

CARE

RESEARCH
AND PRACTICE

FRIEDERIKE BEIER

TIME TO CARE

CHRONOFEMINIST POLITICS
IN AUTHORITARIAN TIMES

[transcript]

Friederike Beier
Time to Care

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This publication was made possible by co-financing for open-access books by Freie Universität Berlin.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>



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transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover concept: Maria Arndt

Cover illustration: Marek Piwnicki on Unsplash

Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839421123>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7867-3 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-2112-3

ISSN of series: 2700-7014 | eISSN of series: 2703-0377

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

For my feminist comrades, from whom I learn care and solidarity.

For my daughter, from whom I learn to be in the present.

For my future comrades, for whom time will be different.

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1. It's About Time

“People never seemed to notice that, by saving time, they were losing something else. No one cared to admit that life was becoming ever poorer, bleaker and more monotonous. The ones who felt this most keenly were the children, because no one had time for them anymore. But time is life itself, and life resides in the human heart. And the more people saved, the less they had.” Michael Ende

Ever had the feeling that time is slipping away? Does it seem like time controls you, rather than the other way around? Do you sometimes feel the more time you save, and the faster you go, the less you have? But where does all the saved time go? And what is time? Time is life itself, the most pertinent insight from Michael Ende's book *The Grey Gentlemen* or *Momo*. The story of Momo is about a little girl who lives in the ruins of an amphitheatre in a fictitious Italian city. She is in every way extraordinary, and soon people realise that she is an excellent listener because she really takes the time to listen. Her ability makes people feel better, gives them a sense of meaning in life, and helps resolve conflicts. Meanwhile, the Grey Gentlemen appear in the story as time bank agents. Through false promises of a better future, the Grey Gentlemen deceive their citizens into trading their allotment of time to the bank in exchange for more time later in life, though later never comes. In reality, each citizen's time is transformed into hour-lilies that the Grey Gentlemen smoke in the form of cigars, while they gain power with each puff of stolen time. Their growing influence leaves citizens time-deprived, stressed, and lonely. Activities now considered time-wasting, such as sleeping, contemplating, caring for one another, maintaining friendships, making art – and every other act that involves the imagination, are gradually phased out. *Momo's* inventor, Michael Ende, better known as the author of the fantasy novel *The Neverending Story*, presented a disturbingly accu-

rate parable of life under neoliberal capitalism, characterised by productivity and time efficiency.

The quote by Michael Ende at the beginning both encapsulates the feminist perspective on care and offers a critique of time use in neoliberal capitalism. Care and social relationships take time; they cannot, or at least not without compromising their quality, be rushed. The attempt to accelerate life through so-called time-saving devices and technologies, such as kitchen appliances, electronic devices, and apps, does not enable more time for recreation or self-determination but instead results in higher standards, grind culture, and toxic productivity. A product of the early 1970s, Ende's foray into fantasy has forecasted the crisis of care, as well as the stress and exhaustion of neoliberal societies in the decades to come.

In Ende's story, Momo eventually rescues the citizens by returning their stolen time and overthrowing the Grey Gentlemen's government, albeit with the help of a tortoise named Cassiopeia and the guardian of time, known as Master Secundus Minutus Hora. As much as it would be nice for Momo to transcend literature and appear in our world to save our time, the task falls to us to reclaim it and change our future. *Momo* has stayed with me since I first read it as a little girl, when I knew little about capitalism but a lot about the value of time. I used to be a little bookworm who lost time and myself in books because reality, as the daughter of a young, poor, single mother, was challenging and sometimes frightening.

The story of Momo in many ways guides my scholarly and activist work on chronofeminist politics. In ancient Greece, *chronos* refers to the personified concept of time or its passage, whereas *kairos* refers to the right time and opportunity to act. While *kairos* implies waiting for the right time or opportunity, *chronos* is ever-happening and ever-present. *Chronos* also refers to chronologies, the entanglement of the present with the past and the future. It includes monochronic and polychronic perceptions of time, in which one thing happens after another, or everything happens at once. It refers to the times of the body and chronotypes, whether you are a lark or an owl. Embracing *chronos* is therefore much more encompassing than waiting for *kairos*, the 'right' moment for social transformation. *Chronos* reflects the diversity of time and its embeddedness in social relations, the economy, politics, and the environment. This book, and, briefly, this introduction, show how our perception of time is shaped by capitalism and patriarchy and indicates the injustices in the use and perception of time. It highlights how authoritarianism appropriates time by accelerating politics. Most importantly, it shows ways and strate-

gies to reclaim time. Chronofeminism, or chronofeminist politics, is a feminist politics of time that attempts not only to change the time allocated by politics through working time regulations or parental leave, but aims to transform the chronology and constitution of politics itself: a politics that cares for our time. Chronofeminism is ultimately about reclaiming time for democracy, gender equality, and time justice.

