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ALAN DÍAZ ALVA

Between Two Clocks: From Blank Futurism to the Aesthetics of Nonsynchronicity

Abstract: The paper analyses the historical temporality of the contemporary tech-sector-adjacent futurology known today as longtermism. I argue that the latter offers a paradigmatic example of what Gary Wilder calls "blank futurism": an abstract, homogenised forward-looking temporality, deeply entangled with new apocalyptic and secularised eschatological narratives gathered under the notion of "existential risk." I will take the 'Clock of the Long Now' (a device currently under construction in Jeff Bezos' ranch) as a striking materialisation of this temporal imaginary, one that extrapolates the hegemonic clock-time of modernity, and with it the temporal regime of capital accumulation, into the farthest imaginable future. I juxtapose this clock with Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010), a 24-hour montage film which, while being synchronised to clock-time, it aesthetically stages it in a way that ultimately eschews temporal homogeneity and reintroduces the untimely in Ernst Bloch's sense of nonsynchronicity. Finally, I explore the political potentials of the untimely, not only as a source for radical futurity but also as fertile ground for reactionary fantasies.

10,000 Years

Back in 1995 in an essay for *Wired*, computer scientist Danny Hillis expressed his desire to build a clock that would tick once a year, cuckoo every millennium and keep time for the next 10,000 years. Baptised as "The Millennium Clock" (Hillis, 1995), this imaginary device reflects, in a particularly poignant manner, the hypertrophy of futuristic thinking that has been a hallmark of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs up to this day. For several decades, it existed solely as a small prototype in the London Museum of Science, and beyond this, as a suggestive thought experiment. Today it is being built in no other place than Jeff Bezos' ranch in West Texas. Housed in a 500-foot shaft carved straight into stone, among the colossal device's features one can find a 6-foot titanium pendulum, 8-foot stainless steel gears, and 3.65 million chimes composed by Brian Eno (Lydgate, 2018). This first full-scale prototype of the clock has, until now, taken over a decade and 42 million dollars to build.[1] As it is often the case with such tech mogul pipe dreams, it is hard to decide if Bezos' Clock of the Long Now is an elaborate gimmick, an art installation, a billionaire's promethean flex, or simply a waste of time (Karpf, 2020). Its potential vacuousness notwithstanding, I would say that it also presents us with a useful entry point into a temporal imaginary that has gathered considerable momentum and popularity over the last few years.

Along with some of his Silicon Valley friends (Stewart Brand the most notable amongst them) in 1996 Hillis went on to form the Long Now Foundation where this device, now rebranded as 'The Clock of the Long Now', became the flagship project.[2] The image from which this foundation draws its name—the 'Long Now'—should give us pause. There are various ways in which it can be interpreted. One could read it as gesturing towards the extended present of Hus-

[1] The 'official' name of this clock is the '10,000 year clock.' See https://longnow.org/clock/. Throughout the text, however, I will continue using 'The Clock of the Long Now,' if only because it throws into sharper relief the experience of time that it aims to produce.

[2] Stewart Brand ended up writing an entire book on the clock and the ideas behind it. See Brand (1999).

serl's phenomenology of time consciousness; alternatively, we could interpret it as alluding to the phenomenon known today as presentism—that is, the reigning "temporal economy of the incessant now" (Rockhill, 2019, p. 20) characteristic of industrial modernity. The Clock of the Long Now, however, was conceived by its creators as something diametrically opposed to this latter temporal regime: rather than endorsing the annihilation of futurity that presentism entails, behind the construction of the Clock of the Long Now lies a belief in deep time—or rather, deep futurism—as an important correction to the contemporary poverty of future-oriented thinking and the concomitant shortening of horizons. As Bezos himself states, the clock is "designed to be a symbol, an icon for long-term thinking."[3] Stefan Skrimshire explains that the Clock of the Long Now is the materialisation of a "faith in the transformative power of extending one's temporal horizon," by way of an "continued extension of a given temporal engagement with the present, an indefinite continuum which paints the future as the extended promise of human time." (2019, p. 69). In other words, one can surmise that the intention behind this clock is to generate a particular temporal aesthetics—resulting from being witness to the inhuman slowness of this mechanism—that would instigate a transformation of our understanding of time and our place in its unfolding. Whether this is an experience that, once the clock is finished (if it ever will be), is meant to be open to the public or reserved for fellow tech moguls and business sycophants, is a different question.

