

# Borrowed Time: Imposed Synchronicity An Examination of Time and its Meaning

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## Abstract

Time governs our lives. But whose time is it? Through the centuries, the easy rhythm of the seasons has been superseded by increasingly accurate measurements and infinitesimally smaller increments of time. From town organization during the Renaissance to a single universal time established in the 1884 Meridian Conference to time used as force by governments, time is molded by the people who inhabit its eons. Imperialism carries with it the implication that time is not simply the hours on the clocks but the attitudes of the governing. For a contemporary audience, Covid-19 has changed the measurement of time itself, and perhaps long-lasting changes to working hours will be the result. There is now a deliberate decoupling of Industrial ideas of time equaling money. Drawing together philosophy, literature, history, science, art, and recent experiments, time and its imposed synchronicity is examined and analyzed. Additionally, time and its relationship to space, through spacetime is also explored from a number of angles. Time, and its power, has shifted throughout the centuries. What remains true is that synchronicity is multi-layered, in terms of nature and society, and that people continue to shape time for its usage and endow it with new meanings. This paper seeks to explore the multidisciplinary nature of time, embedded into all lives, in a sample of the myriad ways time is experienced. It seeks, in part, to show that the shadow of the historical past is not behind us, but beside us moment by moment. Textual analysis for sources from a variety of fields was employed to facilitate a qualitative and exploratory methodology.

**Keywords:** renaissance perspective and measurements; time standardization and the prime meridian conference; work-life balance; utilization of time; time as abstract; time as resource; synchronous and asynchronous time

## 1. Introduction

Over the past three years, time has taken on a new meaning. Some, who for years have said they would get around to a hobby or interest when they “had time”, suddenly found themselves with more time than hobbies. Others, invested in time, kneaded it into their sourdoughs, watching the power of the passage of this luxurious commodity that had become ubiquitous. For others, time now seemed strange, foreign, without its strictures of regimental life. With no alarm clock set, what time would they wake up? Left to one’s own devices, would one’s day be ordered differently? Would it be ordered at all? Or would events unfold, like less successful attempts at origami?

In France, a group of forty people entered a “deep time” experiment, taking this notion farther than most, when they entered a cave to see how time would feel without the benefit of light. (BBC, Deep Time, 2022) In the darkness, where day and night were meaningless, what would time mean? As the official website of the project states, “The fundamental question is: ‘how to achieve an adequacy between real time and perceived time?’” (Deeptime.fr, 2022) Perhaps that points to the larger issue: humans live in borrowed time through imposed synchronicity.

Ordinarily the phrase “borrowed time” suggests an ending is near, but this paper posits that time itself is borrowed and not natural. It is an adaptation that we have made to interface with each other, a societal marker, like language or culture. And just like language and culture can be, and has been throughout history, imposed on another, so too has time.

In its natural state, the seasons mark the passage of time. Human’s governor is the land itself. But with the shifting of work to the gathered town around the central clock and later to the punch cards of the factory, time became the commodity of the employer. So, the maxim goes, “time equals money”.

This paper is a multi-disciplinary examination of time, drawing upon historical information (including primary documents from the Washington International Meridian Conference of 1884 where universal standard time was agreed upon), art, literature, and philosophy, as well as contemporary political decisions and scientific experiments. It seeks to provide a nuanced lens of viewing the structure of time. The areas explored are 1. Time, Borrowed or Contrived: Philosophical Underpinnings; 2. Sanford Fleming and Universal Time; 3. Time as Abstraction and Living Asynchronously in Multiple Times; and 4. Time, Covid-19, and Reevaluating its Meaning. This broad review of time across history and disciplines attempts to offer multiple points of convergence, in alignment with how

reality is experienced. Life is lived moment by moment, but not through one distinct discipline at a time. The overlapping of variation in this study attempts to provide a more wholistic vision of time and all of its facets individually and at a broader level as well. The methodology enacted is qualitative through textual analysis, drawing from both primary and secondary sources. The multidisciplinary treatment and analysis have additionally allowed for an exploratory methodology to examine the protean and versatile nature of time.

