

OPERATIONS IN CRITICAL WAITING PROCESSES:
ANALYTICAL NOTES FROM A DISCONTINUOUS MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an alternative approach to the essential matter of the factors involved in the process of waiting, especially in critical contexts such as civil emergencies. Some categories for the analysis of waiting are developed here, taking an alternative theoretical perspective, where waiting processes are conceived of as operational and institutionalised in nature, rather than mere temporal phenomena. Importantly, this paper contributes to research in the field of anthropology studying processes of waiting, as it presents a unique perspective of analysis. This perspective shifts the focus of these processes from temporalities to institutions and highlights the essential importance of operations in their analysis. In order to exemplify the proposed perspective, empirical waiting processes in crisis will be analysed. These examples of critical waiting have been selected with consideration to their historical, political or social impact. The demand for operational behaviour among the people waiting has also been considered in these examples. These processes will be analysed using categories established from an institutional and operational approach based on the materialistic philosophical approach of the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno Martínez, sometimes called Discontinuous Materialism.

Keywords: critical waiting, operations, referent, prolepsis, discontinuous materialism

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to what is commonly believed, when we are in a social waiting process, we are not in a passive state or immersed in a temporal dimension governed by what is often termed as ‘dead’ or ‘liminal time’ (Sutton, Vigneswaran, and Wels 2011). While waiting, normally we must engage in several activities, many of which are already established and regulated beforehand. This operational

necessity becomes particularly evident during crises, where survival while we wait for help, for example, very often demands several actions. Despite this evidence, research on social waiting has largely concentrated on the temporal aspects, giving limited attention to the operational activities that are also an integral part of these processes. This limitation is particularly significant in critical situations where waiting processes entail complex operational demands and behaviours that can profoundly impact the survival and well-being of individuals and groups.

However, some research on social waiting has highlighted the significance of operations within these processes. Notably, scholars such as Javier Auyero (2012), Bendixsen and Eriksen (2020), Sutton, Vigneswaran and Wels (2011), and Musset (2015) focus on waiting in crisis contexts such as natural disasters or immigration. These studies underscore the dynamic and demanding nature of waiting, especially in high-stress situations, and how they test the capacities of social actors. Other scholars have attempted to provide a theoretical framework to comprehend the actions of waiters during waiting processes. Barry Schwartz (1978) argues that social processes, including waiting, can be understood as a set of operations that consume time. In the context of waiting processes, he identifies a relationship between the sequential ordering of operations, their coordination, and the time allocated to them. Schwartz highlights the organisational nature of certain waiting processes, contending that such institutionalised waits 'also display tendencies and rules aimed at optimizing the efficiency of social organisations by controlling the temporal cost of their operations' (4). He suggests that operations within different contexts, such as libraries versus hospitals or fire stations, have varying sensitivities to time. Consequently, the waits associated with these diverse environments are expected to exhibit different temporal-operational dynamics. However, despite Schwartz's contributions, he has yet to conceptualise waiting as an operational phenomenon fully. While he examines waiting from various angles, he does not attribute intrinsic logic and rationality to waiting itself. Instead, he views waits as byproducts of specific organisational shortcomings, categorising any operational demands as necessary but somewhat incidental or ad hoc to the process. Nevertheless, he does acknowledge the existence of a set of operations inherent in any waiting process and discusses potential frameworks for categorising them.

Catherine Bailey (2019) contends that waiting periods can be categorised into what she terms 'pure waits' and waits that co-occur with other activities. Essentially, some forms of waiting occur independently of any active engagement, while another type of waiting is intertwined with various social processes.

Lijun Tang (2012) also investigates the intersection between operations and temporality in waiting, proposing that waiting can be either passive or dynamic, contingent on external operational demands. However, Tang's analysis requires more comprehensive categorisation to capture these intricate relationships. Mikio Fujita (1985) examines the role of operations in waiting through the lens of the contextual conditions in which waiting takes place. He suggests that the processes of waiting (and thus their operations) are influenced by what is being waited for, establishing a reciprocal relationship between how and what we wait for.

