

Precarious temporalities
Trying to access the reality of real time
Burkhard Meltzer, May 2020

I do not feel like having time for '*a deep breath*' at the moment. On the contrary - time to work is not only much more limited, but also divided in smaller units. Especially with a kid, when you spend almost all of your time at home, and changing hours of care due to COVID-19 regulations.

At the same time, planned projects - events in particular - are postponed or have become unpredictable, and in some cases, contact with institutions was suddenly cut off in the course of their shutdown. The rhythm of responses is slowing down so much that it seems hard to follow up. Time runs either too fast or too slow - or too fragmented. But maybe I just failed to adapt. Perhaps, I am still trying to connect to some real time of my recent past. I should take a breath instead. Or enjoy the obsolescence of schedules, the silence of cancelled conferences, talks or openings.

In fact, after the first weeks of the pandemic lockdown, the complexity of everyday life slowed down to a very basic level on the one hand. No obligation to be at some other place at a given time, hardly any synchronizing of agendas, no missed events. On the other hand, a growing unrest took hold of my mind; an unrest that I suppose was affected by my fundamental disorientation in relation to a sense of time. Leaving my individual difficulties aside for a moment, this may also indicate structural problems with an economy heavily relying on precarious work and informal communication in the fields of art and education.

While public cultural activities have been suspended and my physical contacts are reduced to a minimum, I feel unable to connect to real time. Or might the very addition of the "real" itself point to another problem here? Usually, real time distinguishes scripted timelines (e.g. in films) from the time that I actually experience in everyday life. Likewise, the project title here emphasizes a split between two different perspectives on time - proposing a turn to the "real" one and rendering all others fictitious and somehow disconnected from everyday life.

To a certain extent, this split corresponds with my recent experiences. Apart from that, it does not feel like there is an option to resolve the time trouble with a turn towards the "real". Because in my everyday reality, I think, a split between the "real" and other - possibly fictitious - notions of time does not exist. Rather, I would speak of various and usually interconnected temporalities that seem in many ways out of balance now. For instance, those related to care for social relations, and those of precarious work conditions in the cultural field that often differ from project to project. Keeping all of them connected relies on a permanent synchronizing of various schedules, activities, and economies. Where a common sense for project agendas or deadlines used to be more or less in tune with many parts of the globe, completely differing rhythms of everyday life are constantly adapting to new situations of pandemic cycles now. Furthermore, even if most of us are able to meet on screen, the real time of others is something that seems pretty hard to access through audiovisual images, experienced from the position of physical distance.

As if I would have stepped out of the connection with the reality of real time, suddenly. Moreover, it seems to initiate a conflict of temporalities - first of all between my sense of anticipating the present and possible futures. Whereas staying at home and complying with strict hygiene rules demands an increased capacity of presentness in everyday life, my project work is primarily driven by futurology, or - the anticipating of possible futures. And this is not just a side detail of the planning aspect, but contributes to a large part of my general emotional stability. When I feel like I lose access to the temporal reality of my on-screen contacts, and the prospects for projects prove to be almost impossible to predict, my sense for possible futures fails. It rather becomes an uncertain ground, where once an extensive network of constant personal communication provided the basis for temporal connectivity.