

**Ulrike Felt (2025) *Contesting the Chronopolitics of Research*.  
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How long will you need to read this review? Book reviews are much quicker to ingest than books themselves and they are thus well suited to the increasingly scarce time of researchers. Yet, despite its centrality in the organisation of academic life, researchers' time has been surprisingly neglected in STS. Ulrike Felt's new, open access book offers an essential (and timely) contribution to STS debates on the role of temporalities in academic research. Moving beyond accounts focused on the acceleration of academic work, and those displaying nostalgic imaginaries of slower golden times, Felt demonstrates that researchers inhabit 'epistemic living spaces', a concept emphasising how people perceive the structures in which they work, characterised by multiple and often contradictory temporalities. Time, she argues, should be understood not as linear but as a multilayered configuration of 're-timing' (p. 3). To read this review, you will therefore have to synchronise the heterogeneous temporalities you navigate: the institutional time of funding and evaluation for the projects you applied to, the epistemic temporalities inherent to your objects of study, and your subjective experience of anticipation and waiting, which are strongly shaped by your career stage.

Felt's book opens with a vivid anecdote of her early STS work at CERN, conducted at a time when

academic timescapes were radically different. She recalls "going slowly through a pile of papers" without interruptions from emails or other devices, and getting "lost in time" (p. xi). This autobiographical starting point illustrates the central argument of the book. Researchers' relationships to time have drastically changed due to structural transformations in academia. The turn towards neoliberal university models has institutionalised the rhythms of project-based funding, while the increasing reliance on digital technologies creates the impression that anyone should be available at any time. Felt calls this a new 'temporal regime' that "tacitly governs both our lives and what we can know in contemporary academia" (p. 6). She convincingly shows that time is "a site of exercise of power" (p. 7), which shapes the type of knowledge and academic lives made possible. Importantly, Felt demonstrates that this temporal regime shapes differentiated experiences. Early career researchers must plan ahead their careers, and make difficult decisions about remaining in or leaving academia, which often leads them to commit to safer epistemic projects, especially at the postdoctoral stage (Fochler et al., 2016). By contrast, obtaining tenure does not provide the temporal freedom once imagined by senior researchers, who find their time diffracted across

numerous activities. In that regard, the book itself reflects Felt's long-standing engagement with questions of time, developed over her entire career, while navigating the varied demands placed on a professor in STS.

To methodologically analyse something as dispersed and difficult to grasp as time, the book adopts a dual analytical strategy, examining it simultaneously at institutional and individual levels. On the one hand, Felt examines devices that organise academic time, which she calls 'time generators', such as research projects, CVs, evaluation cycles and metrics. These elements "shape how time is produced and organized" in academia and define "who can impose specific forms of time on whom" (p. 72). For instance, CVs structure career scripts by compelling researchers to present their trajectories as linear, even though personal and professional lives are often far messier. On the other hand, and more extensively, Felt devotes considerable attention to researchers' narratives, which are essential to study the lived, subjective and affective dimension of time (see also, Brunet and Müller, 2024). Narratives, Felt argues, are a 'form of knowing' and express the 'lived time' of research. Through these accounts, Felt reveals how researchers experience pressure, waiting, acceleration, uncertainty, or pleasure, and how they continually weave together conflicting temporal demands. Combining an institutional and experiential analysis enables the book to offer a rare synthesis in STS, where micro-ethnographic and macro-structural analyses are often separated.

To provide analytical tools and study the re-timing of academia, Felt's book develops a rich and articulated conceptual apparatus (timescapes, temporal regimes, time generators, temporalities, etc.). This conceptual richness enables Felt to avoid oversimplifying how time shapes and is shaped by academic work. She emphasises that academic timescapes are full of tensions and contradictions, between acceleration and delay, freedom and precarity, pleasure and pressure. One consequence of this multi-layered time is that researchers must navigate 'academic arrhythmia': a feeling that the tempo of academic life is, at the same time, "too fast, too slow, or irregular" (p. 48). For theoretical STS debates, the conceptual apparatus brings questions of multi-

plicity (Mol, 2002) to the center, by showing that temporal paradoxes and ambivalences shape academic life and that researchers simultaneously inhabit diverse and often incompatible timescapes. Yet, Felt does not stop at diagnosis. She wants to intervene in the chronopolitics of academic research, for instance by fostering more livable academic spaces for young researchers. To this end, she proposes a form of temporal carework that acknowledges the plurality of time in academic work and offers reflexive tools for imagining more livable academic temporalities. Concretely, research institutions could support this temporal care by making the fragmented temporal structures they have put in place, such as funding cycles, career trajectories, or evaluation processes, more coherent with respect to epistemic rhythms, and by acknowledging how different forms of time affect researchers' lives.

For STS scholars, a key point of Felt's book is that the re-timing of academic research has profound epistemic implications. Felt shows that various temporalities shape knowledge spaces (such as labs and fieldwork), research practices (preparing, waiting, maintaining), research objects as well as relations to societal issues. For instance, she notes that some infrastructures require decades of continuous investment, while other technologies, such as CRISPR-Cas9, promise to dramatically speed up work. Another epistemic implication stems from career choices and project funding cycles, which require researchers to "balance one's time investment against the potential gains in knowledge" (p. 342) and thereby weigh on which questions are either pursued or left aside. While Felt occasionally points to differences between natural and social sciences, disciplinary distinctions remain secondary in her account, suggesting that time cuts across disciplinary boundaries in a similar way. A more fine-grained analysis of how temporalities are experienced and shaped within different epistemic cultures would offer a compelling continuation of this work – perhaps even the basis for a second book!

Among the many possible avenues for further analysis, we would suggest two additional ones. The first, on an individual level, would draw on the notion of 'time tricksters' discussed at the end of the book. How do some researchers game

time generators, subvert academic timescapes for their own benefit or to defend their teams or epistemic practices? The second concerns the institutional level, since evaluation frameworks and practices are at the heart of the book. How can current reform movements, particularly those led by COARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment), be treated as attempts to transform academic timescapes? Taking into account all types of academic outputs, such as datasets or reviews, or introducing narrative CVs seem to be potent ways to reconfigure trajectories and their accompanying accounts.

Overall, the reflections presented in Felt's book invite us to attend to the substantial temporal investment required by diverse academic activities, including writing or reading book reviews. Book reviews, in particular, play an essential role in sustaining scholarly communities, yet they often remain largely unaccounted for in dominant research evaluation frameworks. By taking a bit of your time, we hope that this review has shown why attending to academic temporalities matters for academic lives and knowledge practices.

## References

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