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# Speed Traps and the Temporal

## Of Taxis, Truck Stops, and TaskRabbits

*Sarah Sharma*

I begin with a story about the temporal; a story about time and social difference.

A friend and I were waiting for a southbound train during a weekday morning commute at St. Clair station in Toronto when the announcer informed riders that the line was experiencing a twenty-minute delay. People expressed their frustration with eye-rolls and exasperated groans. But just as quickly as the disrupted service was announced a series of plan Bs went into effect across the subway platform. Some were going to wait it out and took to leaning against the walls. A few people hurried out of the exits informing others “I guess I’m going to walk.” Mothers with strollers headed toward the elevators.

As I contemplated my own plan B, my girlfriend had already jumped into action. She had done a quick scan of the crowd and honed in on a young man in a pressed dark suit walking quite fast while staring down at his phone. He did so with such practiced agility that she knew exactly where he was headed: to the financial district. She also knew he was “Ubering” rather than calling a cab because of the way he was typing and holding his phone up to look at the screen under the dim light of the subway station. My friend was in a rush herself and didn’t have the twenty minutes to wait for a train. Waiting at the hospital for her was her new baby born twelve weeks premature. He was in need of the expressed breast milk she had in her transportable cooler bag hanging from her right shoulder. She sped up beside the smartly dressed young man and started to walk in step, “You getting an Uber? Going south, past Wellesley? I’m going to the hospital. Can I come with you?” He happily agreed but he also never lost his pacing, never stopped walking or typing until the brief moment that they stood together at the corner of St. Clair and Yonge when their Uber pulled up.

My dear friend was in survival mode trying to keep her early baby alive and well. Her already acute awareness of what she needed to do in a given moment was even more heightened. She was activating the necessary survival skills that come along with becoming responsible for the life of another. But what is most remarkable about this scene is that she knew exactly where this young man was headed and how he was going to get there. He had all the signifiers of the iconic and privileged protagonist of fast living in a culture that is dominated by the discourse that the world is speeding up. He had on a suit, a quick step, and was tapping madly away into his smartphone. He was plugged in and on the go, using network time to navigate the space of flows so he could bypass the public transportation system that had ground to a temporary halt. He could maintain control over his time by ordering up a driver with his Uber app and get to work without losing a minute. He was in charge of his mobility and his time but also the time and mobility of others.

Enter the driver: the Uber driver's labor is oriented entirely around navigating the rhythm of the streets while maintaining the time demands of their fares. They speed up, slow down, and are made to wait depending on the needs of whoever gets into the back seat. Relationships of synchronization permeate the entire social fabric. There is an expectation that certain bodies recalibrate to the time of others as a significant condition of their labor. As a result, specific temporal regimes and strategic dispositions are cultivated in order simply to survive within the normalizing temporal ordering of everyday life. Cab drivers limit fluid intake so they don't have to stop for bathroom breaks. Nighttime security guards sleep during the day. Back-strained desk workers do yoga stretches at their desk (Sharma 2014). While my girlfriend was also employing strategies to maintain control over her time she bore none of the recognizable accouterments of time management in this so-called culture of speed. No sense of her current relationship to time could be accurately gleaned or conceived of by an outside observer. When she hitched a ride on this young man's vector she was immensely fatigued with tired eyes and a still protruding but empty belly. Her arms were full of bags stocked with time-sensitive materials for the reproduction of the social order. These three figures, or what I refer to as temporalities, at the corner of Yonge and St. Clair are an example of the interdependent and relational nature of time. They exist together on a grid of temporal power relations. It is in this way that time is culturally collective.

The term "temporal" does not imply a transcendent sense of time or the time of history. I mean for the temporal to denote *lived* time. The temporal is not a general sense of time particular to an epoch of history but a specific experience of time that is structured in specific political and economic contexts. The temporal operates as a form of social power and a type of social difference. Temporalities do not experience a uniform time tied to a particular

technology but rather a time particular to the labor and other forms of social difference that produce them. Individual experiences of time depend upon where people are positioned within a larger economy of temporal worth. The temporal subject's day includes technologies of the self that are cultivated through synchronizing to the time of others and also having others synchronize to them. In this way the meaning of one's time is in large part structured and controlled by both the institutional arrangements inhabited and the time of others—other temporalities. Not all such temporal entanglements are this fleeting, as my story indicates. Moreover, I would suggest it is only on the surface that temporal entanglements appear as such. Instead, these temporal crossings are endemic of deeper, more enduring forms of structural difference experienced at the level of time. But this view into the temporal I want to forefront is too often obscured by a more dominant cultural conversation about time; the now common one about speed.