This book is an attempt to explain where all our saved time goes, why we don't have more of it, and to formulate strategies for reclaiming it. The Grey Gentlemen in our current world are less obvious to spot, but all around us: they are visible in capitalist relations, neoliberal ideas of productivity and acceleration, and in a frenzied grind culture we have internalised: they are evident in authoritarian, neofascist, and antidemocratic tendencies of acceleration and disruption of time. All of this leaves us with feelings of resignation and powerlessness, attempting to find redemption in the private sphere, where the persisting social organisation around nuclear families often cannot withstand the pressure. It is the most vulnerable who endure the worst as a result of our distorted relation to time and life. It is the ones shouldered with most care responsibilities, primarily women and queer people, who assume the obligation to care more acutely and are thus chronically exhausted and depleted. Moreover, children, the sick, the disabled, and older people suffer most from the structural timelessness and carelessness inscribed in our capitalist society, in which time seems to be a mere reflection of money.

Time is money, or is it?

The ideas that capitalism enables the best life for all of us and that wealth trickles down have not only been proven wrong over and over again, but the opposite has taken place: instead of trickle down, we witness the so-called Cantillon effect, named after the economist Richard Cantillon, where primarily those who multiply money, today's banks, gain in a capitalist economy. Profits enable the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer by the minute. This is true not only of money and wealth, but also of time. Time doesn't just trickle down. It is distributed unequally, with enormous psychological and physical health hazards for those who are deprived of it, who have to remain in an empty state of waiting by 'doing time' in prison, or by waiting for excruciatingly slow migration or work permit procedures. Time injustices are a matter of class, race, and gender, adding to the stress of the most marginalised. The myth that capitalism allows for the most free time in the course of history is one of the most persistent

myths of our time: in reality, people worked fewer hours before the emergence of capitalism, and time is now distributed unequally to a larger extent.

Focusing on time helps us understand social inequality in greater depth and with more clarity what money actually is: the frozen time of people's labour. Ultimately, it is the time of all working people, paid and unpaid, that creates the enormous wealth that is accumulated by a few and used for their own purposes. "Time is money", the famous quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin, is not entirely true, because time can be so much more than money: enjoyment, rest, or community. However, the reverse is true: money is time, and time is life. Reclaiming time is thus about economic and social justice, better health, and social relationships, about democracy, gender equality, and time justice. Ultimately, it is about a better and more time-just life for all.

Time Injustices

Time is the key to understanding intersectional gender inequalities. While women's movements have succeeded in anchoring many women's rights in legal canons across the globe – many of which are currently under contestation – gender inequality has prevailed. The hope for progress towards true emancipation and absolute equality has largely evaporated while violence against women, queer people, and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPoC) is increasing. These processes can be better understood through the lens of time: it is the unequal distribution of time that is associated with the persistence of gender inequalities, heteronormativity, and racial segregation. The question of what time is worth, who gets to spend it, and who has the right to free time is essential in a capitalist system that is based on inequality and difference. The time of engineers, bankers, and tech workers is valued far more than the time of those who care for others: unpaid and paid care workers, nurses, and teachers. This absurd arrangement of society is inscribed in the capitalist system, which values only so-called productive time and devalues care as the bedrock of our society.

Productive time is accelerated time, and what was productive yesterday is not enough today. Since capitalism thrives on the exploitation of workers' time, capitalist growth requires accelerating production processes to extract more from workers' time. Doing more in less time leads to stress. Stress is dangerous for our health, increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, which are already the leading cause of global deaths. This is why reclaiming time is literally a matter of the heart and of life and death. High levels of stress can also increase conflict and exacerbate social relations. Bringing a child to daycare on