Finally, I would like to conclude this review of the most relevant literature with the scholarly contributions of Giovanni Gasparini and Harold Schweizer, who have delved into the operations involved in waiting. Gasparini (1995) introduced the concept of 'situated waiting', a synthesis of Fujita's framework that focuses on the causes of delays and their operational solutions. He argues that the 'what' and 'how' of waiting are tied to the 'types' and 'forms' it takes in the social sphere. Essentially, waiting occurs materially and is determined by its initial cause. Gasparini outlines five causes of delays in social organisations,² largely attributing them to the 'implementation' mechanisms of specific service activities (*i.e.*, operational processes). Subsequent processes are then implemented to counter the negative effects (such as delays or lost time) induced by the initial ones. In this sense, waiting serves as a type of temporary gap between different operational processes.³

Like Gasparini, Harold Schweizer (2008) acknowledges the interstitial nature of waiting. However, he posits that operations primarily aim to circumvent the waiting process itself. In other words, the operational emphasis in waiting processes is generally geared towards avoiding the experience altogether. This avoidance can be both objectively social and subjectively psychological. Moreover, it aims to mitigate both the material waiting process and its negative outcomes, such as irretrievably lost time. To manage these critical waiting periods, the individual prepares to devote the least possible time to the process. Building on this, Gasparini had earlier introduced the notion of 'equipped waiting', referring to instances where the individual enacts a plan or strategy. According to him, such planning allows one to 'occupy time', thus minimising the undesirable effects of waiting. He notes that in the process of 'equipped waiting', several activities can be undertaken by the waiters, such as 'personal activities (eating, resting, sleeping), communicating, speaking and listening, reading and studying, and even working with a personal computer or other appropriate equipment' (Gasparini 1995, 35–36).

Both Gasparini and Schweizer's positions are valuable in this context as they highlight that actions or operations carried out during waiting are not arbitrary but often stem from culturally rational and logical processes. However, this standpoint has its limitations, including an overemphasis on subjectivism and a focus on the temporal aspects previously discussed. In other words, while the operational nature of waiting is acknowledged, its actualisation is often attributed to individual intent. Although some examples can be cited, such as the ones mentioned, the operational dimension of waiting remains insufficiently explored in existing literature. While some scholars have addressed operational aspects, their analyses often lack focus on the true significance of this dimension. This oversight has also resulted in a need for more systematic terminology, concepts or categories to articulate the morphology of operations in waiting.

This gap may be attributed to various causes, but one of the main examples is, as already highlighted, the over-focus on the temporal aspects of waiting. This ontological perspective limits the scope of waiting studies. Consequently, the prevailing notion of waiting as solely a 'temporal' phenomenon has impeded the inclusion of operations as an integral part of the process. This absence of a well-articulated operational perspective has further impeded the development of such analyses. In this regard, there has been a notable oversight in recognising the internal connections between the timing of waiting and other crucial factors, such as the spatial context within which this temporal dimension unfolds (Lindón 2019), and the specific actions or operations these processes entail.

This paper aims to reverse this trend in waiting studies by introducing an alternative perspective for analysing these processes. This perspective emphasises the operational dimension inherent in waiting processes from an institutional standpoint. The proposed approach recognises the significance of the temporal aspects of waiting, extensively analysed within the social sciences, but also acknowledges the existence of other facets of waiting that warrant consideration. A prime example is the operational aspect of the waits, which will be illustrated using empirical data from crises that have been selected based on their historical, political or social significance.

In these critical waiting processes, I will examine the operational behaviours of the individuals involved, following a theory of waiting and the significance of the operations. This theory is based on the philosophical materialistic approach of the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno Martínez, which is sometimes referred to as Discontinuous Materialism (DM) (Pérez-Jara 2022). DM is a philosophy that rejects the hypostatisation of any element, property, state

or relation of reality. It emphasises the structural dimension of material reality, marked by the principle of *symploké*.⁴ Gustavo Bueno, the initiator of DM, contends that the apparent diversity of materialist worldviews can be distilled into a few possible ontologies, highlighting the systematic nature of rigorous philosophy. In contrast to idealism, spiritualism, monism and formalism, DM presents a materialist approach that bridges the gap between 'spiritual' or 'formal' and 'purely material' substances. It encompasses a notion of matter that extends beyond tangible objects, encompassing non-tangible physical matter as well by considering it material due to its plurality and changeability, and its dependence on physical matter without being exhausted by it.

By embracing an operational perspective rooted in DM, this paper asserts that comprehending waiting processes as complex phenomena becomes feasible by analysing the operations they entail. In this context, the operationality of waiting cannot exist independently of a spatial or chronological dimension. Hence, the operational dimension can serve as a foundational starting point for analysing other constitutive aspects of waiting. Furthermore, this perspective provides a theoretical framework for analysing the operations within waiting processes from a fresh angle.

From a DM viewpoint, waiting involves concrete social processes beyond individual psychology. These processes can be understood as ceremonial or non-ceremonial within an institutional context. The actor interacts with the internal logic of waiting, implementing certain operations to achieve specific aims. In other words, instead of considering the operations in waiting as contingent phenomena, we consider them structured and logically coordinated actions guided by planning. This proposed conceptualisation of waiting as social institutions becomes feasible only when we reject the notion of these processes as random or accidental occurrences.