That the world is speeding up is as much a popular cultural concern as it is a matter of contemporary theoretical importance. It is an observation about the contemporary moment shared by Marxists and marketers alike. The critique of speedup is not so much an accurate description of the contemporary world as it is a limiting discourse that actually perpetuates structural inequalities at the level of time (Sharma 2014). What most populations encounter is not the fast pace of life but the structural demand that they must *recalibrate* in order to fit into the temporal expectations demanded by various institutions, social relationships, and labor arrangements. To recalibrate is to learn how to deal with time, be on top of one's time, to learn when to be fast and when to be slow. Recalibration accounts for the multiple ways in which individuals and social groups synchronize their body clocks, their sense of the future or the present, to an exterior relation; be it another person, pace, technology, chronometer, institution, or ideology. Invitations and expectations to recalibrate permeate the social fabric differently for different populations. What is shared, however, is the looming expectation that everyone must become an entrepreneur of time-control.

When discussing the politics of temporal difference in a range of settings that has included academics but also designers, activists, marketers, and even occupational therapists, the conversation quickly digresses into guesses about what is faster, what is slower, and what takes more time or less. I get asked to comment on Fitbits and other productivity apps and what the emergence of such programs for living means for the politics of time-management. I am consistently asked publicly during Q and A for my own tips and secrets for managing the time pressures of academia with having two children. This departure into narratives of productivity and new technology, as well as personal time-management advice, suggests to me that temporal difference is even more political than I first imagined. The critique of speedup parades as

a time politics while it ignores larger structural political issues related to labor and social difference. To discuss gender, institutional time, and the potential of a politics of refusal is one thing, but to ask how one can “do it all” re-entrenches the gendered institutional control of time. To point to new technologies as altering temporal experiences is a fine observation but it says nothing of the politics of time without understanding that time is itself technological. Time is not a technological measurement of what is real; it is not a phenomenon caused by technological measurement—rather it is a structuring relation of power. It is an intoxicating concern: how to have a better relationship to time and technology. But this cultural fixation on time control and one’s ability to modulate time, to manage it better, slow it down and speed it up, is antithetical to the collective sense of time necessary for a political understanding of time. Moreover, ascribing new temporal milieus and environments to new technologies without also considering the differential politics of time that is altered in the advent of this or that technology misses the opportunity to engage with the social experience of time.

How can individual time-management anxieties be set aside so that the relational and collective social experience of time might be acknowledged? I argue that the cultural understanding of time-control needs to be complicated and denormalized, delinked from new technology. Taking a cue from Judy Wajcman in her book *Pressed For Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (2015), what is most pressing is not resisting speedup or creating new technologies to better control time, but instead cultivating new social realities related to time. In this chapter I extend my work on temporal difference to account for the broader range of media technologies people orchestrate as part of the struggle to stay in time. The accouterments of time control are too often conceived of as consisting of Fitbits, productivity apps, VIP airport lounge passes, standing desks, and the privilege of being able to command and depend upon the labor of others. But recourse to these normalizing instruments of time control is not a universal experience. In fact most of the ways in which individuals attempt to exert the control and management of time barely registers under the rubric of time-management in this so-called culture of speed. As Wajcman argues: “We live our lives surrounded by things but we seem to think of only some of them as being technologies” (2015: 29). I am guided by the notion that we must continue to broaden our conception of technology as it relates to time management, a theory of media that has its roots in the medium theory of Harold Adams Innis (1951) and Marshall McLuhan (1964), but also recognize that the time-management strategies of so much of the population recedes from view because of the overmediatized and limiting notion of time that circulates culturally. Before complicating the category of time control, the first step is to shift the register from speedup to the temporal.