## **2. Time, Borrowed or Contrived: Philosophical Underpinnings**

The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote,

Space, the mere form of external sensuous intuition, is not yet cognition: it only supplies the manifold of intuition *a priori* for a possible cognition. In order to know anything in space, for instance, a line, I must *draw* it, and produce synthetically a certain connection of the manifold that is given, so that the unity of that act is at the same time the unity of the consciousness (in the concept of a line), and (so that) an object (a determinate space) is then only known for the first time. (1781)

In the drawing of the line, the idea of a line is connected to the physical space of the paper that it is drawn on. In constructing a map, the governing of space and relationship to land is conceived of and then depicted. What the mind first conceives of, the cartographer delivers. Creation of space was effected through the construction of imperial aims. By heightening the importance of geography, the cartographer was employed in the mint of the mind: a gold prospector of imperialist ideas.

Space and time were the central focus of the Meridian Conference of 1884: space through the establishment of one single Prime Meridian and time in the establishment of universal time. Intuitive knowledge of space and time, Kant suggested, exists before empiricism of science validates them. That is, space and time exist purely already. Then, when they are applied to real-life experience, their utilization creates knowledge, crucially empirical knowledge (empire knowledge).

The goal of the scientist is to arrive at knowledge through empiricism, or that which is measurable, discoverable, and experiential. Kant elevated space and time for the nineteenth-century citizens of the world, who were eager to enact scientific knowledge in the pursuit of progress. For with progress comes development. Development was cited as the plan for Africa by the imperial nations. Development was extolled in the form of fast-moving trains and ships and communications that all came together and demanded unified space and unified time. Unity in intuition, that is a universal understanding in a single time and a single place came to fruition, and the Empire of the United Kingdom was firmly put at the center of that global unity.

Through the elevation of geography and the enshrining of space and time in Greenwich, an Anglo understanding of how the world was ordered, how it operated, and how it ought to be governed, in their eyes, became the operating system for the world at large.

The French deep time experiment mentioned above states its goals as: “The goals of this mission: to understand the adaptation of cerebral plasticity linked to time, the impacts of desynchronization in the face of a new life situation and the ability of a human group to find functional synchronization, when it is immersed in a totally unknown universe and in the absence of one of its major landmarks: time.” (Deeptime.fr, 2022) Time as a landmark is an interesting notion. A mountain or a stream may be a landmark. But time itself? Time is often thought of as a fabric.<sup>1</sup> If time is indeed fabric-like, perhaps the vision is of a mesh, where existence is sieved through time. Such an understanding would seem to suggest that time, *a priori* at least (as Kant suggested above) and somewhat paradoxically since time itself is a lived experience, is a neutral observer or backdrop. Observing society seems to suggest something different.

A metronome measures the musical timing of a piece. But, in society at large, are we living by a metronome of our own making or someone else’s? Furthermore, is that what it means to live in a collective society? For the purposes of social cohesion, do we risk desynchronization from internal clocks or universal cues? China, for example, remains under a single time zone, despite its vast geographic boundaries. As Hassid and Watson wrote, “few state actions shape citizens’ quotidian experience as fundamentally as setting the boundaries of time.” (2014, p. 171) Time as a tool of power can thus be explored both from a political as well as an economic dimension. Time can become the tool of the employer or ruler. Any teenager who has been assigned a curfew will be able to recognize the inherent power in time and, more importantly, who controls it. In her novel, *The Paris Library*, Janet Skeslien Charles, speaking as a young librarian in Nazi-occupied Paris, wrote, “We’ve been forced to move our clocks an hour ahead to their time zone. Every time I check my watch, it’s a reminder that we live on their time, on their terms.” (2021, p. 178) Imposition of time by the other was a hallmark of Nazism, which disrupted and disordered so much of life they encountered, under their regimented orders. Is this paradoxical, that order should create disorder? Perhaps not, when time itself is beyond regimentation in any meaningful way. What really is a day? What really is an hour? Einstein famously said, “Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example this line from the abstract of this study: “We investigate the fabric of spacetime, its ability to stretch, curve, and expand.” Douglas, G. and Bajaj, N.S. (2020) The Final Size of the Universe Based on the Elasticity of the Fabric of Spacetime. *Journal of High Energy Physics, Gravitation and Cosmology*, 6, 450-461. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhepgc.2020.63035>

it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. That's relativity." (Goodreads, 2022) Perhaps then it is necessary to look at what is even meant by time.

