democracy drives events along a single arc toward ‘the best possible solution to the human problem’” (Sterling-Folker 2016, 256), even if this guaranteed outcome remains always just over the horizon.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivist IR initially differentiated itself against neorealist and rationalist orthodoxies. Using a variety of philosophical resources, early constructivists attacked conventional IR wisdom about nomothetic theorizing and the cumulative nature of social scientific knowledge (Kratochwil 1989, 1993; Onuf 2012). They also moved IRT toward a more open view of time by challenging the importance of empirical regularities and the presumed immutability of the anarchic states system (Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1992) and by arguing that practical processes, shared understandings, and the co-constitution of agents and structures (Onuf 1998, 59, 63–64) all destabilized the ground of grand theory. International relations unfolded in ‘a world of our making’ (Onuf 2012), which emerged from contingent historical processes,<sup>8</sup> embedded prevailing ideological commitments, and always featured continuity *and* transformation (Kratochwil 1986; Ruggie 1982, 1986, 1998; Wendt 1992). Such arguments received support from the surprising – and surprisingly peaceful – end of the Cold War. A vital lesson that IR

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<sup>8</sup> This historical sensitivity gives constructivism a substantive affinity with English School theorizing (Hurrell 2002, xii; Leira and de Carvalho 2017).

scholars drew from this episode was that overly scientific approaches too easily forgot that time was a ‘force’ that ‘in and of itself ... shapes events’ (Gaddis 1992, 39). Time was wilder and less bounded than dominant theories realized, an oversight that left them wide open to the ‘embarrassment of changes’ (Kratochwil 1993, 71; see Leira and de Carvalho 2017, 100). To understand how politics actually works in time, constructivists argue, we must foreground meaning and interpretation (especially identities and norms) over strategic necessities, historical particularity over transhistorical validity, open up causal inference to constitutive factors, and generally treat dynamic phenomena not as impediments to scientific knowledge but the basic ‘stuff’ of social life.

Constructivists working in the late 1980s and early 1990s were remarkably successful in their efforts to open up IR to ideas, processes, and a more flexible relationship to time (Guzzini 2000). In a matter of years, constructivism joined realism, liberalism, and Marxism as a ‘paradigmatic’ approach. But this success also introduced constructivism to the disciplinary politics of accommodation. To seize the initiative for norms and ideas, a ‘second generation’ of constructivists offered a ‘middle ground’ (Adler 1997) or ‘via media’ (Wendt 2000) between rationality and culture, materialism and idealism, structure and agency, objectivism and subjectivism.<sup>9</sup> The latter of each of these pairs could yet be translated into ‘the language of science’, especially as hypotheses about the liberalizing influence of ideas on the international system (Leira and de Carvalho 2017, 105; Kessler and Steele 2017, 8). Norms could be operationalized as variables amenable to empirical ‘tests’ against more rationalist explanations (Katzenstein 1996, 30; Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996).<sup>10</sup>

These translations rendered constructivism less threatening to mainstream IR commitments. Social construction qualified but did not undercut the IR knowledge project. Having lost their back-and-forth mediating capacity between agents and structures, ideas and norms began to look much more like top-down, almost structural causal mechanisms (Engelkamp, Glaab, and Renner 2017, 55). Their dynamism became unidirectional and positive, encouraging peaceful security communities (Risse-Kappen 1996) and ‘cascading’ from system to states and beneath in an increasingly regulatory manner (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891) that set durable expectations and taboos of behavior (Price 1997; Tannenwald 1999). Previously fluid

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<sup>9</sup> On the second generation, see (Kessler and Steele 2017; Barder and Levine 2012; Leira and de Carvalho 2017).