Let's assume for a moment that Bezos' Clock is indeed some sort of art installation—one which perhaps could be situated within the male-dominated tradition of land art—if only to continue thinking about the nexus of aesthetics and temporality that it puts into play. From this perspective, it can be compared to another artwork in which the figure of the clock features prominently, albeit in an entirely different way and, I would argue, with very different results. Christian Marclay's famous 2010 video installation, laconically named *The Clock*, is a sprawling 24-hour montage which assembles film clips where time is referenced or clocks depicted, and which is edited such that that these clips are synchronised with actual clock-time. After premiering in 2010 in London and winning the Golden Lion in the Venice Biennale the next year, it has been screened throughout the world, attracting large crowds and eliciting extensive critical commentary.[4]

In what follows, I will discuss the close relationship that the historical temporality materialised by the Clock of the Long Now of time holds with contemporary trends in futurology and, more importantly, how this is closely related to the socioeconomic system that we find ourselves in. I will contrast this with Marclay's *The Clock*. I will argue that, while also synchronised with linear chronological time and seemingly acquiescing to its relentless forward march, it nonetheless manages to subvert this temporal regime from within by articulating an aesthetics of non-synchronicity.

Depoliticising Time

There is a direct genealogical thread connecting the ideas that undergird the Clock of the Long Now with a more recent iteration of deep futurism that has gathered considerable momentum over the last couple of years. Now widely referred to as 'longtermism', this futurological outlook belongs to a constellation of overlapping imaginaries for which Émile P. Torres and Timnit Gebru (2024) have coined the term TESCREAL—a rather bloated acronym which stands for Transhumanism, Extropianism, Singularitarianism, Cosmism, Rationalism, Effective Altruism, and Longtermism. Each of these terms indexes different vectors of a techno-utopian and quasi-

[3] https://www.10000yearclock.net/learnmore.html

[4] Its recent exhibition at the MoMA in New York spurred a renewed wave of commentary, most notably a collective work of "chronographic criticism" in *The Brooklyn Rail* which involved twenty-four authors from various disciplines and backgrounds. See Braun (2025)

theological imaginary which, Torres and Timnit argue, ought to be regarded as a bundle—or even as a dangerous historical convergence of ideologies peddled by a small cohort of billionaires and tech overlords who see themselves as the custodians of humanity's future (Torres, 2023). Others have insisted that such diagnosis attributes too much coherence and unity to what is better understood as a haphazard (and often internally contradictory) set of niche beliefs confined to Silicon Valley pundits, their terminally online acolytes, and a handful of dubiously funded think-tanks (Hughes, 2023). Regardless of how one chooses to frame it, it is true that these ideologies blend into one another—conceptually, institutionally, and through overlapping networks of advocates—such that pulling on one thread tends to draw the whole tangled mess along with it. However, in lieu of a more comprehensive analysis of how all these ideologies fit together (or don't), my focus here will remain on longtermism, the most recent of the set. More specifically, I want to analyse the temporal imaginary it mobilises and ask how, and to what extent, this imaginary informs the other elements of this peculiar ideological assemblage.

If the Long Now represents the form of deep futurism or overstretched futurology characteristic of these tech-adjacent spheres, longtermism can be understood as its crystallisation into a cohesive research program. Despite its recently damaged reputation following scandals involving some of its prominent adherents, since the late 2010s, longtermism had consolidated itself as an influential school of thought, institutionalised through a network of well-funded research centres—most notably the (now defunct) Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford and the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at Cambridge—and spearheaded by a handful of high-profile figures such as Nick Bostrom, Toby Ord, and William MacAskill.[5] In broad terms, longtermism is underpinned by a form of 'total utilitarianism' that seeks to forecast and calculate the aggregate well-being and value of humanity as a whole, coupled with a consequentialist ethical framework that judges actions solely in terms of their expected outcomes (Fritz, 2023). As Torres—themselves a former longtermist and now one the movement's most trenchant critics—argues, longtermism can be situated within the longe durée of "existential ethics," i.e., the set of ethical reflections prompted by the historical reckoning with the possibility of human extinction. As an ethical framework committed to the careful consideration and mitigation of existential risks, Torres characterises longtermism as "a radical further-loss view according to which our extinction would constitute a moral tragedy of quite literally *cosmic proportions*. Hence, reducing the risk of extinction (and existential risks more generally) should be the top 'global priority' for our species" (Torres, 2024, p. 15).[6] Central to the concerns of longtermism is a highly abstract projection of humanity's (ostensibly calculable) potential in the distant future.