We use time both to mark the moment-by-moment daily occurrences, as well as the larger encapsulation of momentous shifts—a “sign of the times”. But of course, we do not mean it is evident by the accumulation of time, as if each moment were a grain of sand in the hourglass of time. Or, perhaps, that is exactly what we mean. “It’s the year X”, we often hear in historical novels or historical dramas. The point, whatever year X marks, is clear: by this point in time, society ought to know better, things ought to be different. In that light, it is as if the scales of time ought to decidedly be balanced in a different way, with the accumulation of so much time. The judgement of the times comes from a personalization of time that lends a familiarity, an intimacy with it. The art historian Dr. Richard Stemp wrote, “What is more, the vanishing point is supposedly at our eye-level: it is theoretically our point of view, how we would see this scene, making it far more personal to us. The focus on man as the starting point for our understanding of the world and how we see it is essential to the development of the Renaissance.” (2006, p. 54) Here Stemp is speaking to a greater phenomenon of the Renaissance: that of expanding measurement. It is no accident that cartography, the depiction of the world, expanded drastically during the Renaissance. Yes, the world was being explored more and thus there was more knowledge to be mapped. Additionally, however, there were greater tools of depiction.

If man is the measure of the world, the question arises: which man? Under imperialism, the imperialist was the measure. To know the world is to map it, to measure it, and that extends to a measurement and mapping of time. This was encapsulated, perhaps best of all, in the International Prime Meridian Conference of 1884. Habbar, writing about the changes in perspective, and their wider political implications, during the Renaissance, wrote, “Linear perspective and cartography both enabled to frame the world in a window which we could from then onwards encompass, think, visualise, and view at a glance.” (2018) The Renaissance, through its ideals and tools, helped to frame all that could be measurable, including time. Later intentional and international consensus elevated those measurements, both expanding and also limiting meanings of time itself, through precise scientific definition.

Even when modernist and post-modernist art and literature sought to delimit the mind, expanding possibilities, suggesting that perhaps certitude no longer existed, after the messiness of two world wars, time itself became more regimented. Battles, trenches, and poisoned gas shattered lives. But something else was also lost in the war, as explained here by historian Juliet Nicholson, “After the catastrophic death of Victorian certainties, silence was beginning to seem like the only possible articulation of the truth.” (2009, p. 31) Victorian certainty

was exercised by those gathered around the table at the Meridian Conference, who pinned time to a single universal line: the Prime Meridian.

In 1955, atomic timekeeping began, bringing increasing precision; time not only to the season, hour, or minute, but time with an accuracy of only one second deviation per 100 million years. Philosophy suggests that vast spans of time are perhaps meaningless. Musing, philosophically, in an article relating Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* with Zen Buddhism Memić writes, "There is no past or future, but there is also no present, because if we say 'now', that 'now' 'is already past, time is one thing, it is not divisible and transitory component and it cannot be subject to the western definition of transiency and divisibility." (2017) This western division of time is illustrated in the establishment of railway time during the nineteenth century, when the duality of space and time were drawn ever closer. As distances decreased in time between locations, greater cohesion was also necessary for their understandings.

In 1883, Standard Railway Time was adopted by the Canadian and Americans and thus united them. Where previously, each town had its own time, now there was continuity established across four time zones for the ease of transportation and movement of goods and passengers. This event was important, because it united not only a country through systematic time zones, but also marked international cross-border cooperation. It was a case in point for the establishment of international cooperation based upon the marriage of economics and scientific ingenuity. Dick explained, "Because the new 'Standard Railway Time,' as it was called, was indexed to the Greenwich meridian, the 1883 event was an important step in the adoption of Greenwich as the prime meridian of the world." (2003, p. 191)

On October 13, 1884, the American representative Allen presented the resolutions passed by the General Railway Time Convention, held four days earlier in Philadelphia, to the International Prime Meridian Conference in Washington. The resolutions passed at the railway convention were unanimously accepted by those men gathered and signed by their Chairman P.P. Wright. This resolution, in particular, is especially telling of the pressures that those in attendance at the Conference may have felt from the captains of industry. "Resolved, That it is the opinion of this Convention that the selection of any prime meridian which would change the denomination of these governing meridians from even degrees and make them fractional in their character would be disturbing in no small measure to the transportation lines of the United States and Canada." (Meridian Transcript, 1884) Thus, railways and telegraphs not only more closely united the world, leading to the requirement of cartographic unity, but also set a precedent of using Greenwich. That the United States and Canada had already adopted Greenwich for railway time was of significance in helping promote Greenwich to be chosen as the single meridian of usage.

