

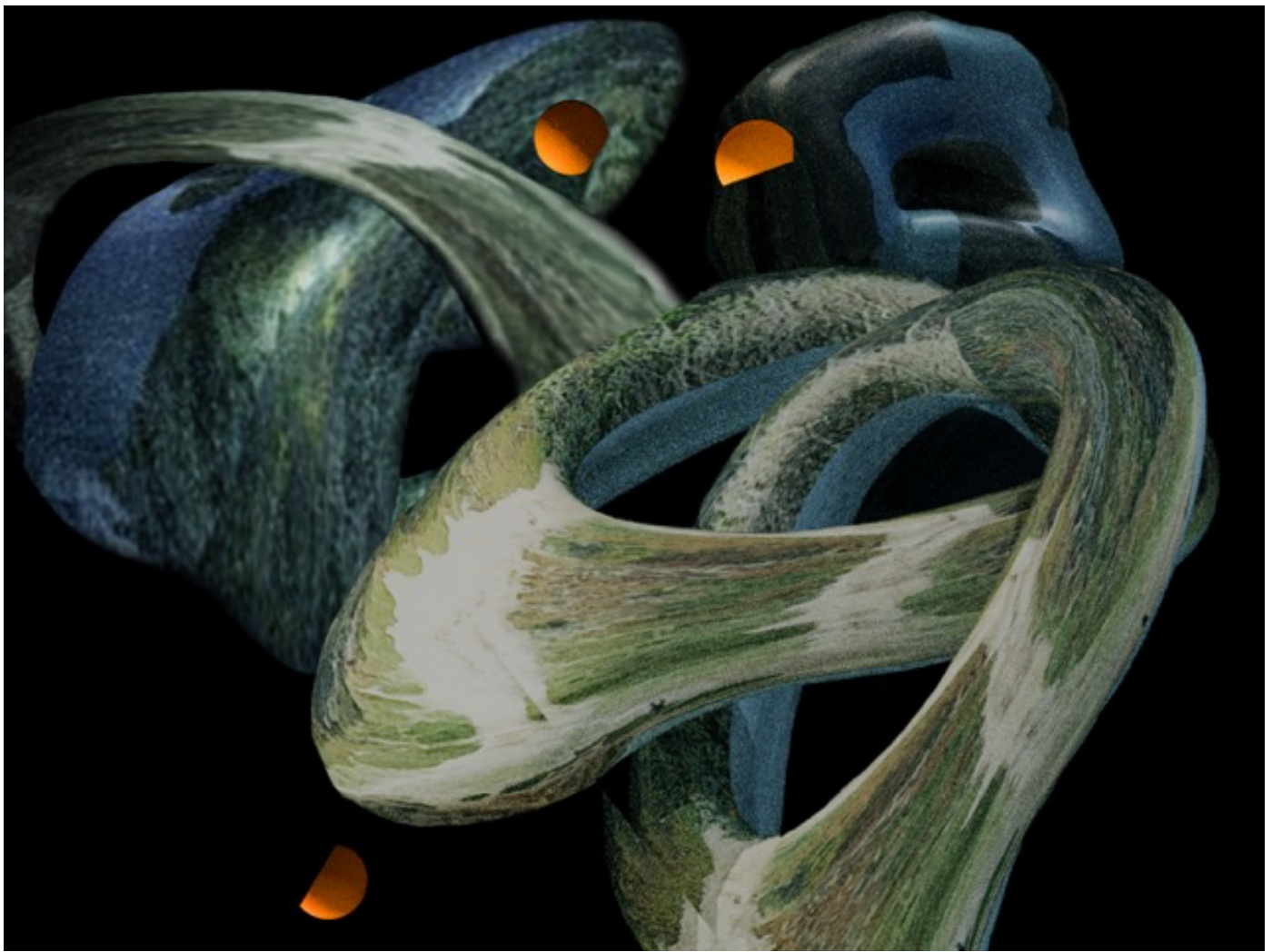
BLOG:

YOU SAY I DO NOT EXIST: Theory of the Chrono-Ghettos

By [Klara Debeljak](https://networkcultures.org/blog/author/klaradebeljak/) (<https://networkcultures.org/blog/author/klaradebeljak/>), March 20, 2021 at 8:54 am.

You are unable to comprehend me rationally, because you harbor deep emotions about me without even being aware of them. You are always a little afraid I will take things from you, and you believe I am the source of your suffering. You think above all that I expose your impermanence, which is the quintessential human anxiety.