<sup>10</sup> On the disciplinary strategies of these engagements, see (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 396).

and contingent identities were disciplined by the ‘spontaneous’ capacity of ‘structural boundary conditions’ to ‘channel ... system dynamics’ toward ‘inevitable’ outcomes like a ‘world state’ (Wendt 2003, 491–92, 507–17; see Hom and Steele 2010, 277–78). Much like liberal IRT, these explanatory closures reinforced the liberal *zeitgeist* of the post-Cold War decade (Steele 2007b; Leira and de Carvalho 2017; Kessler and Steele 2017; Barder and Levine 2012): because international politics had come into line with IR’s broad normative commitments, conventional hypothesis testing of new ideational variables was sufficient to show that (liberal) ideas could overcome power politics. As fluid phenomena became reliable top-down mechanisms, open time looked more and more like the steady march of progress toward justice or, at least, a growing list of liberal gains.<sup>11</sup> While early constructivists admonished IR’s historical amnesia, the second generation embraced historicism, forgetting that the end of the Cold War highlighted the indeterminate and unpredictable flow of time and reading it instead as a historical event of fixed meaning to be explained with tried and trusty methods.

Of course, even while top-down and linear-progressive readings of constructivism were securing a place in mainstream IRT, failed interventions, genocide and ethnic cleansing, and the war on terror confounded many of their hopes and premises. Consequently, a ‘third generation’ of constructivists emerged who explicitly tried to recover the openness and critical commitments of the first generation. These constructivists embraced autobiographical narratives (Steele 2005, 2008; Mitzen 2006), relational processes (Jackson and Nexon 1999) and practices (McCourt 2016). They insisted that ‘social science research cannot be neutral’ and is in fact intrinsically political (Engelkamp, Glaab, and Renner 2017, 52), especially since its subjects and objects cross-contaminate (Oren 2003; Steele 2007b), with ideas changing and ‘traveling’ in unexpected ways. They also began acknowledging and engaging their own normative commitments as intrinsic and inescapably contingent elements of theorizing that entail greater scholarly reflexivity (Amoureux 2015; Amoureux and Steele 2015; Ish-Shalom, in Hom 2017a, 710–14).

By re-opening the settled epistemic and normative assumptions of *via media* constructivism, third generation constructivists engage rather than discipline open time. They happily study

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<sup>11</sup> Contemporaneous studies about the dark side of ideas and norms, for instance how a ‘will to manifest [collective] identity’ drove colonialism and imperialism (Hall 1999) received conspicuously less attention and acclaim during this period.

fluid, ungeneralizable, and non-recurrent phenomena with qualitative and non-positivist methods. Because we cannot know how time will unfold or how it will inflect ideas and norms, a ‘non-reflexive constructivism, i.e. one that does not observe its own context, its own limits ... is a contradiction in terms’ (Kessler and Steele 2017, 9). If there is any ‘lesson’ of the 1990s and early 2000s, this third generation argues, it is that international politics and IRT both exist in an open temporal continuum that cannot be theorized away without risking further embarrassments of changes.

### **English School theory**

The English School (ES) also originally differentiated itself from realism and rationalism (see Navari 2009b, 39–40; Bull 1966; Wight 1966). Even under conditions of anarchy, an international society exists and restrains state behavior (Bull 2002; Watson 1992; Wight 2002). This was a crucial normative check on the supposed inescapability of naked power politics. It was also an explanatory breakthrough. Lacking a sovereign, states might still come to share ideas and practices of cooperation that offered a basis for relatively durable institutions (Bull 2002; Cochran 2013, 187). This view challenged neorealism directly by providing explanations for ‘order without an orderer’ (Waltz 1979, 89).

Historically minded and unapologetically catholic on methods (Navari 2009a, 1–2), ES work treats static entities and variables as processual and ideational phenomena. The balance of power is no ‘mechanical arrangement’ or static ‘constellation of forces’ but rather ‘a conscious and continuing shared practice’ (Hurrell 2002, ix). The international system is no logical functional arrangement but instead ‘a historically created, and evolving, structure of common understandings, rules, norms, and mutual expectations’ (Hurrell 2002, ix). International cooperation flows not from ‘abstract ahistorical rationalism’ but from ‘the processes by which understanding of common interest evolved and changed through time’ (Hurrell 2002, x).

