

The Social Construction of Time



By Sally St. George

The other day, I was exercising on the elliptical machine and looking out of the window of the gym to see several adults dressed for work, and older children with their backpacks, all running to the bus stop. This was happening every few minutes or so and I found myself thinking about time, yet again. I am regularly pre-occupied with time; I worry about not having enough time, I worry about being late, and most of all I fret about time that I think is being wasted or could be used to accomplish a task. Then I began to think about different kinds of phrases that we use or are exposed to every day that relate to time: quality time, time is of the essence, running out of time, time management, time is money, killing time, it is about time, take time for yourself, time will heal, time's up. It seems that a construction of our "times" is that we have transformed time into a commodity, into big business. How thoroughly we can become inducted into the swell of the discourses of time! Not surprisingly, I am frequently lured into feeling guilty if I am not doing two things at once— to save time. But, just in the nick of time, I remember a delightful and provocative novel I read years ago entitled *Einstein's Dream*, by Alan Lightman who described what time *might be*. With each short chapter, readers are invited to imagine a different world, a world organized around alternative conceptions of time: "time is a circle," "time is like a flow of water," "mechanical time," and "body time." You might agree with me that, from a social constructionist position, time is what we make of it.