From the DM perspective, what sets human rationality apart from that of other animals is its precisely institutional character. Bueno (2005) proceeds to provide an analysis and classification of institutions and their significance in anthropology. Here, Bueno contends that institutions should be regarded as the core morphological category of anthropology, while acknowledging that other non-institutional aspects of anthropological-cultural origin can also be found within the purview of philosophical anthropology. According to Ongay (2008), Bueno's theory defines institutions as teleological, normative and practical forms of human action. Moreover, this understanding distinguishes them from the cultural practices of animals, making it a pivotal category in anthropological discourse. In essence, Bueno employs the concept of institutions as a uni-

versal category to delineate human rationality as a distinguishing characteristic, setting humans apart from animals. According to Bueno's perspective, human rationality is expressed through two main kinds of institutions: non-ceremonial and ceremonial institutions.⁵ The former, such as objectual institutions, are also present in waiting scenarios. For example, the bench where someone waits in a social service office, or the shelter used during a bombing, are non-ceremonial institutions. These settings include objects that facilitate the act of waiting, such as the laissez-passer needed for crossing a border between two countries, en route to a final migratory destination. Ceremonial institutions inherently involve human conduct and operations for their genesis (Bueno, 2005). These are institutions where operations are not just incidental but are planned, rationalised, regulated and standardised, much like ritual ceremonies.

The waiting processes that interest us can be described as complex ceremonial institutions incorporating non-ceremonial elements, similar to those mentioned above. For instance, waiting at a border crossing necessitates a series of operations: presenting specific documents, participating in interviews, advocating one's case before migration officers and government agencies, and meeting deadlines. This perspective emphasises the importance of examining the operational aspects and other crucial elements, including time and space, within waiting processes. Understanding these dynamics can provide insights into the behaviour and decision-making of those involved, particularly in critical scenarios, thereby offering an objective basis for explaining the various waiting experiences recounted by the actors involved. The categories I will develop for analysing the operations involved in waiting processes also aim to facilitate the design of practical research tools for analysing waiting processes during crises. By identifying and examining the operational demands placed on individuals and groups during critical waiting, we can enhance research and design interventions for policymakers and practitioners to meet these demands effectively.

OPERATIONS, REFERENT, REFERENTIALS: THEIR CATEGORIAL RELEVANCE IN WAITING STUDIES

It is a widespread idea that waiting is a state to which the subject arrives, induced by a specific situation mostly external to their will. According to Harold Schweizer, 'waiting is not a passage of time to be traversed but a condition of our being' (2008, 128). It is rarely considered that waiting is also a factual and objective institutional process in which the subjects participate with varying degrees of intentionality, but always operatively. In other words, the idea that to wait is also to participate is underemphasised; whether it is pleasant or not,

planned or not, or whether the participants have certain freedom of action are separate issues to be considered. Even so, we take for granted that once in the waiting process, the social actors must necessarily act (*i.e.*, they must operate). For this reason, it is emphasised that actions are mostly 'operative' and carried out by an 'operative' subject in waiting.

Operations cover a vast spectrum of typologies, from 'surgical' operations, where objects are brought together and separated, to 'proleptic' operations, which involve drawing up plans and programmes subject to specific aims. Based on the ideas of Gustavo Bueno (1992, 8), we could say that the waits are processes in which the subject permanently configures what could be qualified as 'intentional objectives'. Intentional objectives are, in turn, dialectically connected with objectives set by other subjects who may aim to achieve their own goals. Thus, actors' plans can move in different directions: they may be parallel, interconnected, intertwined and, at times, in open contradiction or hostility. The confluence of these objectives shapes the consumptive end of the waiting process.⁶ In other words, the point where waiting culminates, *i.e.*, where it temporally, spatially and operationally aims.

With the initial moment, this ending point indicates where waiting is finally constituted, delimiting or defining it depending on the rest of the phenomena of reality. That is to say, the *end* and the waiting must always be the end and waiting of something since there is no absolute end or absolute wait. In this respect, Gustavo Bueno (1992) points out that the 'end of something' takes on meaning as an end only by reference to this 'something' (7). The idea of end when applied to the waiting process acquires a specific categorial meaning, and refers to a process that is also particular, *i.e.*, waiting for something specific and not abstractly or generically. The end is the first criterion we use to define a wait. It is what we refer to when we speak about a wait and constitutes its *referent*. For Buenos' DM, the referent is why 'something' can be considered 'the support or logical subject of an end' (1992, 8). This end boundary is abstract or logical but also materialised through tangible objects, processes or moments: a door, a fence, a document, a border, a ceremony, or a date on the calendar amongst others. These object materialisations will be called *referentials*. Referentials are present throughout the process as elements of identification of parts or moments that, for some given reason, have operative force within the waiting. In short, the referent marks the consumptive end of any process – a wait, in this case. The referentials, on their part, are one of the materials/objective tempo spatial indicators of where this conclusion occurs.

