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Time

[Christina Chau, Laura Glitsos](#)

Nearly 50 years on from Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1971), contemporary society finds itself navigating the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This era has been described as the convergence of digitisation, robotics, artificial intelligence, globalisation—and speed (Johannessen). As such, temporality is taking on a turbulent and elusive edge. In the previous century, Toffler highlighted that technological change accelerated perceptions of time, and he predicted that by the 21st century, people would find it “increasingly painful to keep up with the incessant demand for change that characterises our time”, where change would come about “with waves of ever accelerating speed and unprecedented impact” (18). While Toffler could not have predicted the exact nature and detail of the specificities of day-to-day life in 2019, we suggest Toffler's characterisation marks an insightful ‘jumping off’ point for further introspection.

With Toffler's concerns in mind, this issue of *M/C Journal* is interested in multiple ways that digital media influences and expresses conceptions of temporality in this historical period, the final weeks of 2019. On the basis of the pieces that comprise this issue, we take this concern further to politicise the temporal figurations of media, which we propose permeate all aspects of contemporary experience. Theoretically, this position pays *homage* to the work performed by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin more than two decades ago. In 1996, Bolter and Grusin ruminated on the “the wire”, a fictional device that was the central focus of the film *Strange Days* (1995), a media gadget that could mediate experience from one subject to another, “pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex” (311). For Bolter and Grusin, ‘the wire’ epitomised contemporary culture's movement toward virtual reality, “with its goal of unmediated visual and aural experience” and they suggested that the film provided a critique of the historical mode “in which digital technologies are proliferating faster than our cultural, legal, or educational institutions can keep up with them” (313). For us, perhaps even more urgently, the wire epitomises the colonisation, infiltration and permeation of the production of temporal layers through media systems and devices into the subject's direct experience. The wire symbolises, among many things, a simulation of the terrain of time according to the Jorge Luis Borges fable, that is, one-for-one.

Contingent upon new shifts, and the academic literature which has sought to critique them thus far, in this editorial, we raise the contention that the technologies and operations of power brought about through the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and its media apparatus, have exposed the subject to a multiplicity of timescapes. In doing so, these configurations have finally colonised subjective experience of time and temporality.

Consequently, we have specifically featured a broad selection of articles that explore and discuss the presence of online, mobile, or streamed media as the primary means through which culture understands, expresses, and communicates the world, and ideas around temporality. The articles featured herein explore the ways in which constructs of time organise (and are organised by) other constructs such as; neoliberalism (Bianchino), relaxation (Pont), clocks (Campbell), surveillance, biopower, narrative (Glitsos), monetisation (Grandinetti), memorialising (Wishart), time travel (Michael), utopias and dystopias (Herb). Through the spectrum of topics, we hope to elucidate to the reader the ways in which digital culture performs and generates ontological shifts that rewrite the relationship between media, time, and experience.

Contemporaneity

A key concern for us in this issue is the idea of ‘contemporaneity,’ which has been discussed more recently in art theory and criticism by Terry Smith, and Peter Osborne, amongst others. Both Smith and Osborne use the term to articulate the effects of contemporary globalisation, transnationalism, and post-conceptual art. Smith reminds us that in contemporary society there is

the insistent presentness of multiple, often incompatible temporalities accompanied by the failure of all candidates that seek to provide the overriding temporal framework – be it modern, historical, spiritual, evolutionary, geological, scientific, globalizing, planetary. (196)

As a result, artists are negotiating and critiquing multiple intersecting and contradictory time codes that pervade contemporary society in order to grapple with contemporaneity today. Yet, concerns with overlaid temporalities enter our everyday more and more, as explored through Justin Grandinetti's piece, “A Question of Time: HQ Trivia and Mobile Streaming Temporality”, in which he interrogates mobile streaming practices and the ways in which new devices seek out every possible moment that might be monetised and ‘made productive.’

Grandinetti's concern, like the others featured in this issue, attends to the notion of time as evasive, contradictory and antonymous while forming a sense of urgency around the changing present, and also reconciling a multiplicity of time codes at play through technology today. The present is immediately written and archived through news media live feeds, GPS tracking and bio data in apps used for fitness and entertainment amongst others, while the pace of national television, print media, and local radio is folded through our daily experiences. Consequently, we're interested in the multiple, and sometimes incompatible temporalities that emerge through the varied ways in which digital media is used to express, explore, and communicate in the world today beyond the arenas of contemporary art and art history that Smith and Osborne are primarily concerned with.

Experience

Experience is key. Experience may in fact be the key that unlocks these following conversations about time and the subject, after all, time is nothing if not experiential. Empirically, we might claim that, time is “conceived as the intervals during which events occur” (Toffler 21). However, of course one can only *be* if one is *being in time*. Through Bergson we might say that the individual's perception of time manifests “rightly or wrongly, to be inside and outside us at one and the same time To each moment of our inner life there thus corresponds a moment of our body and of all environing matter that is ‘simultaneous’ with it” (205). Time is the platform through which experience of consciousness is mediated, thus the varying manipulations of time through media apparatuses are therefore inextricable with our lived ‘everyday’.

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E.P. Thompson might call this our "time-sense", a kind of "inward notation of time" (58), however this rationalisation of time is amplified and complicated by digital media, as warned by Campbell in this issue. Campbell explores the performativity of publicly writing the self on social media that commodifies experience. An inward notion of time therefore becomes inverted and publicly performed through digital media, which is a key source of anxiety and control for individuals.