### 3. Sanford Fleming and Universal Time<sup>2</sup>

Sanford Fleming, an engineer, was a guiding voice in the call for standardization. His chief concern was time. Although born in Scotland, Fleming immigrated to Canada at the age of eighteen. Since Canada is a dominion of Great Britain, Fleming's role in the International Meridian Conference was as one of the delegates for Great Britain.

Fleming was the natural choice for the delegate to represent not only Canada's interests but, more importantly, the interests of the Conference. Railroads, such a powerful force for the Conference, were directly linked to Sanford Fleming. As early as 1872, Fleming was surveying for the Canadian Pacific Railway and in 1884, the year of the Conference, he was a director of the railroad. More so than dedication to a particular meridian, Fleming was devoted to the standardization of time. Four years earlier in 1879, Fleming called for twenty-four distinct and universal time zones in his pamphlet, *Time Reckoning and a Prime Meridian common to all Nations*.

Fleming's immigration to Canada from Great Britain and his work in the railways uniquely suited him to the task. Firstly, the expanding railways of Great Britain resulted in the adoption of a standard British time. This was enacted before Fleming left for Canada and so he had first-hand knowledge of the system. Then, when he began work for the railways in Canada, he had first-hand knowledge again, this time of the necessity of establishing a coordinated time. Klinghoffer testified to Fleming's importance, "In October 1883, the railroad industries of the U.S. and Canada adopted a General Time Convention for North America that was based on Greenwich Mean Time. Britain had established this time synchronization for itself in 1843, but its extension to North America was the brainchild of Sanford Fleming, who had moved from Britain to Canada in 1845." (2006, p. 50)

What was most controversial about Fleming's proposal, though, was that he did not suggest Greenwich as the meridian for the day to begin from, but rather an anti-meridian: "In my humble judgment I consider that the Cosmic Day should commence when the sun passes the anti-meridian of Greenwich." (Fleming Recommendations, 1884) Fleming continued to advocate for the usage of the anti-meridian of Greenwich for time, even during the proceedings of the Conference. Interestingly, he did not see the anti-meridian as neutral, despite it not passing through any major country. Indeed, he even stated on October 13th in front of the Conference, "A neutral meridian is excellent in theory, but I fear it is entirely beyond the domain of practicality." (Meridian Transcript, 1884)

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<sup>2</sup> This section and small portions of the previous section are drawn from portions of the author's doctoral thesis, *1884: Determining the Meridian to Map a Changing World: How a Scientific Problem Established a New World Order*. Full publication available at ProQuest. ISBN 9798379793265. (Published July 2023)

Three positive reviews of the pamphlets came from Spain, the Berlin Observatory, and the Russian Observatory. Perhaps, this enthusiasm to Fleming's ideas of time and one meridian, what they emphasized most rather than the exact meridian that was used, lay the groundwork for their votes at the Meridian Conference of 1884.

One strong advocate for the propositions of Fleming, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the President of the Canadian Institute, Daniel Wilson. After stating that a collective usage of time was in the past employed by scientists, he determined that, "it is only of late years that the rapidity of communications by Railway, and the facilities afforded by the Telegraph, have created new conditions which suggest and seem to demand some general system of uniformity in reckoning Time in their ordinary occupations of life." (1880) He went on to show that this issue was not only of Canadian importance but of international significance. While others had shown a lack of reason to change a British convention, Wilson employed transferable logic, determining that, "If uniformity be desirable in Canada and the United States, may it not be equally important to employ it throughout the whole world? Does it not therefore become desirable to seek the cooperation of men of science in other countries, and, if possible, gain general concurrence in any scheme which may be proposed?" (Wilson, 1880)