Over the past few years, longtermism has been subjected to mounting critical scrutiny coming from multiple fronts. Scholars and journalists have variously criticised its conspicuous affiliations with billionaire funders and right-wing figures (raising concerns about conflicts of interests), its tendency to foreground distant futures in ways that risk rendering the neglect of present issues morally permissible (Zaitchik, 2022), the "moral mathematics" and "god's eye" moral perspective entailed by its total utilitarianism (Setiya, 2022; Crary, 2023), and the fact that, for all its purported concern with the future of humanity, it leaves the current status quo largely un-

[5] The scandals I'm referring to are the spectacular downfall and subsequent conviction of Sam Bankman Freid, a prominent supporter of Effective Altruism, and the resurfacing of Nick Bostrom's racist emails.

[6] The 'further-loss' view on human extinction can be understood as the position that "causing or allowing our extinction would be very bad, and therefore wrong, because of the associated *opportunity costs* of no longer existing, such as the loss of all future generations, or the loss of further scientific and moral development." Torres contrasts this position with the 'equivalence view' (the idea that the potential wrongness of extinction is only predicated on its *how* and not in extinction per se) and the 'pro-extinctionist view' (the idea that the non-existence of our species is preferable insofar as it would ultimately imply the absence of all human suffering). (See Torres, 2024, 12).

questioned (Emba, 2022).[7] What I want to suggest here is that this last point cannot be explained solely as an effect of funding commitments or ideological myopia. Rather, I argue that the politics of such futurological endeavours is underwritten by a disavowed universalisation (or naturalisation) of a provincial, yet hegemonic, form of historical temporality. What both longtermism and the Long Now overlook is that time is political (the politics of time) and politics are temporal (the time of politics).[8] As Jonathan Martineau explains, approaching time as socially and politically constituted enables a de-reifying critique, whereas treating time as a universal aspect of human consciousness, a natural property, or an objective given serves to de-politicize time—that is, to sever time and temporality from human agency (Martineau, 2015, p. 5). Peter Osborne formulates a set of questions crucial to a critical examination of longtermism through the lens of chronopolitics (or the 'politics of time'):

> I write of a 'politics of time'; indeed, of all politics as centrally involving struggles over the experience of time. How do the practices in which we engage structure and produce, enable or distort, different senses of time possibility? What kinds of experience of history do they make possible or impede? Whose futures do they ensure? These are the questions to which a politics of time would attend, interrogating temporal structures about the possibilities they encode or foreclose, in specific temporal modes (quoted in Martineau, 2015, p. 5).

As noted above, one might argue that by urging us to extend our temporal horizons to transform how we act in the present, these futurological proposals appear to gesture towards a certain denaturalization of time and an opening up of futurity amidst of our presentist and short-termist milieu. One can say that, to a certain extent, they seem to acknowledge that time is not a neutral container for human activity, but that human practice is shaped and moulded by our conceptions of time. Yet this sliver of insight remains stunted by an idealist and ahistorical conception of time, coupled with a spurious projection, into the farthest reaches of the imaginable future, of a historically specific form of temporality.[9] As Gary Wilder notes, time "is socially produced and becomes socially constraining." (2022, p. 141) It is "a historically specific product of social practices that assumes a real objective power to shape subjectivity and orient action."[10] There is, in short, a dialectical relationship between social practices and temporal regimes. I argue that longtermism's lack of critical self-reflexivity prevents it from interrogating the social and historical origins of the temporal categories through which it thinks. In doing so, it becomes complicit with the "horizontal flattening of the time of the future" characteristic of the 'bad infinity' of 'progress' under capitalist modernity (Skrimshire, 2019, pp. 70, 72).