## Speedup and All of Its Trappings

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a set of questions that focused on the impact of technologies built for acceleration and faster-moving capital on the democratic fate of a sped-up globe emerged across the disciplines. I refer to this line of critical inquiry as “speed theory.” Paul Virilio was one of the first to write of speed in this vein, in 1970s France, and he remains its most prominent figure. But the critiques of the culture of speed continue to accelerate (1986). Speed culture goes by many epitaphs: “the 24/7 world” (Hassan 2003b; Crary 2013) “liquid times” (Bauman 2000), “hypermodern times” (Lipovetsky 2005), “the culture of acceleration” (Tomlinson 2007), “the coming of immediacy” (Tomlinson 2007), “dromocratic society” (Armitage 2000), “the new temporalities of biopolitical production” (Hardt and Negri 2000), “the chronoscopic society” (Hassan 2003b), and “chronodystopia” (Armitage and Roberts 2003). Of course, the advent of the new millennium isn’t the first time speed has been the object of critical inquiry. Such work fits within an important trajectory of thought that includes histories of capital as it became coterminous with different technologies and their temporal and spatial effects. Such critical histories describe clocks, trains, telegraphs, and other global metronomes with their attendant temporal dictates of ticks, tocks, nanoseconds, and light years (Marx 1867/2002; Thompson 1967; Kern 1983; Schivelbusch 1987; Carey 1989; Postone 1993; Abram 1997; Griffiths 1999; Galison 2003; Glennie and Thrift 2009).

While critical theorists of speed examine different elements of speed culture, there is a shared sentiment: new technologies and faster moving capital herald grave political and social consequences. “Speed” is the commanding by-product of a mutually reinforcing complex that includes global capital, real-time communication technologies, military technologies, and scientific research on human bodies. Democratic deliberation gives over to instant communication, or what Virilio refers to as “live contemplation.” Political interaction is replaced by monetary transaction. Space, the apparent *real* ground of politics, is subsumed by speed. “Real-time is not very different from classical tyranny, because it tends to destroy the reflection of the citizen in favor of a reflex action” (1986: 87). Speed theorists argue that geopolitics (a politics based in space) is supplanted by chronopolitics (a politics based in time). The yielding of space to time not only dissolves the grounding of politics but it gives rise to a way of being in time that is antithetical to the political public sphere.

Speed theory is without a doubt indebted to Marx’s formulation of the clock’s quantification of work and the production of value and socially necessary time. Part of this analysis includes attention to the new social formations that arise because of accelerated capital and technologies including the changing quantity of labor time versus leisure time. They align with Marx’s

formulation of socially necessary time (1867/2002). Speed theory is also largely sympathetic to E. P. Thompson's thesis in "Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" (1967) concerned with how the new chronometers imposed by governmental, military, and capitalist interests have replaced earlier, collective perceptions of time that he believed flowed from the collective wisdom of human societies. Marx and Thompson are both necessary to thinking about how capital robs the worker of time, whether by diminishing personal time, controlling the bounds of a working day, stalling clocks, or establishing the age limits of child labor. Yet the protagonist in the theoretical critiques of speed is no longer the worker or any specific subjugated population for that matter. Instead, it is a generalized individual who feels suddenly out of time. The subject of value and the subject of most attention in the critique of speed is the same subject who confirms speedup most readily as *the* new reality—whether the jetsetter, the financial worker, public man, or the theorist. While pointing out the indentured conditions of contemporary labor and living brought on by ubiquitous technologies is an important analysis of contemporary life, it does not deal with the uneven cultural politics of time. The theory of social difference that emerges out of speed theory revolves around a simplistic binary. Zygmunt Bauman, in *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, maintains that "the inhabitants of the first world live in a perpetual present, going through a succession of episodes hygienically insulated from their past as well as future. These people are constantly busy and perpetually short of time, since each moment in time is non-extensive" (1998: 88). He goes on to say, as for the slow class:

People marooned in the opposite world are crushed under the burden of the abundant, redundant and useless time they have nothing to fill with. In their time nothing ever happens. They do not "control time"—but neither are they controlled by it, unlike the clocking in, clocking out ancestors subject to the faceless rhythm of factory time. (1998: 88)

In the end there are only two temporal poles of chronopolitical life that are dealt with: fast classes and slow classes (Virilio 1986), tourists and vagabonds (Bauman 1998), inhabitants of chronotopia and chronodystopia (Armitage and Roberts 2003), and the time rich and the time poor (Rifkin 1987). These two temporal classes are imagined to be much like ships that never pass. And, neither seems to meet the temporal requirement of civic life; where one should be contemplative and deliberative as a form of political temporal composure.