It is clear from his words, that Fleming was interested in time, in the day, more than the location. He thus continued in his proposal of an anti-meridian, because in his understanding and belief a universal time system that began at the Prime Meridian would disrupt a great number of workers. Both prior to the Conference of 1884, especially during the standardization of the railways, and during the proceedings in Washington themselves, the concerns of the citizens were of importance. Mattli and Buthe wrote, "The more a domestic standardization system is based on principles of coordination, the more it should naturally be geared toward providing opportunities for input from a broad range of interested parties and toward aggregating their diverse preferences into a national consensus standard. This should facilitate a broadly supported national position regarding the technical specification of any international standard." (2003, p. 21)

Where does Fleming's assertion that the day beginning in Greenwich would disrupt workers come from? The key is that Fleming spoke of a cosmic day. For a cosmic day, the day is marked by noon, not midnight. It makes sense that Fleming thought in terms of the sun in establishing the day; he was maintaining a precedent set by sailors centuries earlier (TheGreenwichMeridian.Org, 2009).

As Fleming explained, if Greenwich is the prime meridian, then the day will change during the middle of the workday for the majority of workers, specifically those in Great Britain. For example, a worker would go to his place of business in the morning, on the seventh of the month, and arrive home in the evening, on the eighth of that month, all while working a single eight-hour shift.



Fleming then remarked in his Recommendations that Otto Struve, of the Russian Observatory, supported his idea of the anti-meridian as well as the French.

Fleming remained resolute before, during, and after the Conference on the establishment of the anti-meridian from Greenwich as prime. An 1886 issue of *Popular Science Monthly*, two years after the Conference, reported, “In 1879 Mr. Fleming set forth his views on time-reckoning in a remarkable paper read before the Canadian Institute. In this he proposed the adoption of a universal day, commencing at Greenwich mean noon or at midnight of a place on the anti-meridian of Greenwich—i. e., in longitude 180 from Greenwich. The universal day thus proposed would coincide with the Greenwich astronomical day instead of with the Greenwich civil day, which is adopted for general use in this country.” (1886) With his background in engineering and the railway, he came from a scientific and technologically-advanced understanding. He had the best interest of the greatest number of people in mind, something that many others also claimed. What sets Sanford Fleming apart the most is that he was devoted to the adoption of universal standard time above all else, while those in power at the Conference were advancing the fixity of the meridian at Greenwich. Regardless of the differing proposals and reasons, Fleming was influential in laying the groundwork not only for the reasoning behind the Conference, but also in setting a precedent for the voting of certain countries.

#### **4. Time as Abstraction and Living Asynchronously in Multiple Times**

In Salvador Dali’s iconic painting, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), the clocks are melting – under the sun, time is distorted and melted and perhaps meaningless—the seasons still hold sway. This is the metaphor provided pictorially, even if, according to McNeese, “[i]n his own words, Dali explained his decision to paint melting clocks: ‘Be persuaded that Salvador Dali’s famous limp watches are nothing but the tender, extravagant and solitary paranoiac-critical Camembert of time and space.’” (2006, p. 70) Cheese, incidentally, is often cited as something that improves with age. Are Dali’s paintings portraying a wasteland of skewed time, or is it a field of possibilities? With ripening, those cheeses or clocks perhaps have the opportunity to reach “the fullness of time.”

Either way, time undoubtedly is meant to be full. “How are you filling your time?” one might ask. And the correct answer is, of course, by doing something useful. Smiles, author of *Self-Help*, published in 1859 reflects that, “lost wealth may be replaced by industry, lost knowledge by study, lost health by temperance or medicine, but lost time is gone forever.” (Smiles, 1859, p. 128) For

Thomas Carlyle, vastly influential over nineteenth and twentieth-century figures and philosophies and also controversial and societally problematic, time existed in a roundness that was at all points equidistant to eternity.<sup>3</sup>

Vanessa Ogle explains how the usage of time for self-improvement allows for it to become an abstraction: “The interpretation of time as a tool for improvement required the author of such exhortations to conceive of time as an abstract and movable, malleable device that no longer depended on the movements of the heavens and the earth alone.” (2013, p. 1398) This decoupling of time from nature is far removed from wonders such as Newgrange, the oldest solar observatory in the world. Found in the Boyne Valley of Ireland, Newgrange predates the pyramids of Giza by 500 years and Stonehenge by 1000 years. For 5000 years, Newgrange has marked the winter solstice, through the illumination of its chamber, in an impressively accurate means of marking celestial progression and changing seasons.<sup>4</sup> History is the keeper of time, and yet, in prehistoric Newgrange time was recorded on a yearly solar calendar. The ancient Irish literally set time in stone.