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[7] In longtermist literature, one can often find startling conclusions (all ostensibly arrived at through purportedly rigorous reasoning and Bayesian paraphernalia) such as Nicholas Beckstead when, in his highly-regarded 2013 PhD thesis, he writes that "saving a life in a rich country is substantially more important than saving a life in a poor country, other things being equal." Quoted in Fritz (2023).

[8] "[P]olitics depends on prevailing notions of "history," relying on an 'epistemological habitat' that prefigures the relationship between past, present, and future and the role of the (political) subject therein" (Esposito & Becker, 2023, p. 9). In their remarkably useful survey of the field, Esposito and Becker draw a handy distinction between three dimensions of chronopolitics: the time of politics (the rhythms and temporalities of politics), the politics of time (the way in which time can be an object and instrument of politics), and politicized time (the way how time and temporal categories can be deployed as a way to legitimize certain political endeavours, e.g., rendering the colonized subject as 'primitive' or 'backward').

[9] While in this text I use the notions of 'time' and 'temporality' somewhat interchangeably for brevity's sake, they in fact ought to be differentiated. I find Vanessa Ogle's concise distinction particularly useful: "'Time' is understood here as the time measured by clocks, calendars and natural timekeepers such as the sun and the moon. 'Temporality' is taken to describe how past, present and future relate to one another, for instance through repetition and cyclical temporalities or ruptured and discontinuous temporalities, and through experiences and expectations" (Ogle, 2019, pp. 314–315).

[10] Wilder mobilizes the increasingly popular Marxian notion of real abstraction in order to describe the status of time as a socially produced abstraction endowed with an objective validity and the capacity to turn around and exert compulsions and demands upon society.

Clock-time and The Politics of Untimeliness

How does this 'horizontal flattening of the time of the future' take place? For anyone familiar with the extensive literature on the historical emergence of clock-time, the fact that the Long Now mobilises an actual clock as its flagship project will seem almost too on the nose. Plenty of social and cultural historians have documented how the social production and global standardisation of clock-time laid the groundwork for the abstract, homogenous, and linear time characteristic of modernity.[11] Clock-time, as Martineau (2015, p. 5) puts it, sets the stage for an understanding of time as "an abstract and linear succession of empty quanta." In Wilder's (2022, p. 145) words, "[t]he consolidation of clock-time as a second nature forms the sociohistorical matrix out of which modern Western-time consciousness and corresponding conceptions of history emerged." The reality of this second nature should not, however, be understood merely as that of a collective representation or discursive formation detached from socioeconomic matters. Beginning with E.P. Thompson's (1967) trailblazing work, Marxist-leaning scholars have repeatedly underscored the profound imbrication of clock-time with industrial capitalism—from the time management in the factory and the temporal dynamics of surplus value production to the complex time coordination that this totalising mode of production demands.[12] The abstraction of chronometry is fundamental to the functioning of capital, and it was capital that enabled clock-time to expand on a global scale.[13] The systematisation of this temporal regime through institutions such as World Standard Time implies the universalisation of an autonomous and reified time-form. As Martineau explains:

> This tendency to the 'autonomisation' and reification of time in capitalist social time relations has relied on the abstract form of clock-time. […] Modern social time is very much a thing, its essence is 'out-there', beyond human reach, from the movement of the planet to the subatomic realm, as a reified form of social time relations has been systematised and universalised. The drive of capitalism to commodify has accompanied the systematisation of clock-time qua commodified time (i.e. its unification into one system), and its propagation to an increasing range of social practices and regions of the globe in processes resisted to various degrees (Martineau, 2015, pp. 140–141).