ES theorists also take a more flexible view of knowledge warrants (Dunne 2008, 271). Those that embrace covering law explanations also insist that theory must take seriously the ‘singularity’ or irreducible novelty of any actor or event (Bull 2000a, 264; Watson 1992, 1; see Linklater and Suganami 2006, 86–87). Nor do they trouble themselves to solve this ‘paradox’ (Bull 2000a, 264n8)—it is simply an epistemic consequence of studying phenomena that unfurl in open time. This is most clear in ES views on history, which,

although important, offers at best an ‘indirect’ and ‘dim’ illumination of how affairs ‘*may* develop in the future’ (Wight 1977, 191; Watson 1992, 1 emphasis added; Bull 2002, 248ff; see Linklater and Suganami 2006, 87–91). The problem is temporal emergence and novelty – ‘the future is greater than what history can teach us’ (Linklater and Suganami 2006, 92; Bull 2002, 247; Watson 1992, 325). This renders inadequate theoretical approaches that “‘employ a timeless language of definitions and axioms, logical extrapolations or assertions of causal connection or general law, and do not by themselves convey a sense of time and change”” (Linklater and Suganami 2006, 89; quoting Bull 2000a, 253; see also Wight 1977, 16).

ES theorists do grapple with the tensions this open temporality engenders. Bull (2002, 247) decried ‘attempts to spell out the laws of [political] transformation’ and ‘to foresee political forms that are not foreseeable’. Yet he also saw in postcolonialism ‘the working-out within Asian, African and Latin American countries of historical processes that are not unique to them but are universal’ (Bull 2000b, 232).<sup>12</sup> Other ES scholars struggled with ‘an unresolved tension between the historicist and nomothetic outlooks’ (Linklater and Suganami 2006, 91), most prominently in Wight’s description of international politics as the ‘necessitous’ realm ‘of recurrence and repetition’ (Wight 1966, 26). In contemporary ES work this tension persists in the differences between structural and processual histories of international society, as seen respectively in Barry Buzan’s (1993, 2010; Buzan and Little 2000) and Andrew Linklater’s (2004, 2010, 2011, 2016) works.<sup>13</sup>

The question of open time further informs the English School’s ‘great conversation’ about order versus justice (Buzan 2014, 83), or ‘pluralism’ and ‘solidarism’ (Bull 2000c). Pluralism allows for the co-existence of competing value systems while providing a ‘thin’ order based on reciprocal sovereignty and non-intervention (Dunne and Wheeler 1996, 94–96; Linklater 1990b, 20). This forecloses very few possibilities in time other than the wholesale disintegration of the states system or a descent into sheer chaos. Solidarism binds all states together in an ethical commitment to humanity (Bain 2013, 161), often expressed through individual and human rights as the ‘ever-expanding ties of a common humanity’ (Wheeler 2000, 33). Or international law offers a ‘plausible progressivist story’ about the ‘evolution’ of

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<sup>12</sup> This recalls ‘temporal othering’, which closes down time by synthesizing a series of coeval singularities into a totalizing story of political development (Hom and Steele 2016; Hom 2016).

<sup>13</sup> On the question of openness to ambiguity, multiple outcomes, and ‘de-civilizing processes’ in Linklater’s temporal vision, cf. (Linklater 2011, 11, 14, 18, 172–75, 2017; and Hobson 2017; Lawson 2017).

world society (Armstrong 1999, 548–49). Solidarism thus tames some of the vagaries of open time in a generalizing historical movement.<sup>14</sup>

This solidarist vision holds important consequences for humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect (R2P). ES justifications for intervention rest on individual rights and a ‘moral universalism ... forged out of the horrors of the Holocaust’, especially when there exists a ‘supreme humanitarian emergency’ characterized by imminent crimes that will ‘shock the conscience of humanity’ (Wheeler 2000, 302, 33–34; Bain 2013, 162). In such cases, decisive, forceful action is crucial (Wheeler 2000, 34) to address an imminent violation of solidarist norms. As with other more closed accounts of time, advocates read humanitarian intervention’s dismal record as merely indicating that solidarist project is ‘premature’ – ahead of its time – rather than doomed or misconceived (Wheeler 2000, 310). Similarly, after ten years of underwhelming R2P results, including the 2011 Libyan fiasco, solidarists declared the R2P norm ‘established’ but still facing some ‘implementation’ problems (Bellamy 2015). Such comments demonstrate once again how firm normative commitments can constraint the temporal imagination in ways that locate promised results just over the horizon.