Theories of liberal democracy assume a way of being in time, but the assumption itself is not a time politics; it is one single, and albeit very powerful, discursive mobilization of time.<sup>1</sup> What continues to animate public sphere

<sup>1</sup> See for example Scheuerman 2004.

theorizing is an expectation that political civic life is only political insofar as it *takes place in a space and time separate from state and market*. The right practice of time, a democratic one, must be free of institutional restraints, whether economic or cultural. It is a time that must be unfettered in order to be contemplative. While I do not have the space to elaborate here, in terms of theorizing publics, at every level from the local to the global, oppositional to the bourgeois public sphere, temporality is an invisible and unremarked relation of power. “Publics” figure almost exclusively within the theoretical imaginary as spatial constructs. Delineations are made between ideal publics and the “other” space: the public sphere and the private sphere (Habermas 1999), public space and oppositional space (Fraser 1992), the agora and the *oikos*, anthropological public space and non-place (Augé 1995), and public space and speed-spaces (Virilio 1986). The spatial logic of liberal democracy is also evident in the constant questioning of “where” publics might be—are they local, global, subaltern, national, or regional. Are they here or are they there? Is the television talk show a new public space (Livingstone and Lunt 1994) and what about the Internet today (Poster 2006)? The newest technologies looming on the horizon are often met with questions of how they might change social space and they ways individuals interact with each other in space. The *agora*, for example, the venerated space of antiquity that continues to animate contemporary theorizing of the public sphere, was not merely a space. If the temporal is acknowledged, then the public sphere is also a time. It was a space of free time for political thinking for the minority of free citizens. It was an experience of time and social space produced by the *time* of women and slaves who worked in the *oikos*. Speed theory espouses a conception of the public conditioned upon a politics of time that is about the *pace* of one’s time rather than how its citizens or denizens are *constituted in* time. The democratic expectation, to be free and have time, is a liberal bourgeois demand that lends itself better to arguments for lifestyle choices like “how do you do it all” rather than recognition of the politics of time.

The theoretical calls to *slow down* function in a very similar vein.<sup>2</sup> Within this slow-living imaginary, time is treated as something to which we all have equal access (Sharma 2014). Slowness is not outside of the normalizing temporal order. It encompasses its own particular ideological time claims and beholds its own exclusive temporal practices. There is a dominating sensibility within this discourse on slowness that being a “good” political citizen requires transcendence. Transcendence pervades in both taking the necessary time out and abstracting oneself from the energy and traffic of everyday life. But this traffic conditions the very possibility for some to transcend. Slowness, as a

<sup>2</sup> See Parkins and Craig 2006.



form of managing or resisting speed, is in and of itself not a time politics. Slowing down does not necessarily change (and certainly does not ameliorate) the ways in which individuals and social groups are tangled together in time.

Focusing on the issue of fast or slow “pace” without a nuanced and complex conception of the temporal does an injustice to the multitude of time-based experiences and strategies of survival specific to different populations that live, labor, and sleep under the auspices of global capital. The social fabric is composed of individuals’ and social groups’ sense of time, and possibility is shaped by a differential economy, limited or expanded by the ways and means they find themselves in and out of time. Thus what characterizes life are the differential and inequitable ways in which time is made to matter and is experienced. What matters is how time is worked upon and experienced at the intersections of inequity, and how, in any particular technological moment, there are multiple temporalities to be considered.

Speedup as a descriptor of the moment is hard to shake. I suggest it is compelling for a few mutually reinforcing reasons: it justifies a culture of overwork and overconsumption and the unnecessary exhaustion that comes with it. Speedup justifies the need for the labor of others to help maintain and reproduce the conditions and quality of one’s own life, including one’s exhaustion. But speedup might be less an accurate description of the world than it is a universalizing polemic promulgated by those threatened for the first time by the possibility of not being in control of time. One doesn’t have to venture far to offer up the observation that theories of the world speeding up and out of control are written almost solely by men in the Western academy. But this is hardly an adequate intellectual conclusion on my part: to suggest that time is far more multiple and differential than this masculinist discourse of speedup has assumed and leave it at that. I offer a cautionary tale regarding the discourse of speed and its circulatory power; it is not speed per se but the explanatory power of speed that is responsible for perpetuating inequalities at the level of time. The temporal is a corrective to the discourse of speedup. I suggest the temporal complicates the narratives of speedup that permeate culture and theory, but also that a temporal perspective into speed is necessary in order to account for how time is actually lived across the social.