As a crucial enabling condition of the mute compulsions and abstract forms of domination set in motion by the capitalist mode of production, the chronopolitics of clock-time exhibit a drive toward hegemonization that is coextensive with the hegemonisation of the commodity form.[14] "[A]bstract clocktime [is] a *tendency*, inherent in capitalist processes, which has become hegemonic" (Martineau, 2015, p. 8). Translated into temporal terms, hegemonisation means synchro-

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[11] For a particularly sharp survey and critique of the scholarly work on this problem, see Wilder (2022, p. 139–148)

[12] "Of course, abstract clock-time is not simply an illusion. It may have been historically created by human practices. But it was not merely an idea or ideology with which one could simply agree or disagree. In this kind of society, time really was money. To ignore this dictum was to court marginalization, exclusion, or starvation. Marx demonstrates how, in capitalist societies, competition and the associated tendency of the rate of profit to fall creates an objective compulsion to speed up production, reduce the socially necessary labor time required to produce a given commodity, and decrease the turnover time of the Money-Commodity-Surplus Value circuit. Within capitalism, there really is a constant imperative to annihilate space through time" (Wilder, 2022, p. 141)

[13] This is not to suggest in any way that clock-time is somehow inherently capitalist, nor that there is something inherently 'unnatural', oppressive, or negative about abstract time. Several critiques of the abstraction of chronometry have tended to assume a somewhat romantic route, positing dualisms between abstract time and supposedly more 'natural' forms of concrete time (i.e., biological time or the time of lived experience), or between 'Western' and non-Western temporalities. I agree with Wilder when he argues that, rather than criticizing abstract time from the purported primacy of ontology or lived experience, a historical materialist analysis should rather focus on a notion of social time as "a historically specific product of social practices that assumes a real objective power to shape subjectivity and orient action." (Wilder, 2022, p. 141-142)

[14] "To be sure, alienated time and reified time have become *systemic* features of capitalist societies. Such social time relations, in which the very form of clock-time and its abstract time-units have become hegemonic, are specific to capitalist societies; alienated time is inscribed in the hegemony of the commodity form as the expression of social value" (Martineau, 2015, p. 144).

nisation. The story of capitalist modernity is that of "multiple cultural and historical times that do not exist synchronously, though they come to be articulated or 'formally subsumed' under the time of capital" (Toscano, 2023, p. 112).[15] Yet this articulation or subsumption is never complete, leaving the capitalist world-system rife with temporal heterogeneities, forms of untimeliness, or what Ernst Bloch (1977) calls *nonsynchronicities*. Such untimeliness manifests itself in various ways, from the uneven development of core and periphery and the 'counter-times' of workers' struggles that defy the abstract, alienated time of production, to various other forms of clock-time refusal. Forms of untimeliness can be both functional or antagonistic to capital accumulation (Tomba, 2019, p. 160).

Phenomena of untimeliness have been studied from a wide range of angles and methodologies. From phenomenology and vitalism to deconstruction, trauma studies, and so-called hauntology, the nonsynchronicity of the present has been a persistent object of inquiry. However, here I want to follow Wilder's claim that, while there is certainly much to learn from these theoretical currents, it is the Marxist (or historical materialist) tradition that offers two decisive advantages: first, it provides a more robust account of the social mechanisms through which modern homogenous time attains hegemony; and second, it equips us with sharper tools to grasp the political implications of untimeliness. In light of the current discussion, one way to approach these implications is through the political potential that can be found in the anachronistic.[16] I want to suggest that the temporality of longtermism—with the Clock of the Long Now standing as its most revealing symptom—is a temporality that effectively forecloses untimeliness and, with it, the political potentials that reside therein.

There is no place for anachronism and nonsynchronicity in the future-oriented temporality of longtermism. For this reason, one could argue that it is complicit with the dominant presentist temporal regime, understanding the latter as a regime "that constructs a political prison out of the present by simultaneously obliterating the past and transforming the future into an endless repetition of what exists *here* and *now*" (Rockhill, 2019, pp. 17–18). Such a flattening of the future is evident in how discussions of humanity's future potential are filtered entirely through the language of risk management.[17] Rather than an opening for things to become otherwise, potentiality is reduced to the continuation of the same trajectory of technoscientific progress, self-improvement, and, ostensibly, capital accumulation; an abstract potential that must be protected from various existential risks ranging from global pandemics and nuclear war, to potentially murderous artificial intelligence and globe-spanning totalitarian regimes. Despite the breadth of these considerations, by assuming such a notion of potentiality—one which eschews radical social alternatives—this form of futurology can be best described as a "blank futurism" (Wilder, 2022, p. 125). The reified clock-time of longtermism is thus a depoliticized temporality, propelling an alienated future in which politics is effectively foreclosed.