These diverse explanatory and normative positions reflect persistent ES concerns with the implications of open time. While some ES scholars move to decisively discipline time, others argue the opposite, and there is little ES consensus beyond a thin or weak conception of international order. In these ways, the ES preserves a relatively open temporal sensibility.

### **Feminism**

Feminist IRT revolves around the explanatory and normative observation that “‘universal’ knowledge claims ... are based primarily on men’s lives’ (Tickner 2005, 4). Other IRTs elide women and gender, marginalizing over half the world’s population and ignoring the fact that economics (Peterson 2005, 2015; Whitworth 2016), nuclear weapons (Cohn 1987), war and anarchy (Sjoberg 2012, 2013, 2017), and a host of other ‘core IR’ topics include and often depend on gendered elements if we bother to look.<sup>15</sup> Opening IR to women and gender thus requires an audit of dominant explanatory modes, which are intellectual artefacts of a man’s

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<sup>14</sup> As further reflection, however, of the ES grappling with open time rather than decisively solving it, others note that solidarist projects can threaten international order by undercutting sovereignty or cultivating distinctly non-cosmopolitan visions of monarchy, political Islam, and transnational ethnic hatreds (Bain 2013, 165; Buzan 2010, 41, 122, 199; Dunne 2008, 275, 279).

<sup>15</sup> For a treatment of feminist time in political theory, see (Bryson 2007).

world and inadequate to the questions many feminists want to ask (Tickner 2005, 6). If we want to bring women into IRT we need to ask ‘where are the women?’ (Enloe 2014, 1–36) and to privilege ‘thinking from women’s lives’ (Harding 1991; Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006).

For example, historical states are ‘gendered entities’ and gender itself ‘is not a single variable that can be adequately indexed or measured statistically’ but rather a contingent and complex confluence of intersubjective understandings and power relationships (Tickner 2005, 17). Taking these points seriously requires a wholesale rethink of the state as a central concept and organizing form of modern IR. Likewise, feminists embrace interpretive, ideographic, ethnographic and even joyful methods (Tickner 2005, 9–10; Cohn 2006; Penttinen 2013). They take seriously the warrants for participatory and co-created knowledge (Tickner 2006, 27–29; Weldon 2006; Stern 2006; Ackerly and True 2008, 704) and work to recover marginalized voices and individual narratives as sites of international politics (Daigle 2013, 2015) or use art and parody (Särmä 2016; and in Hom 2017a, 703–7) to disturb those politics. Finally, social science is unthinkable for feminists without an explicit engagement of one’s own temporal, disciplinary, and political position (Harding 1991, 142; Tickner 2005, 9; True 2008, 413). Combined with the ‘experience-near’ methods just tabulated, this locates feminist IR closer to the lived experience of open time. As such, feminist IR proceeds through reflexive practices of ‘continual adjustment’ (Tickner 2005, 9).

Key distinctions within feminism recapitulate some of the questions raised by this open view of time. Liberal feminists embrace a more closed normative vision of a universalist theory of human rights that can provide justice in local contexts (Ackerly 2008). They also flatten out gender differences in arguments for increased female political participation based on the equality argument that ‘women share the same capacity for reason as men’ (Whitworth 2008, 393). Moreover, liberal feminists may retain a commitment to rationalist science and take more sanguine views of quantitative analysis (Ackerly and Cruz 2011). This reintroduces frequentist assumptions about the relevance of the past to the present and the commensurability of difference, both of which delimit temporal possibilities.

Standpoint feminists approach gender disparities differently, arguing that women are *better* disposed to producing accurate knowledge than men. As historically marginalized subjects, they are ‘less ideologically vested in maintaining the status quo’ (True 2008, 413; Whitworth



2008, 395). Yet standpoint feminism also maintains the possibility of objectivity. According to this view, an explicitly gendered standpoint combined with the continual adjustment of scholarly reflexivity moves knowledge toward a decisive truth. Along this road to objective knowledge, standpoint approaches ‘homogenize’ and ‘invalidate’ differences by predetermining some values as ‘authentically’ feminist (True 2008, 413; Sylvester 2002, 216). The overall effect is to reduce time to a single static continuum (Hutchings 2016, 43), whose causal and political force may be tamed by better knowledge.