### **Enter the Temporal**

The fixation on speed and the problem of tempo leaves individuals and social groups more vulnerable to biopolitical control. When better time management is imagined to be the solution to speed, what is occurring is greater institutional control over the time of one’s life; not just one’s lifetime but the immediate minutes, how the days pass, and what time is supposed to mean for



the modern subject. Foucault uses the term *biopower* to describe how the various institutions and disciplines arising in the eighteenth century monitored, intervened, and controlled the productive capacities of individuals and populations at large. Through different techniques and practices these institutions of the state, as well as other institutions of modern power such as the army, family, police, schools, and medical professions, would administer life through the optimization and intensification of the life force. When Foucault argues that biopower is the power to “live or let it die,” the temporal is explicit (1977). Life is not taken. It is “let to live” through investment or “let to die” through disinvestment, slowly. One of the core features of neoliberalism is widespread disinvestment; the rolling back of the state’s regulation of health, welfare, and other public services. But all bodies do not experience such disinvestment in the same way. One of the central paradoxes of neoliberalism is that while the state has disinvested in most bodies, some are reinvested in by more exclusive means through the market. The bodies that are invested in are the ones most vital to contemporary capitalism, precisely because they don’t need to work in order to survive. One of the growing sights of investment I would argue is cultivating meaningful experiences of time, working upon one’s time-sense. It depends upon belief in the speed of life to gain entry into subjects’ lives in the first place.

Across the landscape of everyday life, interventions into time are presented as invitations to experience a novel temporal experience—to slow down, take a breather, nap, meditate, and rest at work on-site and on demand. We are witnessing the emergence of infrastructure of temporal care built around maintaining the time needs of particular subjects. By “time needs” I mean the discursive construction of one’s lifetime and time of life being of particular importance to the contemporary moment. Temporal architectures are composed of built environments, commodities and services, and technologies directed to the management and enhancement of a certain kind of subject’s time—a privileged temporality. For someone like the contemporary business traveler an immersive environment oriented around their time maintenance combines technologies and human labor that allow them to recalibrate and get resituated within the particular time demands of global capital. The airport’s temporal infrastructure attends to accidents and risks within a biopolitical economy of time. It does the reproductive work to enhance, activate, and effectively transform the body’s capacity to produce as well as alter the subject’s experience of time to the rhythm of a capitalist work ethic. This temporal infrastructure maintains highly structured temporal experiences and normalizes a set of mutually reinforcing conceptions of time. While capital develops at the expense of bodies, it makes clear which bodies will be taken care of. Take for instance Minute Suites, appearing across American airports (see Figure 9.1). These WIFI-powered napping suites replete with desks, beds,



**Figure 9.1.** Minute Suites Traveler's Retreats offer in-transit travelers a place to “nap, relax, work” in private

workstations, and a on-site service staff offer the paying airport guest the chance to recharge and work or nap in private.

The rise of a temporal architecture elevates the cultural significance of waiting from the dead time of doing nothing to a time of self-improvement and a privileged moment of reprieve. Everyone manages time in one way or the other, for better or for worse. But for most populations, the management of time is more or less private and invisible—hidden from the view of others. And even for subjects of value at the airport, for example, waiting has not always taken on such a public character. It was done in exclusive lounges with other temporally compatible subjects. Today, the emerging architecture of time maintenance designed for the business traveler offers a public display of busy-ness where they can retreat privately in public view. People exercising good time management are visible everywhere and culturally applauded for doing it so well. There they are managing their time like pros and making good use of the architecture of time maintenance erected for their labors. These technologies of time maintenance reinforce the idea that subjects of value cannot be easily replaced, but the secondary labor they depend upon can.

The speed theorist also reinforces this value when they focus solely on new technologies and a singular experience of time. If this business traveler and their Minute Suites and all the gadgets and productivity apps that adorn them were generalizable across the social fabric then perhaps the argument could be



**Figure 9.2.** Interior view of a Minute Suite

made that this is a culture of speed and the politics of time needs to be directed toward dismantling this tempo. But the continued focus on this population and this tempo, in theory and in the consumer market, obscures attention away from the other temporalities that labor in order to maintain this time. One need not even have to look past the Minute Suite concierge to see the differential temporalities that compose the architecture of time maintenance. Thinking politically about time requires attention to these temporal entanglements and how time is experienced as a form of social difference.

