



# THE TIME OF INFECTION

BIOMEDICINE AND THE PROBLEM  
OF RESTLESSNESS

Marsha Rosengarten



# The Time of Infection

This book contributes to the exploration of the concept of time in the social sciences and philosophy, by reflecting on the ontological presuppositions of medical science and what this means for the response to communicable infection. By examining infection as a process that resists segmentation, prediction, and control, the author exposes the ontological limits of linear divisible time as it is routinely mobilised by biomedicine and health governance to make life knowable and governable. Rather than abandoning time, it recognises it as a powerful technical device, one that has come to be treated as a mirror of reality rather than as an intervention that actively shapes what can be known, valued, and acted upon in the face of potentially lethal infection. The book will appeal to scholars in sociology, social theory, philosophy, and medical science interested in temporality, conceptions of power, and speculative thought.

**Marsha Rosengarten** is Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London and Visiting Professor in Global Health and Social Medicine, King's College London. She is the author of the award-winning *HIV Interventions: Biomedicine and the Traffic between Information and Flesh*, the co-author of *Innovation and Biomedicine: Ethics, Evidence and Expectation in HIV*, the co-editor of *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures*, and co-editor of *Narcofeminisms: Revisioning Drug Use*.



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# **The Time of Infection**

Biomedicine and the Problem  
of Restlessness

**Marsha Rosengarten**

First published 2027  
by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2027 Marsha Rosengarten

The right of Marsha Rosengarten to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

For Product Safety Concerns and Information please contact our EU representative [GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com](mailto:GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com). Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-367-33712-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-35634-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-32143-6 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9780429321436](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429321436)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

*For those whose experience of infection I have not  
presumed to capture.*

*if the movement, that is any movement, is lively enough,  
perhaps it is possible to know that it is moving even if  
it is not moving against anything.*

Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (Beacon Press, 1985),  
p. 165.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>viii</i>
1 The Promise of Time	1
2 Racing the Clock and the Paradox of Time	18
3 Out of Sync: Infection, Insistence, and Repetition	37
4 Safeguarding the Timeline: ‘Unpredictable Nature’	55
5 Memory, Immunity, and Value-Creating Bodies	71
6 Restlessness/Infections Possibles	88
<i>Index</i>	<i>101</i>

# Acknowledgements

Many books are attempts to grapple with something that has puzzled or troubled their authors. Those who know some of my habitual patterns may appreciate the irony that I have turned my adherence to ‘being on time’ into a project that would commonly be said to have ‘taken considerable time’, while refuting the very idea of time. This book was always intended to focus on the biomedical formulation of the problem of infection, but its conceptual binding to time made its presence known in ways that I found difficult to leave still.

One of my earliest memories is of being diagnosed with measles and being told I posed a danger to my sister as she struggled with pneumonia. It was one of those experiences when a scientific fact arrives bundled into a situation that has an uneasy moral fit. If innocence was a precondition to what I then learned of my infectiousness, it was displaced by a more potent knowledge that I was a danger as a result of myself. Many years later, aware of the savagery of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), I saw how this knowledge of communicable infection turned those living with a positive diagnosis of HIV, likely to result in AIDS, into pariahs. I began to wonder if it could be different, not especially for its psychological consequences in terms of social attitudes, which many have done the work on, but about the sociality of the ‘thing’ that occupies the biomedical focus on infection.

In the company of very special colleagues who have become dear friends, I witnessed how a problem can be made different. In particular, in the company of Helen Keane, Susan Kippax, Susie McLean, Dean Murphy, Kane Race, and Niamh Stevenson and the late Alan Brotherton, I learned to be alert to HIV’s possibles. I also learned why it matters to engage in the social inquiry of biomedicine. It was through these friends that I met Rosalyn Diprose, whose generosity of thought, often in the astute presence of Alison Ritter, helped me to clarify a little of the strange and circuitous path that this book has taken me along. There are many others I have learned from in the HIV field, including Judy Auerbach, Ade Fakoya, Bob Grant, Kiran Pienaar, Tim Rhodes, and Ian Weller, my occasional excellent travel companion, Fiona Samuels, plus others who remain nameless but not forgotten for sharing a little of what living with and losing to the infection meant for them.

This diverse circle of thinkers grew into a broader world of philosophical companionship, for which I cannot fully express my appreciation. This book owes a considerable debt to Martin Savransky and Monica Greco. It could not have been

written without them and, probably, much to do with their doubts as well as their inspiration. Martin, most especially for always introducing a new angle to whatever I thought was settled. Without the provocation of his extraordinary breadth of thought, the motivation for this book would have been considerably less ambitious. And if I had paid more heed, it might also have been very different. Monica has sustained a special place in my thinking, reminding me that articulating the problem is central to what can be achieved. This may seem obvious, but attending to this task is not always easy. I share her advice because it invites engagement beyond simple critique.

Spontaneous walks with Nele Jensen, in the company of hairy Tilda and Eric, have almost always involved exposure to perspectives I initially believed I had grasped, only to realise that they were often half-baked. Nele's companionship as a collaborator and, more so, as a friend has confirmed for me that a kindred soul can be someone with a different mode of rationality and also, on occasion, contrasting pursuits. Kari Lancaster's enthusiasm for my work has been a lifeline. Her encouragement has been invaluable in many ways, especially in helping to bring this book to some form of closure. Julian Land showed an interest that suggested to me that the project had legs when I had begun to doubt its sense. Jorge Castillo Sepúlveda has maintained a long-distance friendship and collaboration that has rendered the concept of time inconsequential.