Postmodern and postcolonial feminists, by contrast, aim ‘to destabilize both IR’s and feminism’s philosophical and epistemological grounds’ (True 2008, 413). Any and all concepts are ‘assertions of power’ that foreclose alternative and novel possibilities (Zalewski 2000, 26; Whitworth 2008, 395). Feminists should therefore embrace deconstruction’s potential for ‘exploring, unravelling, and rejecting the assumed naturalness of particular understandings and relationships’ underpinning gender asymmetries (Whitworth 2008, 395). Postcolonial feminists additionally criticize a maternalist and ‘First World feminist voice’ in liberal and standpoint work (Geeta and Nair 2014), which would teach, direct, and otherwise determine the possibilities of very different communities where gender intersects with race, indigeneity, and other representations. This feminism is not about hunting for better truths. Instead, it asks us to engage the multiplicity of gender identities and women’s lived experiences. Here time can take many forms and is graspable only in its teeming singularities.

Like other IRTs, feminism admonishes parts of the explanatory and normative mainstreams by opening up political time. It then differentiates internally in ways that discipline or embrace this open view of time to varying extents. Strong liberal normative or social scientific commitments close time down the most. On the other end of the spectrum, postcolonial and postmodern feminists maintain a radically open view of time precisely to keep interpretive and normative dialogue going as key political processes in their own right. In terms of time, this latter view comports most closely with feminism’s animating purpose. If the ‘forms of exclusion or privilege organized through gender ... are never closed or fixed’ and are instead ‘constantly being produced and reproduced’ (Whitworth 2008, 399), then time must continue to flow in a fundamentally indeterminate manner.

## **Marxism**

Marxism predates organized IR and was imported fairly late to IRT in only partial and problematic ways, largely due to its links to the Cold War contest between capitalism and communism and how this inflected political science (Teschke 2008, 163). So tracing a Marxist IR is fraught with gaps and fragments, although theorists have long noted its importance for IR (Wight 1966; Rosenberg 2006). Nevertheless, Marxism contributes distinctive and almost uniformly closed visions of time to IRT.<sup>16</sup>

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels theorized the emergence and progressive universalization of capitalism and its consequences: a global bourgeoisie incorporating all peoples within a single civilization, wars of imperialism driven by competitive accumulation and the need for new markets and new labor, social alienation common across the working classes, and eventually the consolidation and struggle of these classes against capitalism and its state benefactors. For Marx and Engels, these processes represented “simultaneous development on a world scale”, which would culminate ‘eventually in a synchronized proletarian world revolution’ (Teschke 2008, 164). Theirs was an unabashedly normative effort and a closed one at that, insofar as capitalism uniformly induced alienation, communism proffered a cure via the dissolution of ‘false consciousness’, and the point of theorizing was not merely to interpret the world but ‘to *change* it’ toward specific ends (Marx 1976, 571; see Kurki 2009, 247–50). It was also an explanatory closure, a ‘singular analytic’ concerned with “‘capital’ in the abstract, unfolding according to its inner contradictions’ and producing through its own ‘dialectical self-movement’ a ‘vertical deepening and horizontal widening’ that ‘relegates agency and history to the margins’ (Teschke 2008, 164, 166). Marxism thus constructed a thoroughly closed vision of time: a uni-linear and (ultimately) progressive arc that worked by ‘unifying the world geographically, homogenizing national differences sociopolitically, while polarizing class relations universally’ in order to set the stage for world revolution (Teschke 2008, 164).