In another sense, as an entity that gives body and internally unifies the process,

the referent is related not only to the acting subjects but also to objective elements beyond the waiting actors (*i.e.*, both internal to the process and external to it). This relationship also contributes and qualifies, in a configurational sense, since it takes place within the boundaries imposed by the context outside the process (its surroundings). Hence, it has some dialectical and conflictual links with environmental factors external to the waiting process. These relationships are essential for understanding the internal processes of waiting, as the influence of this environment crosses the procedural parts and the actors involved in the waiting itself. Waiting is also acted upon (operated) by all forces that establish a dialectic relationship with the referent. In other words, the referent marks an end and a 'boundary' (Bueno 1992, 9) for the waiting process. Furthermore, the referent marks an end in operational terms (the end of the operative courses) and limits temporal and spatial segments. According to Bueno (1992), the referent also indicates the limits of 'the surface of a bounded space through whose extension the action (the "pressure") of the exterior is determined in enveloping limits which are synthetically identified with the limits determined by the reaction (or resistance) of the interior multiplicity' (8). This means that the dialectics and operative actions within the waiting process also play a role in determining these final limits.

In short, a given wait finds its final closure, as a totality, in the referent that indicates the empirical consumptive end of the process. However, this closure (an end of the waiting process) is ultimately a gateway to connected but different processes. In agreement with Gustavo Bueno, we can say that referents constitute a simultaneous or successive multiplicity. In other words, the referent, as a final configuration, if it is to be an end as such, is more than just the culmination or cancellation of operative courses internal to the waiting process. In addition, waiting constitutes dialectical linkages with the 'outside world' after the process. In this respect, the referent is linked to 'a term or set of terms', which can be both results and contexts external to the process itself, but which unify waiting in its processual (courses of operations) and configurational (spatial/temporal context) multiplicity. These processual realities, external to the waiting process itself, exert constant pressure to break the borders of the wait, both at the wait's *contour* (the margins that define and distinguish the waiting process from other adjacent processes of reality) and the wait's closure, its referent (the end of the wait or any of its process).⁷

An empirical example can help explain this. Considering the critical waiting process at Kabul airport in the last days of August 2021, we can say that it was an institutionalised waiting whose preceding inflection point was the seizure of the capital by Taliban militias. This waiting had as its consumptive end the 'exit

from Afghanistan' of the US military and others involved. Here, the benchmark was the total evacuation of US troops and collaborators, materialised in the referentials: effective boarding, take-off and transcendence of the air borders of Afghanistan by the aircraft used in this operation. The process of objective waiting was constituted (defined) on this referent, which *de-limited* the operations of the 'waiters' (the actors), giving shape to an institutional process that could be called 'waiting for the evacuation of Afghanistan'. The operational achievement of this referent (effectively, get out of Afghanistan) also marks the consumptive end or conclusion of the wait in both time and space. In the same way, this referent indicates the end of the operations internal to the process (the present courses of the wait) and multiple external operations, which also influenced the waiting in multiple ways. A good example in this context is a situation described by Stephen Losey as a testimony of his efforts to help a staff member waiting to be evacuated:

My phone lit up [...] with a call from Afghanistan. The number belonged to Said, an interpreter from Kabul who had worked for the US military a decade ago. But the voice on the other end of the phone wasn't Said's. An American Marine was urgently asking me who I was. I told him my name and identified myself as a reporter with Military.com. I asked whether Said was there and if they were at Abbey Gate, one of the main entrances to Hamid Karzai International Airport, which currently serves as the only way out of the country for many Afghans. [...] The Marine on the other end of the phone confirmed that's where they were. I asked how I could help. [...] He called someone else over, a first lieutenant, and I could make out something like, 'We got a Pentagon reporter here'. (Losey, 2021, paras. 1–5)

Here we see how internal operational courses (Said being at the gate, talking with the marine) and external courses (the call coming into the phone) interact dialectically in the waiting process. These examples also help to diverge from the idea frequently found in social research that waiting times are parenthetical – that is dead, empty or liminal. Our idea is that waiting occurs at a certain point of operative inflection where specific courses that precede those of waiting are diverted to give way to other operative courses. In other words, the operational perspective establishes the waiting process's clear epistemological and empirical framework. In summary, waiting has in the preceding inflection point its starting point and in the referent the moment of closure. Although these both delimit and define a wait, waiting also involves other moments that imply operative sequences.