In contrast, the abstraction of time, spoken of by Vanessa Ogle above, embeds it with fragility. It becomes a finite resource, one which can be exhausted by an individual. Time, especially from the eighteenth century onwards, becomes a carrier of moral responsibility. Idleness is now condemned as squandering both time and money. This coupling of time with money was written about by Benjamin Franklin, a century prior to Smalls’ *Self Help*, in 1752. The Director of the V & A Museum, Tristram Hunt, speaking to the industriousness that marked the eighteenth-century records his own observations among Franklin’s,

“[B]y the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the suppression of fairs and sports... a new time-discipline was imposed.” A Calvinist ethic of hard work combined with a proliferation of clocks and watches, diaries and calendars and a rising tide of production to instil the diligence of labour. “Since our time is reduced to a Standard, and the Bullion of the Day minted out into Hours, the Industrious know how to employ every Piece of Time to a real

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<sup>3</sup> “Eternities, The Conflux of, Carlyle’s expressive phrase for Time, as in every moment of it a centre in which all the forces to and from Eternity meet and unite, so that by no past and no future can we be brought nearer to Eternity than where we at any moment of Time are; the Present Time, the youngest born of Eternity, being the child and heir of all the Past times with their good and evil, and the parent of all the Future, the import of which (see Matt. xvi. 27) it is accordingly the first and most sacred duty of every successive age, and especially the leaders of it, to know and lay to heart as the only link by which Eternity lays hold of it and it of Eternity.” (Nuttall, 1907)

<sup>4</sup>For more information: National Museum of Ireland. 2020. *The Winter solstice at Newgrange / National Museum of Ireland*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Irish-Antiquities-Division-Collections/Irish-Antiquities-Articles/The-Winter-solstice-at-Newgrange>> [Accessed 19 January 2022].

Advantage in their different Professions; And he that is prodigal of his Hours, is, in effect, a Squanderer of Money,” wrote Benjamin Franklin in his *Almanac* of 1751. (2021, p. 27)

Hale speaks to the changing circumstances with the introduction of town clocks in the Renaissance, observing that tensions arose during the later Industrial Age; Hale suggests that during the Renaissance, time existed both naturally within the seasons and simultaneously became a measured public affair (1977, p. 11). The mechanization of society through the age of industry carried the synchronization of European Renaissance society into the wider world. Measurement, including of time, became an export from Europe into colonial empire. The researcher Vanessa Ogle has questioned the reality of standardization, remarking, “As a result of such encounters with time or unintended consequences of unifying time, up until the 1940s and 1950s, the concept of a worldwide grid of standardized, uniform mean times, and coherent notions of social time, was largely a fiction in the heads of a few mainly Euro-American railway engineers and scientists.” (2013, p. 1377) It is interesting that she specifically names railways and scientists, as these were the girding forces at work during the Washington International Prime Meridian Conference of 1884. Ogle’s work also suggests that, at least for some colonial locations, the true circumstances may have resembled the Renaissance, where multiple versions of time-keeping co-existed, rather than strict standardization that the imperial nations were increasingly seeking. That duality of time, often between work and life outside of work, exemplified under the Renaissance centralization, mechanization of Industrialization, and the spreading global influence of imperialism, is no relic of the past. Instead, this tension of living at different rhythms, has been highlighted during the pandemic.