IR theorists adapted Marxism into world systems theory and modified it with elements from Antonio Gramsci’s work. World systems theory reads international politics as continual class struggle and emphasizes the ‘relative tightness or looseness of the world-system’ based on enduring capitalism (Wallerstein 1974, 406, see also 1993). This is a mild relaxation of Marxist explanation but one immediately tempered by a shift from one classic closed

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<sup>16</sup> For a fascinating study of Marxist time and political institutions, see Hanson (1997).

temporality to another – where Marx and Engels anticipated a unilinear march toward revolution, world systems theory sees only cycles of capital’s dominance (Hom and Steele 2010, 276). Neo-Gramscians (e.g. Cox 1981, 128–30, 1983) keep the general normative ambit of Marxism but admit greater historical contingency into the story and incorporate quintessentially IR elements like international organizations and states as agents that help spread contextually-specific modes of production and structures of accumulation. They also add ideology and elements of culture to help explain how capitalism moves from material exploitation to total political hegemony in the form of a global civil society (Teschke 2008, 173–74). Yet while the explanatory story is multi-linear, time remains closed – neo-Gramscians read international politics primarily as a matter of the ‘universalization of particular state-society complexes’ (Teschke 2008, 174). Like Marxism more generally, these IR-local variants totalize time and history as a uni-linear ‘ascent to universality’ (Linklater 1990a, 35–41; Rosenberg 2016, 142; Teschke 2008, 165).

A much more recent variant of Marxist IR differentiates itself by relaxing the explanatory register further with a specific eye toward a more open view of time. Justin Rosenberg (2016, 128) proposes to ground IR as an intellectual pursuit in the ‘fundamental fact’ of human ‘multiplicity’. Both in its view of the future (contra Marx) and its understanding of the past (contra neo-Gramscians), Rosenberg’s (2016, 135) argument views humanity and time itself as multiple rather than unitary. For instance, ‘no society undergoes a history that is truly linear and self-enclosed’ and any understanding of ‘world development overall cannot be uni-linear or even just multi-linear’ but must be instead grapple with dialectical change processes, which do not resolve teleologically but rather produce emergent novelty by ‘unlock[ing] new possibilities and departures through [intrinsic] mechanisms’ (Rosenberg 2016, 138–39; e.g. see J. C. Allinson 2015). Rosenberg suggests an archetypal example in Trotsky’s uneven and combined development, which does not read various local contexts as following the same script but rather analyzes them as following similar but distinct themes and, crucially, interacting with one another to produce new and unexpected variations.<sup>17</sup> This intersection of ‘differential temporalities ... scramble[s] the causal co-ordinates of socio-political change’ (Rosenberg 2016, 142). In temporal and explanatory terms, then, this is a very different Marxist IR. It remains to be seen what sorts of closures such visions of uneven and combined development might stimulate.

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<sup>17</sup> For a critique of Rosenberg’s account, see (J. C. Allinson and Anievas 2009).

## Critical Theory

Critical Theory (CT)<sup>18</sup> shares Marxism's concerns with emancipation and the role of ideology in political domination. However, CT embraces a wider explanatory menu, analyzing language (Booth 1991, 313), practices (Bilgin 1999; Jones 1995), and a variety of forms of subjugation (see Fierke 2007; Krause and Williams 1997; Yalvaç 2017). Yet CT's emancipatory interest also bakes a normative tension into its relationship to time. For instance, CT distinguishes itself from neorealist IR by claiming that international realm is not 'immune to moral progress' and that rather than anarchic necessities, reason 'determine[s] human destiny' (Shapcott 2008, 332, 335). This involves the temporal wager that a more meaningful freedom is not only possible but dependent on mechanisms of reason and history itself. Thus the 'removal and correction' of various 'distortions' of power (Shapcott 2008, 331) allows humans' *natural* positive capacities to come to the fore. So while CT scholars decry rationalist attempts "'to attain technical mastery of history by perfecting the administration of society'" (Shapcott 2008, 330; see Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), they replace this with the working ideal of a cosmopolitan or progressive *telos* (e.g. Linklater 1990a, 10, 2007).