### **Architectures of Time Maintenance Beyond the Jet-Set**

Late summer 2015 I am at a truck stop in Sarnia, a town between Ontario and Michigan before the border crossing between the US and Canada, the rest-rooms for gas station patrons are out of order and women are redirected to the truck stop facilities (see Figures 9.3 to 9.6). The sparkling condition of the facilities for women reveals not just excellent maintenance staff but the fact that female truckers are far and few between. The truckers' lounge has TV screens, an on-site hairdresser, and showers for the truck drivers. There are also coin-automated massage chairs, a free magazine collection, and unlimited



**Figure 9.3.** A slow day at the lounge at the Sarnia Truck stop. The space is designed to allow drivers to sit and watch TV while waiting for their number to be electronically displayed letting them know when a shower is free



**Figure 9.4.** The “Relax and Enjoy” toilet/shower at the Sarnia Truck Stop. The Denny’s ad to the right promises fast food as fuel for the body

brewing coffee. Showers are controlled by an electronic waiting system displayed on the television screen—numbers are called when the facilities become free. There are pamphlets and posters that advertise a website directing would-be truckers to [lifeasatrucker.com](http://lifeasatrucker.com). The website promises that the biggest advantage of a career in driving is the solitary time it provides to



**Figure 9.5.** Coin and credit card automated massage chairs at the Sarnia Truck Stop. Before sitting down one can also place a food order at the adjacent Denny's via the electronic kiosk. Ads overhead refer to job opportunities in trucking and mechanics



**Figure 9.6.** A hair salon for driver's grooming needs while waiting for truck maintenance and repair

contemplate and reflect on one's life. The available services are not so much about enhancing the truck driver's quality of time or level of productivity but instead making their stop enjoyable while meeting the most basic of needs. The truck driver's meaning of time, their temporal outlook or sense of the moment, is not highly invested in. There are no signs indicating how tired,



busy, or high-tech their lives are in this apparent world of speed. Instead their architecture of time maintenance is about hygiene, grooming, and sustenance, in a timely and orderly fashion. They are there to refuel the body and the tank while not wasting too much time. Oil changes and haircuts take about the same amount of time. The food options are fast.

### The Desk of a University Department Manager

The office manager of my outgoing department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the frontline of a department that is comprised of thirty faculty members, forty active graduate students, and 800 undergraduates. She has her desk set up in a very deliberate way (see Figure 9.7). If you look closely enough you can see that is ordered in such a way to help her maintain an oasis of calm in an environment that she has little control over. At any given moment one of these 875 people might need something via email or in person. UPS comes flying in and out, the mail person appears twice a day, there are jammed photocopiers and printing problems, disgruntled students and people lost in the hallways. None of these are actually part of her main job description. I get a brief sense of what her day is like a few times a week when my own office on the second floor loses its Internet connection and my defunct computer is



**Figure 9.7.** The desk of an office manager at a university reveals an invisible system of time control/management. Her post-it note attached to her screen reminds her to breathe and for how long

not going to be replaced. It is my last semester at the university before I move to the University of Toronto in January and my own temporal architecture is slowly being dismantled. I start using the desk behind her, the one usually reserved for the work-study students. Succulents and aloe plants, motivating mantras from American feminists, and inspirational posters pepper her desk. Most striking is the yellow post-it note stuck to her computer screen with the reminder: "Inhale 5, Hold 2, Exhale 6." I ask her how often she uses her post-it note message and she smiles coyly and says, "Whenever it catches my eye when I'm feeling stressed out. No one knows what I'm looking at. I just have all this stuff coming at me all the time, you never know what it will be." She stretches at her desk and makes sure she stands up and walks around every hour. In discussing the possibility of a standing desk for her she responds, "they aren't for staff I don't think."

### Taxi Cab Interiors

The front seat of a taxicab offers a rare glimpse into the taxi driver's relationship to time (see Figure 9.8(a) and (b)). The taxi driver in most major metropolitan cities in North America is almost always newly immigrated and waiting for accreditation papers. Many are seeking asylum. The taxi driver straddles multiple temporalities, both personally (the offset clocks of time zones that dictate phone calls home, the slow progress of work visa applications, the movement of their children through the US school system) and professionally (the tempos of those they must transport, the slow traffic, night and day, the ticking of the clock, and the running meter). The front seat is a private space for the taxi driver. Rarely are fares invited to sit in the front when there is room in the back. It is where drivers keep their personal belongings that help them get through the day. There are coffee mugs, packages of quats, cigarettes, pillows, eye masks, blankets, cellphone consoles, water, hand sanitizer, and half-eaten meals. Overhead on the visor, there are pictures of family members, CDs, business cards, and picture postcards of elsewhere. Hailing a cab with a large group of people, when everyone won't fit in the back seat, often results in frenetic scurrying. Drivers quickly push their belongings on to the floor, stuff things into glove compartments and the sides of the doors, or collect it all in a pile to dump in the trunk.