If there is something we 'owe' to the future, as the title of William MacAskill's (2022) best-selling longtermist manifesto suggests, it is certainly not more of the same: not the bad infinity of endless progress, space colonisation, and uploaded minds, all in the name of some abstract future potential. To owe the future would mean being compelled to actualise unrealised potentials, to 'open up the past' as an 'arsenal of futures' (Tomba, 2019, p. 13).

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[15] For the idea of formal subsumption as the mechanism of synchronisation under the time of capital, see Harootunian (2015).

[16] "In this historic-temporal multiverse, anachronistic temporalities cease to be remnants of the past, and huge masses of legal and political material, considered archaic within the unilinear conception of time, instead open up new possibilities for reconfiguring the present" (Tomba, 2019, p. 27).

[17] "To sum up, an orientation towards the future and concomitant attempts to make the future more governable, to hedge against dangers with new concepts and a new language of risk, risk management and the politicization of uncertainty as a threat to entrepreneurship of all sorts, are indeed important hallmarks of modernity" (Ogle, 2019, p. 321).

The Other Clock

From what has been said so far, it may seem that untimeliness and non-sychronicity are to be found *outside*—or in the interstices—of the depoliticised (and depoliticising) temporal regime characteristic of capitalist modernity and most saliently crystallised in Jeff Bezos's massive clock. In other words, one might assume that they can only be found in the not-yet-subsumed margins of value-mediated sociality, as well as in those cultural and bodily practices that, for various reasons, elude its chronopolitical strictures. However, it is worth asking whether non-synchronicity might also be found within (or immanent to) the experience of clock-time itself.

Christian Marclay's *The Clock* is a single-channel video that assembles more than ten thousand roughly one-minute-long clips, many drawn from otherwise unremarkable Anglo-American film and television which depict clocks and watches (or indirectly reference the hour in dialogue) displaying a time synchronised to the actual time of viewing. In doing so, the piece logs almost all of the fourteen hundred and forty minutes of the day and projects them in a perpetual twenty-four-hour loop. In this minute-by-minute montage, time moves relentlessly forward in an implacably linear, chronological sequence, propelling the rapid cuts forward and thus, from a certain perspective, restaging the compulsion that, as discussed earlier, clock-time exerts in modern society. As viewers, we are absorbed by the illusion of simultaneity constructed by the film; an experience of a kind of temporal interpellation "enacted by the synchronous gearing of reel time into real time" (Krauss, 2011, p. 217). Just as the film incorporates countless snippets of fictional characters glancing at their pocket watches or wristwatches to look at the time, one often notices the glow of screens from people in the screening room or gallery doing the same thing (Fitzpatrick & Glassman, 2013).

Several critics have situated *The Clock* within the lineage of archival and found footage practices in film (Russell, 2013b), as well as within the engagement of visual artists with cinema and the institutional endorsement of such practices that began in the 1990s (Balsom, 2013). It is often argued that, its reliance on consumer-culture imagery, its alliance with visual spectacle, and its profile as a crowd-pleasing attraction that straddles both the museum and the market, Marclay's clock lacks a critique of the commodity culture from which it draws from and participates in. Several critics suggest that the piece's appeal rests in part on the rather facile pleasure of recognition and nostalgia it provokes. It has therefore elicited somewhat unfavourable comparisons to other similar works, such as *Historie(s) du cinéma*, Jean-Luc Godard's more high-brow, intensely self-reflective, and auteur-dripping monumental collage-based film (Russell, 2013, pp. 168–170). Martine Beugnet argues that, in contrast to Godard's work, the straightforward, serialised taxonomy of *The Clock*'s formal structure aligns with the logic of advertisement and image consumption. Moreover, she suggests that, by focusing on immediately recognisable Euro-American film fragments birthed by the culture industry, it eviscerates the political dimension that archival art and found footage can otherwise engage with by exploring the question of provenance, context, and resignification. To this extent, Beugnet (2013, p. 194) contends that, if we attend to the way *The Clock* "makes industrial rhythms of production and consumption integral to its form and mode of display," we see how Marclay's installation "reflects and participates in the continuing interpenetration of art and capitalist culture."