Three notable variants clarify CT's internal temporal tension. First, scholars turn to Habermas' (1984) discourse ethics (see Diez and Steans 2005). According to this view, once freed from ideology and political interests, open discourse between relative peers approaches 'communicative *rationality*', an impartial point of view fostering consensus and collective action. These 'ideal speech situations' allow the 'force of the better argument' to carry the day (see Crawford 2002, 29, 411–21), and encourage a politics that is simultaneously universalistic, sensitive to difference, and more open (Benhabib 2002; Linklater 1990a, 1998) to the materially disempowered and to alternative international actors like INGOS (Risse 2000). This variant of CT implies a domestic analogy—namely that the consensual motor of discourse ethics works outside well-ordered situations (Crawford 2002, 419).<sup>19</sup> It also brackets any speech situations in which interests, identities, political purposes, or basic worldviews are fundamentally incompatible (see Hutchings 2005, 160). These two

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<sup>18</sup> There are a number of IR approaches critical of mainstream, statist, and/or neopositivist grand theories. Following Shapcott (2008, 329), this section concerns work inspired by Frankfurt School or 'large "C" critical theory'. It does not address postmodern, poststructural, or postcolonial theories (see Hom 2018b).

<sup>19</sup> Crawford's (2002, 421–22) work on slavery and decolonization concludes that a world discourse ethics *is* possible, but only in the more limited form of 'developing "principles" (not law or procedures) of basic conduct' rather than '*reaching* [the *telos* of] consensus'.

assumptions enable an account of social relations, freed from power political constraints, naturally sluicing towards meaningful consensus.

Second, Critical Security Studies (CSS) makes emancipation the centerpiece of alternative conceptions of security (Wyn Jones 1999, 5). Driven by a concern with the everyday oppression of ordinary individuals, CSS constructs a deeper and wider notion of security oriented away from the state and toward lived freedom (Booth 1997, 114, 2007, 101–5; also Krause and Williams 1996; Ewan 2007). Overdetermined situations are insecure situations, while security is ‘survival-plus’—an existence beyond survival-struggles that prioritizes ‘the freedom of individual and groups compatible with the reasonable freedom of others, and universal moral equality compatible with justifiable pragmatic inequalities’ (Booth 2007, 106, 4). CSS also argues that emancipatory security is a ‘process rather than an endpoint’ (Wyn Jones 1999, 78) drawing inspiration from human creativity rather than any ‘timeless or static’ (and therefore ‘false’) concept of emancipation (Booth 2007, 210, 113). These comments locate emancipatory security in ‘localized and unfinished process[es]’, far away from any ‘blueprint’ or ‘unidirectional path towards an emancipated end-state’ (Nunes 2012, 353).

This looks like a relatively open view of time. Yet critics still worry about implicit normative closures. For them, CSS reflects a particularly Western (Barkawi and Laffey 2006), liberal-individualist (Shepherd 2008, 70), and otherwise essentialized worldview. This skepticism responds in part to a CSS tendency to treat emancipation as a ‘philosophical anchorage’ (‘a basis for saying whether something is “true”’), a ‘theory of progress for society, and a practice of resistance against oppression’ (Booth 2007, 112). While they may insist that these functions can only relate to provisional and concrete contexts (Booth 2007, 112–13), such comments highlight a delicate balancing act. CSS wants to *locate* emancipation in relatively open time but *ground* it in invocations of truth, progress, and a ‘conscious universalism’ (Booth 2007, 1). In this, CSS taps into a venerable tradition of negotiating the vagaries of open time by appeal to more stable foundations. Relatedly, by insisting that emancipation is vital but never fully realizable, CSS recapitulates the liberal tendency to studiously place its animating normative conclusion just out of reach.

A third offshoot of CT, ‘sustainable critique’ (Levine 2012; see also Barder and Levine 2012; Levine and Barder 2014), pursues a more concertedly open relationship to time. Rather than

consensus or emancipation, sustainable critique forwards reflexivity, juxtaposing our basic need for concepts and models with the catastrophic potential of such tools when we forget their essentially artificial and provisional nature (Levine 2012, 14–29). This is not about realizing freedom but rather the more limited need to ‘chasten’ reason and theory in order to limit horrific outcomes (Levine 2012, 29–37). Such limited aims and a focus on resisting the ‘false sense of necessity, inevitability, scientific objectivity, or naturalness’ produced by reification preserve a more open view of time, or ‘the full, dynamic, and constantly changing nature of things-as-such’ (Levine and Barder 2014, 869, see also 871). In another break with earlier CT, sustainable critique’s response to the persistent dangers of reification is *not* to elevate any specific critical alternative but instead to recommend a ‘constellar’ approach of balancing one’s own account against others while paying particular attention to what incommensurable worldviews and mutually exclusive choices these comparisons disclose (Levine 2012, 225–58). By trading in progressive endpoints for the perpetual juxtaposition of opposing viewpoints, sustainable critique cultivates an open and open-ended vision of IRT that can remain with (rather than confront) the implications of politics in open time.