But these scattered front-seat objects are hardly just things. Together, they compose the taxi driver's daily rituals of time management. As the expendable bodies of a labor force that can easily be replenished, there is no need for the structures of capital to endow the taxi driver's time with importance. Much like the desks of office managers, the cab interiors reflect rituals of





Figure 9.8(a).



**Figure 9.8(b).** Interiors of taxi-cabs reveal deliberate and strategic time management rituals that fall under the radar of how time control is culturally conceived: thermoses, extra cups, visors, paper calendars, religious iconography, worry beads, toys of sleeping offspring at home. Many of these objects serve as reminders of the passing of time and why the drivers drive

time-maintenance devised strategically and creatively—in relation to the other temporalities that the driver must navigate around and between.

In one of the cab interiors (Figure 9.9), the visor, the coffee, a post-it-note calendar is clearly visible. What is harder to make out but perhaps most interesting is the range of religious iconography, including a rosary and the photos of Jesus that are on his driving wheel and on the meter. He also has family memorabilia assembled in the front seat. When discussing his cab interior and his choices, his answers all reflect the temporal. The birds remind him of the two types of people in the world and help balance him so he can stay calm and keep his business mindset and keep going. There is a figuring of Minnie-mouse that is his 5-year-old daughter's; it reminds him why he works late at night. The religious pieces are reminders of the temporality of life and death, the passing of time, and a greater power over his minute, day, life, and afterlife.

All of these rituals to stay in time at the truck stop, the department office and the taxicab, are also technologies of the self by those whose labor is oriented to the maintenance of life/reproduction of time for others. These

are also forms of labor who fall outside of the common picture of fast urban life in the discursive world of speed. The taxi driver, truck driver, and office assistant are the human infrastructure for more privileged tempos. This is a quality of labor central to gigs, wage labor, and other forms of devalued care labor required to reproduce the productive requirements of others. And in all of these spaces there are even more layers of temporal interdependence that could be detangled with more layers of complexity. There are even more service staff securing, cleaning, and maintaining the university office, the places the taxi drivers stop and rest at, and the truck lounge. And each of these subjects will also devise and strategically attempt to control their own time without recourse to an elaborate architecture of time maintenance created to keep them in time.

One's relationship to the temporal order of things, the value of their time, can be rendered visible by how time is strategically managed and controlled. This is where the politics of time intersects with time control. The control of time is never individual; it is always collective. To achieve time control, to work toward it constantly, could be an empty political goal. The ultimate desire to control one's time is not a sufficient endpoint or starting point for politicizing time.

**"I control my own time, I control my own time,  
I control my own time"**

Mohammed is a London Uber driver. He provides bottled water, crisps, and biscuits in the back of his Uber. He has a mini-vacuum he keeps in the front seat so he can quickly clean up the crumbs. It is Saturday in Central London around midnight. The pub patrons are home already and the clubbers still clubbing. Midnight is quiet in this part of London. The next rush is hours away. Mohammed tells me he had started a career in computer engineering but after a year of uninspiring days working at a desk under a strict management team he felt like he was wasting time. Becoming an Uber driver felt like the "ultimate freedom." He tells me that he really enjoys the work because it lets him be in control of his time. He makes this proclamation right after relaying he has spent the last thirty minutes quite bored and waiting in his car for a fare. Mohammed doesn't really take entire days off either. He sometimes decides in the moment if he is going to drive or not. If he's out and feeling bored or not having fun or just sitting around at home and feels guilty about not working he turns his phone on. This sentiment echoes other workers in the gig economy made up of menial outsourced labor.