If *The Clock* appears to closely and acritically align to both the form and content of the culture industries that supply its source material, its use of temporality seems equally suspect. As a time-based medium, film can generate different experiences of time, from the "cinephiliac trance" (Russell, 2013, p. 172) that taps into the cinematic character of consciousness itself (Stiegler, 2010), to the disruptive temporalities cultivated by more experimental works. In her glowing review of *The Clock*, Zadie Smith (2011) boldly asserts that it is "the first film in which time is real," interpreting the piece as a collection of "thousands of fictional interpretations of time *repurposed to express time precisely.*" In doing so, she effectively equates the historical

temporality of clock-time with time tout court. This is not an altogether incomprehensible interpretation: unfolding in precise synchrony with chronological time, *The Clock* doubles as both a cinematic collage and an actual working clock, aligning biological and social time with cinematic time, and looping them 24/7 in a manner that seems to dovetail with the temporal demands of late capitalism (see Crary, 2013). As such, rather than fostering a critical perception of the clock-time as a historically constructed temporality, its collapsing of readily recognisable fiction (or diegesis) into duration appears to saturate our entire experience with it—to twist Smith's words, it renders this real abstraction even more real and palpable. If Bezos' clock projects the abstract temporality of clock-time to the farthest reaches of the future, Marclay's would seem to make it inescapable in our experience of the present.

And yet, amidst this phenomenological saturation, it is also possible to discern a rather subtle degree of non- or heterochronicity within the persistent chronological seriality that *The Clock* so starkly stages, rendering its relationship to the temporal regime of capital more ambivalent than it might initially appear. In her analysis of cinema's emergence within 19th century industrial modernity, Mary Ann Doane (2002) highlights this medium's ambivalent role: on the one hand, it tamed the upheavals of modern life into linear diegesis; on the other, it offered filmmakers a powerful tool—the technique of montage—to explode this linearity and cultivate a denaturalised and critical perception of time. Marclay's own use of montage, however, diverges substantially from more experimental uses of the technique by avant-garde artists.[18] By adhering to taxonomical seriality, it can be seen as bridging this once–radical form with the logics of the capitalist visual economy, to the point that it arguably "reduces the montage effect to an easily consumed serial form" (Beugnet, 2013, p. 200, 193). Yet the sheer diversity and range of cinematic situations assembled in *The Clock* manages to introduce a countervailing dimension of contingency into this temporal system, thus recalling film's ambivalent legacy, albeit now in the age of digital archiving and editing. As Beugnet writes:

> Whilst it evidently plays on the classic association of cinema's beginnings with the establishment of modern, industrial time, the sampling method seems to both playfully celebrate cinema as one expression of the homogenizing force of modern, global time while also demonstrating, through the apparent heterogeneity of its sources, the impossibility of containing contingency. By the same token, however, what it also points to is how once radical techniques, such as non-narrative montage, become absorbed in commodity culture. […] *The Clock* both reflects on and partakes of the kind of commodification process that underpins the unification of the concept of time […] Indeed, in *The Clock* montage itself is arguably transformed into a simple, infinitely reproducible meta-system, a serial form that neatly replicates common operations of commodification and rationalization and, by virtue of its strict taxonomy, contains the possibility of contingency offered by the multiplicity of its sources. (Beugnet, 2013, p. 198-199)

Every clip is decontextualised, rendered exchangeable, and largely emptied of its original meaning through the work's strict taxonomic serialisation. The material is organised into clusters that display the administrative functions that clock-time serves modern society: we see various scenes of emptying classrooms at the same hour, people rushing to work during morning commute, workers returning home for dinner after a long nine-to-five. Likewise, there are plenty of scenes in train stations, terminals, and banks—the locales of rationalised time par excellence—in which the pressure of time is taut and palpable. And yet, woven into this often-overpowering drumbeat of mute and homogenous time, one encounters dilations, contractions, rhythms, and refrains that emerge from the meticulous (and labour intensive) editing and montage. Themes, figures, and characters return, we experience brief ten-minute build-ups of tension with subsequent release, familiar faces age from one appearance to the next. Throughout the film, there are sever-

[18] One can highlight the stark contrast between Marclay's and Sergei Eisenstein's own use of this technique, particularly in the unfinished project to make a film based on *Das Kapital* which he envisioned as a "visual instruction in the dialectical method." On Eisenstein's project and his notion of dialectical montage, see Vogman (2019).

al scenes that register the time of boredom, downtime, and inactivity, where people are seen waiting, smoking, or even sleeping at unlikely hours. In the more eerie 'after-hours' of the film—which, except for the few special screenings, have often been inaccessible to viewers—Marclay draws on material from horror films and even soft-core pornography.