Among those I first came to know during a very special phase at Goldsmiths, University of London, are Vikki Bell, Fay Dennis, Bill Gaver, Michael Guggenheim, Monika Krause, Mariam Motamedi Fraser, Vik Loveday, Mike Michael, Nirmal Puwar and, later in the fracas, Anna Furse, and Irit Rogoff. Each has included me in their worlds and, by doing so, enriched mine. Holding honorary posts at the University of New South Wales, Australia, and here in London at King's College, initially with the aid of Anne Pollock, has also been important. So, too, have been generous invitations to explore my ideas in new and welcoming forums. Kate Sear and Kylie Valentine's conference on drugs, as I was trying to finish this book, offered a new opportunity to think outside the boundaries, as did an invitation from Ann Kelly and Lindsay McGoey to participate in an almost-forgotten workshop on Pace that provided the early scholarly impetus without my realising it. There have been many other events that have aided my thinking, including those of the Unit of Play, the Centre for Invention and Social Process (CISP), which have now disappeared due to management forces committed to the oddness of time. A different but also important collaboration amongst many that warrants mention was that of EUROPACH project, led by Todd Sekular and undertaken by an energised group of thinkers determined to sustain the learning from HIV. So, too, was a more limited undertaking with Bryan Lim under the banner of CISP that paid heed to the fascinating world of microbial thinking and from which several participants appear in this book. Of late, I have been privileged to participate in a new kind of thought experiment with a group of erudite thinkers keen to break from the constraints of academic management with the Institute for Contemporary Critical Thought (ICCT).

I also want to thank the editors of *Timescapes of Health, Illness and Care*, Katherine Kenny, Mia Harrison, and Anthony K.J. Smith, who endorsed my early, tentative efforts to write on the time of infection. A brief discussion with Hannah Landecker on measles,

some years ago, broadened my horizons on infection that underscored what a conversation might do. Many others have sustained this project, helping me to see beyond the strange obsession that an academic project can become. Some are more present in my life than others, but I am grateful to all for the generosity of their spirit. Jane Becker, Elizabeth Birkenbuel, Carlo Drago, Alison Goldfrapp, Harriet Graham, Lisa Gunning, Diane Hamer, Julian Hopwood, Hilda Hoy, Cas Lawrance Malin Stahl, The Racoons of Brenda Coughlan, Beadie Finzi, Luke Gottelier, Rebecca Keane, and Damien Timmer. The family extension of Ro, Maeve and Lorna Goldman, along with the Le Couteurs, most especially the extraordinary Anne, are treasured possibles of what can become.

This book has tested my patience and, I suspect, the patience of many around me who witnessed its pondering, which involved moving almost every word around the page and back again to arrive somewhere else, or not on any page. It's hard to say if this is connected to my preoccupation with time. But whatever has settled on the pages has been made possible by Cath Le Couteur's presence in every special part of my life. I will not attempt to put into words the difference she makes; only to say that it matters in the most restless and, thus, wondrously thought-provoking ways.

# 1 The Promise of Time

... the immediate fact for awareness is the whole occurrence of nature. It is nature as an event present for sense awareness, and essentially passing. There is no holding nature still and looking at it.

(Alfred North Whitehead)<sup>1</sup>

This book is about how the idea of time is used to understand and respond to infections of the body, particularly those known as communicable between human bodies. While nothing in this book denies that the signifying powers of what we ‘moderns’ think as time can affect infection, my focus is on the peculiarities produced by the scientific assumption that all of existence unfolds in what is commonly accepted as a linear passage and moves as if conforming to its divisible measures. Perhaps the strangest thing about this idea of time is that no one has ever seen it except on the face of a clock: a device central to modern life not only for marking the hour but also for teaching us to see the world as a mechanism governed by measurable movement.

Almost all scientific texts will reiterate that infection involves a mechanistic response by our bodies to a microbe replicating in conformity with measurable time intervals.<sup>2</sup> However, are our bodies and the problem of life-affecting infection merely a matter of ticking mechanisms? The etymology of time traces back to the word ‘tide’ in the early 13th century, evoking an ebb and flow. As recorded in historical accounts, tide was understood to mean ‘on all occasions’ or ‘as warranted’.<sup>3</sup> Tide speaks not only of movement but of the restless insistence of events. With the invention of the clock, the linear progression of repetitive points and periods has segmented even the ebb and flow of the tides into objects of time.

Throughout this book, I maintain this strict, altogether neat notion of time. Although there are other ways of referring time – for instance, as ‘multiple’ or ‘lived’ – as if different to that of the clock in order to appreciate that experience does not conform, I am not persuaded that these expressions necessarily depart from a more basic assumption that all objects and events happen due to a transcendent force. In the natural sciences and the modes of governance that they inform, infection is unquestionably conceived as an object driven and tracked as if moved by such a force, its movement is transposed into sequences conformal