ANCHOR POINTS, AND PROLEPTICAL AND DEMARCATION OPERATIONS

Moving on from our explanation of the nature of operations within waiting processes, this section delves deeper into the morphology of these actions. As previously mentioned, I consider certain waiting processes to be institutional and operational phenomena. In this context, these processes should have a final purpose or end, marked by what is referred to as the referent, where all operative courses conclude. However, one might question what happens with those internal courses that do not finish at the referent or the waiting's final aim. To analyse this, it is necessary to establish another category for points that signal the end of intermediate operational courses also present in the process. Through these internal determination points, the waiting process can be described and measured. These closures or particular operative culmination points are referred to as *anchor points*.

The anchor points in an operational waiting process are both starting and ending points of operative courses, and their time-space positioning can be internal or external to the waiting process. Operative vectors of two types connect internal anchor points: a) projected and b) achieved. In its subsequent inflection phase, external anchor points connect the waiting referent with other possible referents belonging to operative courses subsequent to the waiting process.⁸

Concerning their positional functions, these anchor points can also be topological, topographical or both simultaneously.⁹ In other words, they constitute markers of logical meaning (topological) and indicators of geographical location (topographical). For this reason, anchor points can be identified using referents of cultural and physical/natural phenomena. Thus, we can distinguish between logical demarcation operations and territorial demarcation operations, which use referentials to logical demarcation and referentials to territorial demarcation.

The logical demarcation operations coordinate one's operational courses with other operational courses where one establishes dialectic relationships during the waiting process. These operations can be internal and external adjustments concerning the position of the course(s) with which one interacts. In other words, they can be aimed at restructuring one's prolepsis and at projecting (sometimes changing, diverting and even slowing down or eliminating) *proleptic operations* for its execution once the waiting process is over. Sometimes these operations are juxtaposed with operations of territorial demarcation, taking the form of topological referentials. This dynamic indicates that other subjects' prolepsis or operative courses consider that a specific position within

the process has been spatially and operationally occupied.

These territorial demarcations aim to signal where the waiter is among the rest of the waiters. These actions can be either a) organisational/legal or b) moral/cultural. The former actions include information windows, written records, computer software, information screens, warning devices (luminous or vibrating technology, customer alerts, electronic queue managers), and mobile applications. Amongst the second actions we find referentials such as verbal announcements, conversations, spatial markers (*e.g.*, near a door, next to a plant, next to the toilet), presence records (your luggage in a seat, a picture of a place), group recognition (actions that announce to a group – verbally, by body language, by some object – that you are there), and other kinds of individual's announcements (telling someone one's position).

A specific example of logical demarcation can be seen in the following critical waiting case. According to Richard Larson (1987), certain police departments in American cities managed demands for police service through what he calls a 'differential police response strategy' (900). This measure deliberately delayed specific lower priority calls for service by thirty minutes to two hours, a practice carried out even when sufficient police officers and police cars were available. These operations were intended to make officers available for possible short-term high-priority incidents and other essential police tasks. Citizen surveys showed that in these lower-priority incidents, the people waiting showed no dissatisfaction with the late response of law enforcement. Even when they were delayed by more than an hour, as long as citizens were informed of the estimated magnitude and reasons for the delay, they were satisfied. According to Larson, this informing process made citizens more cooperative and satisfied than when no information was provided, even if the response took less time. Larson attributes these favourable results to the fact that the feedback given to consumers provoked a sense of social justice and attention to their demands. Without denying this possibility, from the DM perspective, one explanation is that, through certain operations, patients have been offered the possibility of establishing logical demarcations that are more accurate to the waiting process.

Considering that these demarcation operations occur at the anchor points, the question is how one point communicates with another before addressing why this connection is established. The answer to this question lies in the logical vectors that the operative subjects trace between the anchor points, which guide their operative courses within the process. Through this vectorial connection, operational segments are also created. These not only serve as links between

the different points but also make subjects' expectations genuine vectorial phenomena. These logical interconnections are another characteristic of waiting that supports their gnoseological status in the context of scientific analysis. In other words, the different vectors that guide the operations are launched from each of the anchor points. These vectorised operations have precisely one anchor point at the end of each segment. These anchors constitute the tensioning points that mark the purposes of the waiters. In turn, the interconnection of these must end in the referent. The last does not mean that all the points are connected to each other, only that the chains established between them must eventually end at the referent.