## **Conclusion**

IRT manifests interesting temporal dynamics and tensions. Each theoretical tradition begins as an argument against its self-identified foil (usually an existing theory), and this typically involves some variation on the theme that time unfolds in more ways than the foil admits.<sup>20</sup> These traditions then differentiate internally based on how individual variants respond to open time. In realism, constructivism, feminism, and critical theory, for instance, oscillations between open and closed time track major internal developments. In liberalism and somewhat less so Marxism, there is more consistency. Both tendencies have much to do with scholar’s social scientific and normative commitments. Stringent explanatory standards or vigorous normative commitments are each sufficient to close down time—where both prevail, as in liberalism, the closure verges on total. Time-driven closures also occur within traditions. Neorealism, second generation constructivism, solidarist ES, liberal and standpoint feminism, and emancipatory CTs tend not to accept time as a contingent and open-ended flow. Instead, they offer social and political proposals that can ‘solve’ these temporal dynamics or propound time as an orderly continuum constituted by robust causal mechanisms, functional or progressive logics, or the frequentist promise that past tendencies capture future possibilities.

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<sup>20</sup> One consideration linking such openings is that they make political change possible – the world has to be malleable if we want to show how to transform it (see Whitworth 2008, 399).

One branch of IR theorizing has been conspicuously absent from this survey. Postmodern and poststructural, or lower-case ‘c’ critical approaches, constitute the bulk of IR’s explicit engagements with time to date. This literature looks quite promising at first because it consistently avows temporal openness, possibility, and contingency (e.g. Blaney and Inayatullah 2010; Edkins 2003; Hutchings 2007, 2008; Lundborg 2011; Shapiro 2001, 2010, 2016). However, the sheer variety of times put forward in this literature defies easy categorization – not least because critical time scholars rarely if ever engage each other’s alternative temporalities except to acknowledge their shared purpose of challenging the conventional times of hegemonic political logics (Hom 2018a, 70–71). Moreover, as I detail elsewhere (Hom 2018b), critical exemplars tend to be so committed to an open view of ‘the political’ that they *empty* out time altogether, refusing to say what might constitute it, from whence it springs, and what its consequences are (e.g. Edkins 2003, 2013; Lundborg 2011, 2016; Shapiro 2016). This is a metatheoretical effort to preserve sheer possibility *as such* – but it leaves much of the heavy lifting about how we might use time to rethink politics unfinished. In the context of our animating question, it will be interesting to see if this empty view of time prevents critical scholars from realizing the reconstructive and affirmative projects implied in their temporal deconstructions.

While sympathetic with an open view of time and the critical wing of IR, my own work on time proposes a different approach altogether. The upshot of open/closed time has to do with how we think political relations unfold, how we might steer them, and whether we can do so without irreconcilable conceptual and practical violence to alternative ways of becoming. Open/closed time thus hinges on a question of *timing*, understood not merely as co-incidence but a much more robust intellectual and practical effort to *imagine and establish* dynamic relationships between change processes (Hom 2018a, 71–75). This is why time cannot coherently remain empty – uttering ‘time’ implies some substantive proposal about which changes matter, how they emerge and relate to extant situations, and how they enable and constrain action. IRT registers temporal claims because theorists are trying to understand just these sorts of underlying timing dynamics of international politics. Open time reflects an interest in timing or putting politics together so as to cultivate flexibility, reversibility, and creativity; closed time reflects a need to provide more robust assurances about how things will turn out. The fundamental tension between open and closed time, then, stems from and

reflects the persistent challenges of timing international politics, which are always complex, dynamic, and never really finished (Hom 2018a, 77–78).



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