TaskRabbit is an online outsourcing company that helps busy people “live smarter” by connecting them to people within the vicinity who can take care of a range of domestic errands like furniture assembly, grocery shopping, and cleaning. Their tagline reads: “We’ll do what you don’t want to do, so you can do what you love.” The *New York Times* recently ran an exposé on workers in the sharing economy at Fiverr, TaskRabbit, Uber, and Lyft (August 2014). One of the taskers profiled was a single mother who had spent almost sixteen hours doing menial work for others that included assembling Ikea furniture, gardening, and taking someone to the airport before the crack of dawn. At the end of the day she has worked well beyond an acceptable workday. She also has a backache and a tension headache to show for it, along with 200 dollars. She recognizes that it was a good day in terms of cash but not a sustainable livelihood. She expresses that the ultimate pay-off for this type of precarious work is that at least she can control her own time.

The invoking of time control in these two examples is set against another temporal condition of generalized precarity—the unguaranteed future. In fact, the mention of the control of time actually refers to a tiny slice of time: control over one’s immediate working conditions, sometimes the hour, in the absence of security. Even if the boss is decentralized and diffuse, incarnate in every transaction, the relationship is fleeting and more palatable than other types of workplace domination and exploitation. Likewise, those who need task rabbits suggest that the technology “greases an otherwise awkward exchange” (Singer 2014). Taskers and Uber drivers plug in and plug out when they want to. They determine the length of their working day as well as their own geography. As a type of labor that is downloaded on demand, they might not know the exact contours of their day or even what they will be doing the next hour but their labor gets to feel like a choice even if there is so clearly no choice but to work. Having control over one’s time in the absence of security and with the promise of laboring under temporal parameters of the day one chooses seems like an acceptable trade-off.

But it is not just that time control here operates like an ideological precept, a Zen meditation one can repeat as a justification for tenuous and precarious working conditions that is concerning. Instead, it is because the mantra “I control my own time” is said while entirely recalibrating to the time of others and while doing tasks others have devalued as useless pursuits of their own time. “I control my own time” is also a statement espoused by those controlling the time of others by outsourcing all of their tasks. Both promulgate time control as an unquestioned good. What is entirely obscured is the fact that one’s productive life and sense of time well spent runs on the energy of other more expendable bodies—other temporalities.

## Conclusion

Time-management is signified by a world of clocks, spreadsheets, smart-phones, Fitbits, stations for charging electronic devices and questions like, “how does she do it all.” Increasingly it looks like Minute Suites and on-site massages, yoga at the desktop, and the ability to outsource life to a rabbit. All of these techniques for staying in time actually foster a deeper cultural fixation on the management of time—leaving one in a state of constant marginal dissatisfaction. Time cannot actually be entirely managed and controlled on one’s own, after all. But time management also comes by way of breast pumps and post-it notes with reminders to breathe, by way of a coffee pot at a truck stop and a picture of Jesus next to a figurine of Minnie mouse on the dashboard of a taxicab. These techniques reveal the differential social experience of time; one entirely ignored in the discursive construction of speed as the universal experience of time today.

I have had a tendency to leave the critical questions of new technology aside out of principle to show that having a political approach to time does not necessarily hinge upon the digital or digital speeds. But there are increasingly good reasons to sharpen up here and address the digital in relation to my suggestion of a temporal approach to speed and time. To return to the sentiment from Judy Wajcman that I began with, it is not a question of new technologies but of constructing new temporal social realities that can be harnessed and cultivated by and through technology. I wonder if the multiple temporalities that compose the social fabric, and their various uneven entanglements could be rendered more visible by new technological means. Is there a way to provoke or capture the collective rationality of time via new technological means? And by this I do not mean the global village or the beauty of connectedness but rather to conceive of apps freed from productivity and individual time control, ones that provoke recognition of the rhythm of material interdependencies. For example, how could technologies actively promote work/life imbalance in order to reveal the problem of this dominating construct in the first place. Perhaps there are programs that could reveal one’s temporal privilege and will tally up the performance of busyness versus the interdependent labor involved in one’s performance of busyness. I pose this playfully in closing in part to change the conversation that occurs between theorizing time and technology from the all-too-common digression of determining if something is faster or slower, if there is a good way to save or make more time, or how one manages to balance it all. The change I am envisioning is one toward provoking recognition of temporal privilege, one that might forefront who has time to even think about time (says the

academic obsessed with the cultural politics of time). Surely there are deeper, more structural problems to attend to with regard to the politics of time than determining if privileged individuals have enough of it. A temporal perspective might relieve us from the trappings of speed and speed theory and push those interested in time politics to begin from the points of time's collective entanglement.