In Toffler's estimation, even by as early as the 1970s the technoscience of Western culture had "released a totally new social force" and he contends that this had reshaped the collective psyche with

a stream of change so accelerated that it influences our sense of time, revolutionizes the tempo of daily life, and affects the very way we "feel" the world around us. We no longer "feel" life as men [sic] did in the past. And this is the ultimate difference, the distinction that separates the truly contemporary man [sic] from all others. (17)

While Toffler was referring to a different technological context, he serves as a reminder that digital media amplifies pre-existing effects of technology. Therefore, while autofiction and the public writing of the self is not necessarily new, it is nevertheless key to contemporary feelings of acceleration and the temporal vernacular of contemporaneity – one that exacerbates the experiences of acceleration, inertia, and how we 'feel' the present and our presence in the world.

In this issue we also wish to note the ways in which digital culture, and perhaps in particular new media platforms and narratives that permeate our homes, appear to be directing the Western "time-sense" (Thompson 80) away from metaphors constructed through the linear trope of 'rivers' or 'streams' and toward the more complex arrangements that we suggest are more suited to metaphors of 'confetti' or 'snow', as Laura Glitsos elucidates in her piece "From Rivers to Confetti: Reconfigurations of Time through New Media Landscapes".

As just one example, we might think of the multiplicity of 'peculiar times' built upon each other in the production, distribution, consumption and convergence of so many levels of digital media. In one sense, we might approach 'peculiar times' as the peculiarity of temporality in any given context. However, in another sense, we might also recognise the layering of standardisation which is then peculiar to each of the modes of production, consumption, and distribution (as laid out by Althusser and Balibar). As just one example, in the context of streaming services, we find the "flattening of historical frames" (Kaplan 144) in the scrolling back and forward on social media timelines (Powell 2). So perhaps *our* peculiar time speaks of the collapsing between ontological boundaries of past, present, and future—a kind of contemporaneity that splits between the peculiarities of production and consumption of digital media.

Standardisation

Historiographies of time-sense in the Western tradition have been covered by thinkers as diverse as E.P. Thompson, Graeme Davidson, Bernard Stiegler, and Henri Lefebvre. While it is not our aim to repeat those narratives here, we concede some markers are crucial to note in order to set the context for our selected pieces. Beginning in the early- to mid- middle ages in Europe, up until the spread of clocks in the 14th century, time was largely related to processes, tasks or stages of light during the day, and time does still continue to exist in this way for some communities (Thompson 58). During this era, and of even back to the third century BCE, there were time-keeping technologies which could measure smaller increments of the day, such as the water-clock, the sun-dial, and the hour-glass, but everyday activities for the working people were largely regulated by natural or circadian rhythms (Thompson). It is perhaps these rhythms which served to shape the 'inward notation of time', in Thompson's words, through the discourses of nature, that is through the language of streams and rivers—or 'flows'.

The 13th century saw the advent of mechanical time-keeping technology utilising what is called a "verge escapement mechanism", that is, a "feedback regulator that controls the speed of a mechanical clock" (Headrick 42). About a century later, coupled with the emergence of puritanism, Thompson tells us that we start to see a shift in the construction of time which more and more depends on the synchronisation of labour (Thompson 70). Even so, working rhythms remain fairly irregular, still more suited to what Thompson describes as "a natural human rhythm" (71). This changes suddenly in the 19th century when, with the explosion of the Industrial Age, we witness the dominance of factory-time and, of course, the adoption and standardisation of railway-time across Britain, Europe, India and North America (Schivelbusch).

The trend toward standardisation continues into the mid-20th century with what George Ritzer has famously called "McDonaldization" (2008). Thus, through the blanketing nature of 20th century "industrial capitalism" (Thompson 80), everyday experience became predicated on standardisation. Thompson tells us that these "changes in manufacturing technique ... demand greater synchronization of labour and a greater exactitude in time-routines in society" (80). For Thompson, the "technological conditioning" of "time-sense" ushers in the model of "time-measurement as a means of labour exploitation" (80). This historical point is central to Giacomo Bianchino's argument in "Afterwork and Overtime: The Social Reproduction of Human Capital", in his discussion of the fundamental nature of capitalism in shaping time-sense. However, what we suggest is that this theme of 'time-sense' as shaped by the broader political economy of media is found within each of the pieces in the issue.

A discussion of standardisation is problematic, however, in the wider conceptualisation of time as elusive, multi-dynamic and fractured. Surely, standardisation should at least come with the ability of certainty, in some respects. However, this is the paradox of the digital and new media age: That standardisation is both arbitrary and, in echo of Balibar and Althusser, 'peculiar' to an endless layering of separate time-streams. It is, perhaps, *the jumping between them*, which has become a necessary function of living in the digital age, that produces the sense of fracture, the loss of standard.

This issue of *M/C Journal* explores the various ways in which the constellation of current media practices that are online, offline, embodied, and networked, collectively inform and express concepts of time. The feature article "With This Body, I Subtract Myself from Neoliberalised Time: Sub-Habituality & Relaxation after Deleuze", written by Antonia Pont, keenly asks how relaxation might be used to evade neoliberal machinations around organising time, efficiency, and productivity, all of which endanger a diversity of temporalities. While all media have their own unique limitations and affordances regarding influencing and expressing relationships to time, they are also impacted by current perceptions of uncertainty and neoliberal agendas that underlie the working relationships between people, the media that they engage in, and representations of the world.

The feelings of inertia expressed by Toffler nearly 50 years ago has not only been accelerated through technological expansion, but by a layering of multiple time codes which reflect the wide range of media practices that permeate the contemporary vernacular. In 2019, concepts from

the current post-Internet stage are beginning to emerge and we are finding that digital media fragments as much as it connects and unites. An 'inward notion of time' becomes brokered through automated processes, issues around surveillance, affect, standardisation, norms, nostalgia, and the minutiae of digital time.

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