As we have already noted, this final referent is the exit door, so to speak, of the process of waiting and, at the same time, the point of restarting – the consequent inflection – of other proleptic courses *after* the waiting. To denote this end of waiting as a processual totality, we can use the isological culmination point. This point is where waiting ends or concludes temporally, spatially and operationally. Although it takes the form of a culminating moment here, in regard to the closure of the waiting as a specific phenomenon, it simultaneously constitutes a point of inflection, as previously discussed. In other words, a place in space/time where the subject finds themselves in a different place rather than returning to an initial point prior to the waiting. Here, new operative courses will begin, materially different from the waiting and the processes that preceded it. In this sense, waiting would be something like what Ilya Prigogine (2018) describes as a 'dynamic system' that tends towards irreversibility, with the inflection points being irreversible phenomena. Hence, returning, going back, to the moment before the waiting is spatially, temporally and operationally impossible.¹⁰ When referring to the initial points mentioned in some scholarly texts, they are no more than a literary or hypothetical resource.

On the other hand, we must not lose sight of the fact that these processes are sets of operations that advance in dialectic relationships and confrontations with other institutional operational courses from the standpoint of waiters and organisational norms. In addition, there are more prolepses of the social actors who are waiting or outside the waiting process and may or may not interfere with the operations related to the waiting process. All these actors, operating within the frames of the referent, strive to achieve their objectives by constructing and reconstructing multiple operations based on previous knowledge and experiences.

This tension in pursuit of the referent makes it possible for the operability within the waiting to be evolutionary and not regressive since this closure

differs in an absolute way from the turning point that started the process. In this sense, even when it seems that an actor returns to specific anchor points – spatial, for example – in the waiting process, this is only in appearance because both the situation and location are always different, as well as the temporal positioning. In the empirical reality, the actor has merely transformed the previous anchor point into the starting point of a new vector or a different operative course.

INTENTIONAL OBJECTIVES: AIMS, PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

Previously, all discussion has been related to the vectors' forms, closures or anchors, and their possibilities. This section shifts to a description of their contained materials in more detail. Vectors are morphologically the forms where the waiting processes' intentional objectives are contained. According to the definition offered by Gustavo Bueno, intentional objectives can be of three types: *aims*, *plans* and *programmes*. The aims are 'the objectives concerning the proleptic subject that proposes them (*finis operantis*)';¹¹ the plans are constituted by 'the objectives in relation to the other personal subjects they affect'; and the programmes are 'the objectives considered concerning the proposed materials (*finis operis*)' (Bueno 1992, 11).

The categories outlined are crucial for the theoretical strategy presented in this paper. It can be argued that, to a certain extent, a process lacking operations structured around aims, plans, and programmes cannot be classified as a 'waiting process' in the categorial sense we propose. If a process does not meet these criteria, it should be regarded as a distinct phenomenon, separate from what can be termed 'social waiting'. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of what can be categorically studied within social sciences.

In literature and certain metaphysical philosophies, it is possible to find phenomena considered as waits, where the waiting takes place without the actor executing proleptic operations based on intentional objectives. In these kinds of waits, subjects sometimes do not even know what they are waiting for. From the DM perspective, these cases would be described as waiting without referents. This lack of a referent makes these processes fall under the category of theoretical limit waiting, that is, only possible in abstract fields of analysis and with no possibility of materialisation in reality.

The institutional waits, which I believe should be of interest to the social and human sciences, not only possess an analysable operative structure but also are not contingent or accidental. Instead, they are processes that can be observed

across time and space, constituting a significant part of the material for the field of these areas of knowledge. These processes exhibit an internal structure from the beginning to the end, framing the subjects' intentional objectives in the form of aims, plans or programmes, which articulate the operative courses of actions involved into a socially understandable logic. Therefore, these actors must be classifiable in themselves and in their actions and behaviours as social actors. In other words, they must be something different from the closed and atomised 'individuals' who 'experience' reality in an 'autonomous' and singular way. We believe that this *anomic* agent, whose waiting process is centred on their singular experience, is outside the analytical scope of the social sciences. In this sense, I propose that waiting processes, at least those which offer analytical possibilities for the social sciences, must have intentional objectives of some kind, presented in the form of aims, plans or programmes that articulate specific operative courses of action.

According to Bueno, aims, plans and programmes can be one of three types: a) total, b) general or c) partial (1982, 21–22). In line with the subject of our analysis, the total or general aims in a waiting process are those intentional objectives that can be linked to operations carried out by all the actors involved in the process, whereas particular aims are described as those that articulate operations in which not all the subjects engaged in a process are involved. The example of the critical waiting for evacuation of coalition personnel and Afghans collaborating with the occupying troops planned through the Kabul airport can be drawn on again here. All the waiters were involved in the process, carrying out operations to enter the airfield and reach the runway where the planes were located. These operations were articulated for total or general purposes, relating to the totality of those involved in the institutional waiting process, which in this case was waiting for humanitarian evacuation.