### **5. Time, Covid-19, and Reevaluating its Meaning**

Working habits have changed dramatically under the specter of Covid-19. Many have found that in-person attendance is no longer compulsory for productivity. Indeed, Forbes reports that under lockdown, 90% of those surveyed felt their productivity had remained stable or actually increased (Gaskell, 2022). What this means for time is that perhaps Benjamin Franklin’s adage of time equaling money is false. Or at least, more than work ought to fill one’s days. This has allowed employers to realize that they are borrowing time from their employees. Ireland has sought greater life-work balance by decreasing the working hours for their public sector employees (Goodbody, 2022). Additionally, a BBC article, examining if the changes under Covid-19 will last, shares these findings, “Only 12% want to return to full-time office work, and 72% want a hybrid remote-office model moving forward.” (Coronavirus, 2020)

Busting the myth of 9-5 productivity is perhaps no surprise to many within the creative industries. Although some artists and writers keep regimented schedules, many follow as the muse comes. For some, time itself, or the rejection of time, becomes the muse. Here, Pamela Lee speaks to the art of the 1960s, “Cutting across movements, mediums, and genres, the chronophobic impulse suggests an insistent struggle with time, the will of both artists and critics either to master its passage, to still its acceleration, or to give form to its changing conditions.” (2006, p. xii) It is reminiscent of Juliet Nicholson’s observations on silence following World War One after Victorian certainty, in this case the decades of the 1960s marking social upheaval in the face of a rapidly changing, post-war world. Silence is not an option for time, as its metronome continues to tick, its bells continue to toll.

But struggle with time’s explanation is a form of silence, a questioning of time itself. It pauses the power of time, insisting that humans have some control over what time does, or at least what it means. It can be molded by meaning in the hands of people. Fear becomes a driving impetus to exert greater control over the strictures of time, moving through new hourglasses, under rules that push the sands of time forward with greater speed. A desire to decouple from that emerges. Ironically, Covid-19 has in some ways provided that temporal relief. Pressing deadlines fade as health becomes the top priority. Is it then possible to live without time holding such a decisive power over our lives? Productivity reports point to that reality. Additionally, the absence of time’s power in familiar ways is an element of those deep time experiments in the French caves, written about at the beginning of this article. One of the possible uses of those findings, the report says, is for deep-space voyages. This brings the paper full-circle. Time and space exist intricately bound together, but humanity is at the heart of the depiction of those spaces and that time. Although spatial and temporal reality are inescapable, their meaning is continually reevaluated and derived from humanity.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this explorative and qualitative study, time has been examined through a multidisciplinary view, employing diverse lenses including art, literature, and science. History, as the keeper of time, has played a particular importance in the underpinning of the contextuality of this study. Through this paper, which has sought to analyze material from a multiplicity, rather than a single discipline, and in providing nuanced perspectives, it is hoped that time with all of its myriad possibilities will be considered in a new way. Time, at first glance, seems fixed, a constant measure in our lives. Depending on the circumstances, when time is especially short or passes slowly, time may step to the forefront of life. In general, though, it tends to beat a steady metronome

in the backdrop. Delve a little deeper, though, and the simplicity and straightforward nature of time dissolves. Time itself, in its modern understanding, has become something abstract. And yet, its precision has increased to remarkable standards.

Standardization itself speaks to the relationship of humanity with nature, with society, and with geopolitical ramifications of the world. Time, as illustrated in the work schedules of the Industrial Revolution, imperialism, and during World War Two, was a tool of power. Tensions have arisen when time is imposed, as exemplified by Vanessa Ogle's studies. Time continues to fascinate because it is universal. That is, time exists collectively and yet retains individuality for each person in how it is experienced. Something of this abstraction is interpreted via literature and art. Philosophy also speaks to the delimiting of time, the regulation of time, and the conception of time itself.

For the past few centuries, time has been coupled with productivity and work. Now, attributed in part to the rapid changes that the worldwide pandemic necessitated, work and time are being decoupled. Productivity remains, even without a strict clocked-in schedule. Indeed, when all time is absent, human productivity remains high, as witnessed in the French deep time experiments. In some ways, there is never enough time, even when time itself is removed.

With the prioritization of a greater work-life balance, ownership of time is being reevaluated. Reestablishing rhythms with nature became a touchstone for many during lockdown. Synchronization of time, imposed by others, has led to the stealing of time. Humanity, however, continually has the means to reevaluate the meaning of time itself. So, the next time you find yourself asking, "What time is it?" Pause. Consider. Maybe the real question is, "Whose time is it?"

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