

# *Quarantine:* Disruption of Routine and the Global Suspension of Lived Temporalities

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On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> the clocks went forward in the UK. Whilst the Nation may have scarcely noticed the incongruous change in time a year ago (lest it fall on a working day), this time around my social media was filled with sarcastic responses as to the significance of this annual event: “you’ll have to remember to change your clock to make it to the sofa on time”, the memes scoffed. However, far from a mere event of bitter amusement, what can this tell us about ‘time’, and our relationship to it?

Arguably, perhaps for one of the first times for many (especially non agricultural workers), the futility of bi-annually changing clock time has been brought to attention. For now, we are no longer existing in clock-time as we know it. We are in *Quarantine*.

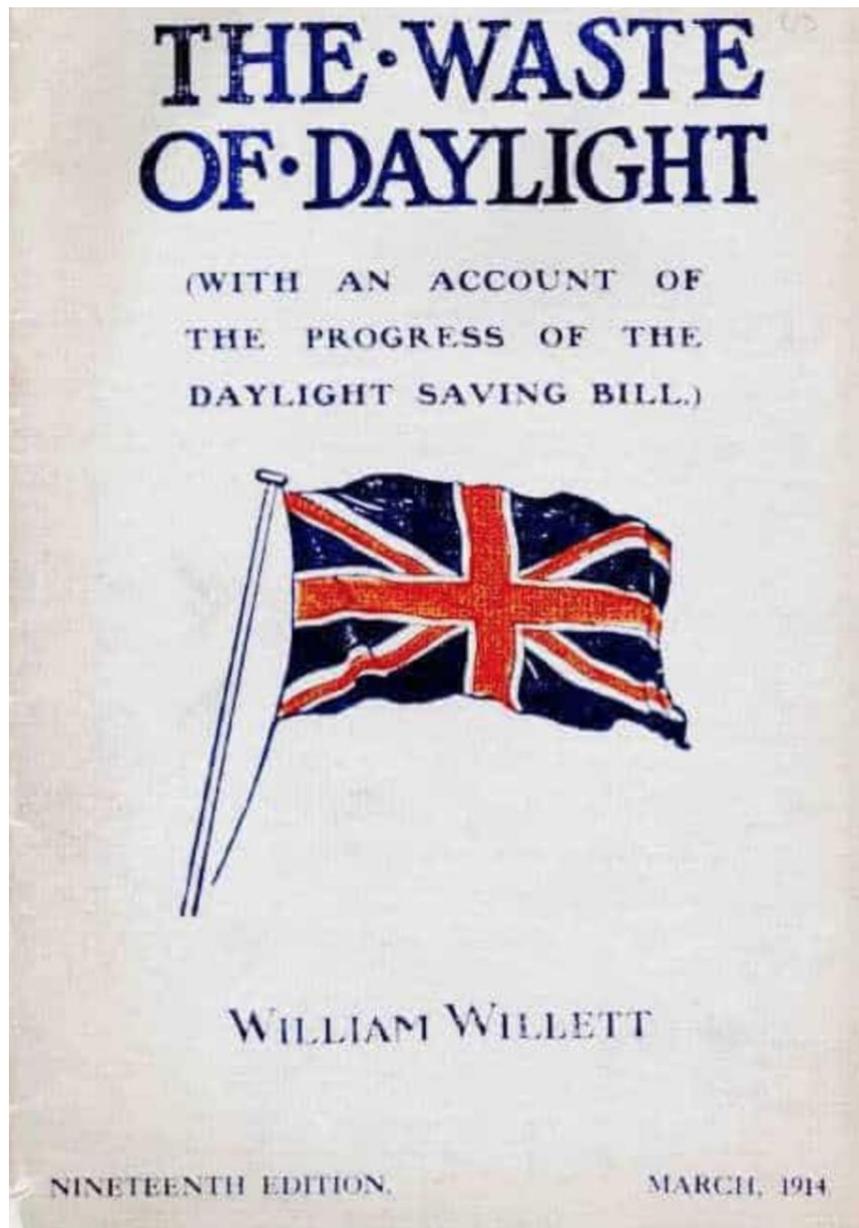
*Quarantine* moves differently than our daily lived temporalities of routine and order, although some of us may find this hard to shake (just yet).

For example, I spoke to my mother today (a Sunday), who wanted to avoid taking her government-ordered once-daily exercise with the dog because “it’s the weekend and families will all be outside”, making social distancing more difficult. But why would people take their families out specifically on ‘the weekend’ if they’ve been at home all week? Indeed, we have scheduled this blog series in accordance with our own constructs on time too, releasing two posts per day during the week and only releasing one a day on Saturdays and Sundays, as ‘people may not choose to browse the internet on the weekend’ (we reasoned). However, for the next three weeks (and potentially beyond) in the UK, there is *no* ‘end of week’. Our familiar structure of time, arranged around a five-day working week, is herein suspended.