Both artefacts examined here—Bezos' and Marclay's clocks—mobilise the figure of the clock and its associated historical temporality: the former unwittingly eternalising it as the form of time as such, while the latter staging it more ambivalently through the complex nexus of film, popular culture, display, and spectatorship. Marclay's piece is most certainly not concerned with the vast, unimaginable timescales of longtermism and its secularised eschatologies; instead, it foregrounds the experience of the present, making its modern entanglement with clock-time palpable and viscerally felt, while also reintroducing elements of contingency within chronological seriality. To claim that this modest phenomenological subversion of clock-time somehow constitutes a source of a radical or emancipatory chronopolitics would most likely be an overstatement. What we can say is that it articulates an aesthetics of nonsynchronicity that, at the very least, attends "to how transformative possibilities may already be germinating within an untimely now" (Wilder, 2022, p. 191).

Coda: On (Neo)reactionary Modernism

We should be careful not to construct a straightforward dualism between synchronicity and non-synchronicity, wherein the former is automatically tethered to the temporal regime of capital and the latter is assumed to point towards its emancipatory overturning. It is crucial to emphasise that, if non-synchronicity and the untimely are vectors of political potential, this is a potential which can be channelled in different directions. As Bloch (1977) himself argues, the "dialectic of non-contemporaneity" can give rise not only to radical futures but also to romantic critiques of capitalism and, most dangerously, to reactionary fantasies.

Borrowing the influential term coined by Jeffrey Herf (1986) to describe the conflicting historical temporalities of the Third Reich and the role of technology therein, Alberto Toscano characterises 20th century fascism as a "reactionary modernism" that sets in motion an explosive "disjunctive synthesis of archaism and futurity." Unlike mere traditionalism, the bloody projects of national and racial purification that defined this form of fascism are predicated on its "*futural* orientation, even at its most apparently nostalgic or archaic." In Toscano's apt formulation: "fascism mobilizes *non-contemporaneity* […] around a *nostalgic* project of *regeneration*, *palingenesis*, *rebirth*, grounded in a view of the present as *decadence*, *decay*, *degradation*, consequent upon a *defeat*. Fascism speaks to a *plurality of times* which correlate to the multiplicity of its audiences" (Toscano, 2023, pp. 98–102). This project of regeneration is intimately connected to technology. As John Ganz explains, what the ideologists of the Third Reich (but also Marinetti and even Henry Ford) called for

> was not a rejection of modernity so much as the search for an alternative modernity: a vision of high technics and industrial productivity without liberalism, democracy, and egalitarianism. Technology in the service of a hierarchical society and an authoritarian politics, or rather, hierarchical society and authoritarian politics in the service of technology, as the correct pathway to unfettered progress and development (Ganz, 2023).

Ganz argues that we can observe a similar "coexistence of the archaic and the futuristic" in some of the shadier corners of Silicon Valley, manifested with varying degrees of explicitness, most starkly, perhaps, in Pether Theil's militaristic obsessions, Curtis Yarvin's cartoonish techno-monarchism and Nick Land's perfidious 'dark enlightenment'. This complicates the analysis of longtermism's temporality sketched above, insofar as one can identify what could be described as an undercurrent within this futurology that shares the eschatological concerns of the rationalist and liberal-humanitarian version of longtermism, while fusing its temporal horizon with an elitist, anti-democratic, and hypertechnological political vision where blank futurism

gives way to a vicious reactionary modernism and a quasi-fascist eugenic teleology. For those who subscribe to this dark underbelly of long-term thinking—and who are often only one degree of separation away from mainstream adherents—the only future that is owed anything at all is that of those already at the top of the food chain.

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