However, the instructions given to US citizens, other nationals, or specific support personnel of the occupation forces were specific, *i.e.*, partial instructions. For instance, these instructions included directives such as: report to a certain gate, at a certain time, with their passports in their hands (Packer 2021). These concrete directions led to the implementation of operations motivated by partial aims, *i.e.*, directed at only a portion of the total subjects involved in the process. Consequently, these subjects had to establish operational courses according to plans and programmes that were also particular or partial.

In this sense, Nigel Walker, a humanitarian agency worker in Kabul, said that when he tried to access the airport on the days of the evacuation, he had to perform planned operations to keep his foreign identity secret. According

to him, for the rest of the waiters, ‘the presence of people like us, who would potentially get out, caused a frenzy in the crowd [...]. It was dangerous for everybody in that crowd if foreigners were there’ (Vlamiš, 2021, para. 18). To gain access to the door indicated by the diplomatic staff, Walker had to cover his face and remain silent for as long as possible so that his identity would not be revealed, given the Afghans’ reactions to the existing (partial) evacuation programme of foreigners. In this example, the prolepsis articulated concrete plans and operations concerning people: desperate Afghans. In other words, those operations were formulated by attending to other people and their plans or partial programmes. According to Gustavo Bueno (1992), plans impact subjects in two ways. Firstly, subjects are affected because they are the place from which (*a quo*) the plan is conceived. In this case, plans can be called aims, *i.e.*, subjective aims (*finis operantis*). Secondly, as actors are components of an objective institutional totality involving courses, subjects are affected in terms of the purpose (*ad quem*) of the plan, *e.g.*, plans, programmes, *etc.* Thus, we can speak of objective plans that must necessarily consider the other subjects and their respective plans in their *finis operis* (objective end).

Another example of the same, found in the magazine *The Atlantic* (Packer 2021), followed (in real time) the story of Khan, a translator for the US embassy in Kabul. After obtaining a visa to travel to the US during the evacuation chaos, he attempted to leave Afghanistan with his family through the airport. According to Packer, Khan attempted to gain access to the airport just after the fall of Kabul, as he had tickets and visas for himself and his family (*finis operantis*). However, his operations were unsuccessful. Thousands of people consisting of ‘all kinds of Afghans [who] were trying to escape’ as well as ‘Taliban fighters outside the gates’ prevented him from doing so (2021, para. 5). As *The Atlantic* reports:

After nine hours in stifling heat, without water or food, Khan and his family had to return to their rented room. [...] The next day, Khan returned by himself to the airport. The crowd outside was even larger, and armed Taliban fighters were threatening anyone who tried to get through. ‘Going to airport is just waste of time and facing threats [*sic*]:’ (Packer, 2021, para. 5)

Within the events illustrated, it is possible to see the intersection of the two plan types described above. Khan’s subjective plans, his *finis operantis* – based on having his papers in order, his American visa, his purchased tickets – had to be brought into accord with the objective plans that the process of waiting for humanitarian evacuation presented. This plan included the confluence of

multiple operational courses and subjective plans, which gave material form to the process, and demanded objective planning (*finis operis*) that conformed to the existing reality. For their part, programmes are composed of people referring to impersonal terms or people ‘insofar as they can be treated as impersonal terms’ (Bueno 1996, 421), *i.e.*, refugees, soldiers, and terminal patients. According to Gustavo Bueno, programmes could also be classified as a) generic and b) specific, in the same manner that plans were classified above.

An example of both types of programme can be observed in the royal court of Sweden during the 17th century. Here, individuals seeking positions within the kingdom’s offices often spent days waiting in the palace’s antechambers and corridors. This waiting process was a prerequisite for obtaining a promotion or a government office, and demanded the applicant’s physical presence. The applicants adhered to a generic programme for aspiring to a position, which involved situating themselves along the path the king would take to dinner, as noted by Sellerberg (2008, 357). The programme was initially generic, but it gained a more specific character at a critical juncture. When the king passed by, the aspirant was expected to briefly converse with him and then formally apply for the desired position. The effectiveness of this strategy depended on several factors, such as the king’s mood, planned royal activities, and competition from other applicants, which added specificity to each application. Following this pivotal moment – the anchor point – the programme reverted into its generic form, as the applicant had no option but to await notification of whether their application had been successful.

