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Critical Reflections on Time and Capitalism

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Abstract: Wayne Hope's book on *Time, Communication and Global Capitalism* highlights how capitalism depends on two central issues: communication and time. In that, Hope's analysis goes well beyond the famous quote on time by the comedian Dave Allen "we spend our lives on the run: we get up by the clock, eat and sleep by the clock, get up again, go to work—and then we retire. And what do they [fucking] give us? A clock". Hope emphasises the conflicts between two key time concepts: a) real-time and b) clock time. But the books also discuss ideas such as presentism, temporality, coevalness and allochronism. All these notions affect how capitalism communicates time to us. The book, rather convincingly, argues that all these versions of time are part of global media capitalism, financial regimes and the political economies in general. As a consequence, they also shape today's workplaces and everyday life.

Keywords: Time, Communication, Globalisation, Capitalism, Recognition

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1. Introduction

Wayne Hope's highly illuminating discussion of the relationship between time and capitalism contains six parts: time, globality, capitalism; time, hegemony, and global capitalism; conflicts over time; the crisis of global capitalism; and finally, collective opposition. Hope starts with the statement that "for Keynesian social democracy to be dismantled, it was necessary to redescribe it as an inefficient, state-dominated regulatory structure akin to the neo-Stalinist political economy" (xii). Today, we know the epoch of Keynesian social democracy has ended as the corporate mass media have achieved what is outlined above.

As a consequence, we are deeply into the epoch of neo-liberalism with all its pathological trimmings: rising inequality and global poverty (Oxfam 2016; Halimi 2015; Jaumotte and Buitron 2015), a significant global financial crisis (Klikauer 2012 and 2015); and unsustainable environmental destruction (Oreskes and Conway 2010). All of this is linked to time in many ways. For instance, there are mechanical devices such as clocks and watches that measure time (labour time, the time needed to place an order by a merchant banker, etc). Then there are representations of chronologies such as capitalism's and neo-liberalism's time-line and calendars. And there are also technological infrastructures such as telegraphy first and telecommunication later that link, for example, a New Zealand author to his publisher in London, the publisher to the reviewer in Australia and the reviewer to a journal back in London and Vienna where this review was published.

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2. Capitalism, Time, and Communication

Technological infrastructures also created 'media-ICT [information and communication technology] corporations [that] became a major sector of capital accumulation [relying on] global television news, Internet platforms, cyber-culture and the built environments of spectacular consumption' (7). In this, "the system of global labour [exists] across time zones [and is expected to have] round-the-clock readiness [but is ultimately treated as] collateral" (8f). All of this signifies our epoch even when considering, so Hope argues, that there are "just two major breaks in human history: the Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions" (16).

What is occurring today belongs to the latter epoch. An epoch that started when "the growth of industrial capitalism after 1850 positioned clock time as the absolute indicator of productivity, cost, and profit [and] disciplined workers and their families [who] were expected to internalise these principles of time use" (19). Today we—even as academics—have internalised time discipline dutifully, producing A-star journal articles within an externally (usually Human Resource Management) given time frame with a high impact factor as the pathological madness of the relentless "mega-machine" (Watson 1997) enforces "the impact factor fetishism" (Fleck 2013) that is made to appear normal through HRM tools such as key performance indicators (Parr 2014).

According to Hope, this will inevitably change—but not for the better hitting, for example, people like academics—once a new time regime arrives on the desk of university management. Outside universities this is already occurring. It has taken the following form: "instantaneity and simultaneity have replaced sequence and duration [and] Internet communication has, arguably, ensured the ascendancy of real-time over clock time" (20). This might mean that Managerialism's performance management reviews will force academics into relentless drive for "high-number" outputs in A-Star journals. In the future this will no longer be measured annually but instead instantly—perhaps with tweet-impacts, tweet-numbers per day, tweet-receivers, tweet-impact factors, etc. as the hallucination of Managerialism knows no boundaries. All of this might also eventually end the epoch of clock-time and mark the beginning of real-time. In this context, Managerialism's "ruling elites themselves seek hegemonic authority by advancing their own epochal significance and sense of historic mission" (30) by moving capitalism to high-speed super capitalism (Reich 2007). To diagnose all this, Hope offers two tools—chronos vs. cairos:

1. The Carological approach emphasises breaks, ruptures, non-synchronised moments and multiple temporal dimensions [while]
2. Carotic time may be constitutive of war, imperialism, revolution, or decolonisation. (37)

Under the first, one might think of 'ruptures of a hegemonic system' (38) like the replacement of feudalism with capitalism. Such 'a ruptural moment also de-reifies those widely held conceptions of the past which had legitimised the hegemonic system' (38). Perhaps one might see two significant hegemonic systems during the last five hundred years. The first was that of feudalism sustained through ideologies such as religion, faith, destiny, and a God given order; the second is that of capitalism with its known ideologies. In Europe, for example, between both—perhaps from the French Revolution of 1789 (severely rupturing the feudal ideological system) to the Russian Revolution of 1917—a rapture period of roughly one-hundred-thirty years opened in which many rulings elites struggled to maintain and/or gain the ideological upper hand. The rupture period ended with the formation of the hegemonic system of capi-

talism as an ideology—combined with mass media and flanked by its economic imperatives enhanced through mid-20th century consumerism.

When viewed from the perspective of "time and capitalism"—the book's title—perhaps one might start to re-think the common timelines set by a strictly politico-economical view of historical epochs (e.g. Polanyi 1944; Hobsbawm 1968). By the 21st century capitalism's global hegemonic system was secure with "global communications [and the] consolidation and cartelisation of the telegraph industries" (49). Hope sees three sequential movements:

a) The rise of hardware corporations;
b) Software applications; and finally,
c) The Internet and dot.com (53).

This led to an "epochal shift" signified in a "society of control [where] power is exercised through communication, information and monitoring networks [all of which is] internalised within the subjects themselves" (63). On this, Foucault (1995) has emphasised that the need to display control through the public display of brutal punishment was—at first—moved beyond closed prison doors until it was eventually being eliminated as "punishment regimes" were internalised by the population. This was made possible through structured, symbolic, and institutionalised punishment regimes that range from early-institutionalised socialisation in schools to socialisation at workplaces. Through corporate mass media, these mechanisms are skilfully linked to consumerism while punishment was eased and moved towards the fringes of society to keep a few remaining delinquents—a criminalised Lumpenproletariat—in line, often paraded on tabloid-TV as a public spectacle and warning to an increasingly compliant and affirmative, albeit shrinking middle class branding itself as capitalism's winners.

All this is supported through "the worldwide commercialisation and regulation of national broadcasting systems encouraging the spread of advertising, infomercials and corporately sponsored current affairs programmes" (76)—the latter being tabloid-TV. To sustain the winner ideology and capitalism as such, "league tables of rich and powerful individuals are regularly published worldwide. Meanwhile, the poor and destitute are kept in the limelight by aid agencies and news media as victims of floods, earthquakes, famines, diseases outbreaks, and insurgencies" (82). All of this is no longer presented as "god given" (feudalism) but as "natural" (capitalism). It is made to appear as if the plight of billions—the planet slum (Davis 2007; Oxfam 2016)—is totally disconnected from capitalism. As a consequence,

> they tell a de-historised story about capital […] capital has no apparent source; it exists in the form of grand signifiers that appear to be autonomous in every sense, except for their relationship to the individual subject. Capital seeks not power or even excessive profits, but rather the greater good; capital does not stand in relations to society, *it appears as society* via the imagery of a network of markets integrated by telecommunications and cool new technologies (84).

But capitalism's hegemonic system can never be conflict and contradiction free as Hope's "conflict of time within global capitalism" (87) shows. For one, the global supply chain operated by corporations—delivering, for example, your next $5 t-shirt—often conflicts with "clock time". As such, these developments "offer the most vivid images of our times: telephone operators assisting customers from across the globe; traditional indigenous farmers growing specialist crops for wealthy metropolitan consumers; Chinese millionaires reaping the profits of Walmart constructs; sweatshop

workers toiling in locked rooms for which brand name buyers disavow responsibility" (107). How this works in reality has been shown by Leaf (2012, 241f):

> Walmart is the largest American company. Walmart operates sweatshop factories in Saipan bringing in Chinese women from the mainland to make clothing for sale in Walmart stores in the US. At Walmart's sweatshops women were paid $3 an hour and could be fired and deported if they 'fell in love; got married; became pregnant (terminate pregnancy or be deported); participated in political or religious activities; failed to meet their daily production quota; refused to work overtime, including unpaid volunteer hours; participated in any activities which lessened their energy for work; refused to lie to inspectors regarding safety conditions at work, the number of hours worked, the true number of women living in a each barracks room; asked for higher wages; and tried to organise a union'.