And, like so many other dawning realisations about the state of the world that the pandemic has encouraged, so too might the enforcement of *Quarantine* make us begin to question our blanket acceptance of constructed-realities-as-truth. Whilst global populations chorus in simmering realisation that all along, those individuals working in supermarkets, agriculture, as cleaners, transport workers, and lorry drivers are the *essential* ones who deserve greater recognition and, importantly, *better pay* (with self-interested capitalists *not* being the ones to save us from this pandemic), so

**Good News!**

**On the 29th of March the  
clocks will go forward one  
hour, so that we can stay  
home another hour :)**



might they begin to notice something else: the structure of time (and specifically, labouring time), may also deserve to be put to scrutiny.

Let us go back to daylight savings.

Although supposedly not his original idea, daylight savings was introduced in the UK in 1916 by a Kentish builder called William Willett, who made a nifty pamphlet, 'The Waste of Daylight' to accompany his campaigns to make this a reality in Britain. Briefly, changing the clocks forwards and backwards every year allowed labourers, specifically those who needed the light to do their work, to conserve the hours of sunlight available to them as the seasons changed, i.e. to keep them productive for as much of the year as possible. It is fundamentally about increasing and extending labour.

Although no longer a necessary reality in millions of lives today, agriculturalists might still find favour with this concept.

For example, my doctoral fieldwork in rural Peru took place in agricultural communities, and it is no stretch to suggest that their concept of [labouring] time was drastically different from mine. For example, people would often rise at 4am, going to bed again by 7 or 8pm; a necessity if they wished to make it out to the fields and farm before the sun reached its strongest – in no way an understated affair in the high Andes. In a humorous anecdote, I was once loudly admonished for “being out so late” by a group of men in the village where I was living, and I scurried back to my room in shame over my late-night wanderings. It was 8pm.

However, variations in time-understandings do not end at so shallow a notion of appropriate bedtimes. Domestic migration and seasonal agricultural labour further mandate perceptions of ‘time’ and call into question the logic of the Gregorian calendar. Further, and importantly, ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’ time, understood in a linear sequence to a Western imaginary, are instead cyclical, interrelated, and cross-cutting. Undoubtedly, one could find many examples of differential undertakings of ‘time’ across the globe, and so I won’t dwell too long here.

Save to say, then, that 'time' as we know it is *not* Universal.

Of course, we may not always be lead to question this. But, maybe now we should.

I circle back then, to the fallacy of clock-time as we know it, and what this might have to do with our relationship to labour, our cherished 'working week', and COVID-19's role in muddling our acceptance of routinised lived temporalities. Could we say that *Quarantime* disrupts the cosily-accepted fallacy of capitalist time-discipline?

In 1967, E.P. Thompson argued that whereas once, work would be task-based (i.e. I am finished when the task is done), the commencement of the industrial revolution and with it, industrial capitalism, heralded the dawn of clock-time; I start and I finish when the clock [my boss; the capitalist] tells me so. With this development, a worker's labour could be counted in units of time instead of task-units, and paid for according to these time-units. So, we can "clock off" work, be "off the clock" when not working, and "clock-a-doodle-do" with our alarm tones (I might be the only one who does the last one). Similarly, it also became possible to "spend time", as "time is money".

By and large, most of us work by the clock, and exchange our units of time worked for our salary. Our time-labour has a price, and makes a profit. Indeed, it has been argued that daylight savings were adopted specifically to extract more profit from labour, as they ensure the continuation of an extended working day throughout the year. Profit, it has been argued, has a grip on our time (Tokumitsu, 2018). However, the times they are a 'changing.

Is it too much to suggest that a post-corona future might also lean towards a post-capitalist potentiality, at least as far as time and the 'working week' are concerned? After all, as earlier mentioned, people are fast becoming wise to *who exactly* is essential to our societies and to the survival of us as *humanity* (note: not you, Murdoch), and as an extension of this realisation, people are seemingly beginning to wonder quite why the newly-recognised 'essentials' are not paid enough wages to survive. With dearly-held concepts of worker-value fast unravelling, might ideas about time-discipline also begin to fray?

Finally, outside of the capitalist time-scape, *Quarantime* has further influenced and encouraged our agency in another time-curiosity: 'time-space compression'. Originally coined by David Harvey (1989), 'time-space compression' broadly refers to the destruction of spacial barriers and distance through economic and technological advancements. Anthropologist Amber Case (2010) relates this to our use of mobile phones and specifically, the way we use them to interact with other people across the globe through social media. It would be fair to say that at this moment of crisis the majority of us may be somewhat more glued to our electronics and social media platforms than usual. These internet communities, Case argues, influence time-space compression by virtue of making us constantly accessible to an extended populace existing in different spacial and even time-d realities. She expresses concern over the psychological effects of this 'ambient intimacy' (a closeness with others over social media that we would not usually have access to due to time and space constraints), however in the unique case of *Quarantime*, this time-space compression is perhaps offering a welcome reprieve to the solace of isolation. Further, it may serve to remind us of something else: 'time' is but a construct, and now we are left to reconstruct our timings in isolation, wed only to the rhythm of an unknowable pandemic and unspecified-lengths of seclusion at home.

Maybe most of us will cling to the familiar routine of the 'working week' and the 'weekend'; a seven-day cycle that dictates our Netflix and Tik Tok activities (I mean, spreadsheets and conference calls). However, maybe enforced *Quarantime* could also serve as an opportunity to reflect on dominant notions of time and how we choose to pass it in our lived temporalities.

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*(Images from Facebook, historic-uk)*

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