Concerning both plans and programmes, both the prolepsis and anamnesis are completed. No plan or programme can be created out of nothing. There are always ‘past models proposed, subsequent transformations, and unexpected results’ (Bueno 1992, 11). Here it must be emphasised that the *finis operis* (objective aims) do not, in any case, coincide entirely with the *finis operantis* (subjective aims). The future arises precisely from the resulting novelty of applying past models to new situations. Anna Secor, as part of her research in Istanbul, relates repeated scenarios where critical waiters (women, in this case) are shifted from one government office to another, and forced to travel around for ‘documents, money, and influence through the offices and waiting rooms of government buildings, state ministries [...] and courts’ (2007, 38). She labels them ‘experiences of waiting’ (2007, p. 33). From the DM perspective, Secor (2007) gives a perfect account of proleptic operations driven by aims, plans and programmes. These offices are not mere unimportant spaces but also constitute anchor points within a process of institutional waiting. The referents could have accessed a state aid scheme, housing or job. However, what is important

to note is that the referents were preceded by multiple vectorised operations, the exposition of which Secor perfectly carries out.

CONCLUSION

This paper has introduced an alternative approach to understanding waiting processes as institutional and operational phenomena rather than merely temporal ones. Using the framework of Gustavo Bueno's DM, we have proposed categories and terms to analyse the operations in critical waiting processes. The proposed terms, including anchor points, referentials, aims, plans, programmes, referents and proleptic operations, have provided a framework for analysing the internal morphology of waiting processes. By highlighting the importance of understanding the operations demanded of the waiters, we hope to contribute to explaining and resolving waiting-related crises. This paper's analytical perspective of DM offers a useful starting point for further anthropological research on waiting processes. The framework outlined emphasises the institutional and operational aspects of human/social realities, where it is possible to include waiting processes. Applying this perspective to the study of waiting processes can offer valuable insights into various areas of anthropology, including migration, conflict and development.

However, it is important to note that the findings presented here merely scratch the surface of this topic. Further research is essential for fully developing this perspective. Nonetheless, this first exploration provides a contribution to the field of waiting studies, and it is hoped that it will encourage more nuanced investigations of operations within these processes, both theoretically and empirically.

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NOTES

- 1 Duzán D. Avila Castellanos holds both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in sociology, as well as a Doctorate in Philosophy. He has a rich history of teaching and lecturing at various universities across Latin America, Spain, and New Zealand. His academic journey includes serving as a professor at three universities in Cuba. Currently, he is a Research Associate in the Department of Philosophy, School of Social Sciences at the University of Waikato. Duzán's research spans

several fields including the sociology of education, sociocultural anthropology, the philosophy of social sciences, and cultural sociology. ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2893-2147>

- 2 The five causes he proposes are: 1) the actual scarcity of goods and services supplied compared to the demand for them; 2) a monopoly of the services supplied; 3) bad or inefficient functioning of a service activity; 4) time limitations in the supply of services, *e.g.*, when they are only accessible in restricted daily or weekly time-zones; 5) uneven time access between different customers and service users (Gasparini 1995, 32).
- 3 The critique that can be levelled against this perspective is that even within these temporary lapses, operations are present, as will be discussed in the following sections.
- 4 The principle of *symploké* was introduced into Western philosophy by Plato in his work, *Sophist* (251e-253e). This principle emphasises the nature of reality in terms of continuity and discontinuity, suggesting that not everything is disconnected from everything else, but also that nothing is entirely connected with all other existing things. By advocating for a form of discontinuous pluralism, Plato challenges prevailing monism and also absolute pluralism which was manifested in some of the philosophies of his time.
- 5 For a comprehensive analysis of the institutional nature of social waiting processes, refer to Avila Castellanos (2023).
- 6 This term corresponds to the worldly meaning of end as ‘finish’ or ‘completion’.
- 7 The contour is the surface or line of separation or dissociation between the contained space (content) and the enveloping space (surrounding).
- 8 These are the external anchor points that are beyond the referent. Such external points always have a projective vectorial relation to the operations of subjects immersed in what we call the concave perspective of waiting. At the same time, they can sustain a vectorial relation by achievement that is more related to patients immersed in what we named the convex perspective of waiting.
- 9 See: Ávila (2021), ‘La topografía de la espera. Apuntes categoriales para el análisis de los espacios de espera’ (in press).
- 10 This condition of irreversibility, which seems a self-evident truth and common

sense, is often unknown to those who go through processes of waiting. In this sense, Odysseus never returned to the happy Ithaca of his dreams, but to another reality where he had to deal with Penelope's thirsty suitors.

- 11 The distinction between *finis operantis* and *finis operis* is pivotal in understanding human actions. *Finis operantis* refers to the individual plans and subjective intentions that drive a person's actions. On the other hand, *finis operis* denotes the objective outcome of these actions in reality, as they interact with multiple uncontrollable or unforeseen factors. It is important to note that *finis operantis* and *finis operis* do not necessarily align; in fact, they often diverge. In simpler terms, these concepts relate to what one seeks to achieve through actions and what is actually accomplished.

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