To many of those working in corporate offices, Leaf's description may sound horrific. But only a century back—before we had internalised such horror catalogues, 'waged labour and time discipline were most rigorously imposed in textile mills and engineering workplaces' (110). This occurred even though the ideologues of Managerialism and Human Resource Management seek to present both as a-historical. And if—on rare occasions—both recognise their past, it is a past cleansed of reality. 19th century Satanic Mills (Blake), Bleak Houses (Dickens), and the overseer's whip are replaced with hallucinogenic-ideological images of company welfarism presented as historical playgrounds run by Jane Austin's lovely Mr. Darcy.

Meanwhile, 19th century imperialism is also replaced, this time with the ideology of globalisation in which brutality, gunboats, military invasions, torture, and global genocide is replaced by a new form of imperialism while still producing "surplus humanity [and] structural exclusion" (116)—with raising barbwire and metal-fence boarders protecting the remaining affluent islands of capitalism. Meanwhile the aforementioned 'dormitory labour regimes' (121) are run under the maxim of "my 2am is the rest of the world's 9am' (120), exposing the global working class to fractured timelines while signifying 'the slave mode of production" (124). In sum, "global capitalism's supra-territorial, instantaneous networks of financial speculation, subcontracted production and worker exploitation [are] driven by conflicts over time" (129).

As for financial capitalism, "the time conflicts inherent in financialised capitalism erupted into a crisis [the Global Financial Crisis starting in 2008] that was displaced rather than resolved" (149). But still financial capitalism and global banks have learned their lessons from this: "seven years after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, it is often said that nothing was learned from the crash. This is too optimistic. The big banks have surely drawn a lesson from the crash and its aftermath: that in the end there is very little they will not get away with" (Luyendijk 2015, 28). But they have learned even more than that. Lesson number two is: we can make stratospheric profits while reaping fat bonuses and lesson three is: when things go wrong, taxpayers will pay for what we did under the global double ideology of "too big to fail and too big to jail".

With the successful destruction of Keynesian economics under the hegemonic system of neo-liberalism signified by Hayek's ideological catechism of deregulation and given the experience of the past two decades, what the future for capitalism holds might well be "crises without end" (165). Even under the global financial crisis (GFC) "global capitalism as an epochal system was not seriously threatened" (169). Given that, "banks largely maintained a business model that had directly contributed to the 2008 financial crisis" (173). But this time financial capitalism is better equipped. The second time around it knows what to expect: once the next crisis comes, they will—rather inevitably—know that cause can be offloaded (externalised) onto others,

namely us. Just as Warren Buffet once said, "there's class warfare, all right but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning" (Stein 2006).

All of this is not inevitable as Hope's "towards a time manifesto" (206) outlines when noting that "disrupting the fragile just-in-time networks of supply chain capitalism, forging solidarities between organised labour, precarious workers and the informal poor, fashioning anti-austerity political projects, and sustaining a networked protest culture against financialised capitalism must occur simultaneously" (208) while 'oppositional coalitions and the populaces […] must demand […] recognition from transnational corporations and transnational states' (208). Hope closes with 'political manifestations of this demand include the recognition of independent trade unions, democratically elected anti-austerity governments, and transnational activist organisations" (208) while it is certainly correct to demand "recognition". Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1995) have made us aware of the significance of "recognition".

3. Conclusion—What is to be done?

Overall, Hope's book has some strengths and a few weaknesses. If one takes Wright's (2010, 26) threefold concept of:

a) Diagnosis and critique of society tells us why we want to leave the world in which we live;
b) The theory of alternatives tells us where we want to go; and
c) The theory of transformation tells us how to make viable alternatives achievable"

Perhaps the strength of Hope's book—as, rather unfortunately, so many do—rests on Wright's "A" rather than "B" and "C". Most surprisingly, as a book on time, communication and capitalism it misses "the Blindspot of Western Marxism" (Smythe 1977). The book fails, for example, to discuss questions such as "recognition by whom?" when it demands "recognition from transnational corporations and transnational states". A more detailed discussion on corporate mass media would have been highly helpful to Hope's project and might even have included cases where recognition is deliberately denied (Klikauer 2016).

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