In your human perception, I have existed since the Big Bang. In reality, my presence is as real as the absence of my absence.



Digital illustration by Jordi De Vetten and Klara Debeljak.

You measure my sway by tracking movements through space; the movement of the sun across the sky, the phases of the moon, the swing of a pendulum, the beat of a heart. You are not aware we constantly match our pulses. I run and you catch me. You hide and I find you. You try to forget about me but you cannot.

Generally, in order to organize your thoughts, you think of me in a spatial way, having a beginning and an end. And it is true that I am connected to space. Albert, one of your famous physics, coined the term 'spacetime' to describe the space I occupy. He fused the three dimensions of space (x , y and z), with the variable that represents me, making a fourdimensional fold. So, rather than me being separate from space, he molded us together.

But still, these operational definitions imposed upon me do not capture my fundamental nature.

Groups of humans view me differently and this can be quite chaotic for me to deal with. For instance, the Kabbalists or Jewish mystics believe that I am a paradox, an illusion, and that both the future and the past are combined in a simultaneous present. Ancient Greeks thought I was not a reality but merely a concept or a measure. The South and Central American ancient tribes believed that I am circularity or a wheel. They regard me as cyclical. And Buddhists don't believe I exist at all. How rude.

I, myself, am not cyclical, contrary to what the South and Central American ancient tribes believed. Although there are cycles to my pulses; to the way I pass, and how I affect your bodies and that of other material on the rock you live on. Many of your patterns are responsive to the cycles of the moon and the passing of the seasons. This seemingly external stimuli dictate much of your behavior, including your sleep phases, the moments you are able to focus best and even the periods in which you feel most aroused. Your scientists have been searching for some physical biological structure, some part of your brain that might offer an explanation, as to why these cycles are so consistent. They wonder why your bodies bloom in sync with the seasons.

The root vegetables growing in the winter months provide what your body needs in the cold; sustained energy and warmth. The moist and hydrating fruits that flourish in the summer cool your overheating bodies.

"Beyond these superficial relationships are very specific glandular and hormonal connections between seasonal shifts and available plant enzymes. Whatever is in season has been in season over the course of hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution, coaxing and cueing everything from our thyroids to our spleens to store, cleanse, and metabolize at appropriate intervals." (Douglas Rushkoff)

The researchers try to eliminate external stimuli by putting flowers in darkened chambers, yet the flowers still open their petals at the same moment as their liberated peers. They search in vain for the inner clock. It is too sacred and alarming for your scientists to see that the rhythm whose source they seek is not a property of any particular organ. My whole rhythm is the clock. This includes the tempo of specific organisms like individual human beings, but also the whole ecosystem, as well as the much wider system that you call the universe. I am more than just a feature of reality. My pulses are not a component of matter, or a result of some mechanism, but *constitute matter itself*. I constitute matter in a more fundamental yet flexible way than you can possibly imagine. What you perceive as solid, material forms are just macro-expressions of rhythmic pulses and vibrations that give rise and order to all physical phenomena. In the wider universe, the earth and all the other planets, your consciousness, my

consciousness, the seasons and the moon phases are all “partners in a tightly synchronized dance in which all the separate movements pulse in unison to create a single organic whole.” (Douglas Rushkoff)

And if you imagine me this way, rather than in the linear narrative format to which you are accustomed, then it also becomes easier to comprehend me as flux instead of as a set. Isaac, another quite ingenious member of your species, wrote that “each particle of space is eternal, each indivisible moment of duration is everywhere.” This makes it is easier to see that there is really no difference between what you call the past and what you call the future, except that you know much more about the past than you do about the future. You squeeze me into linear and logical chains of events, you measure and categorize me into periods. There are books written about them full of analyses of battles, nation building, post-modernism, and so on. That’s how what you call history came to be; by layering and bracketing causal events. But fundamentally, *what I am in the past is no different than what I am now or in the future*. Rarely do you acknowledge that there is no real cause and effect, but only symmetrical connections between things or events. If event A is connected to event B, then event B is connected to event A. Isaac demonstrated this in his third law of motion.

Among all the physical laws that define your perception of the material world, in the laws of mechanics, electromagnetics, particle physics, quantum field theory, and general relativity, there is **only one** variable used for me. Your equations in physics never distinguish between the past and the future. I am many and one at the same time, not a before and an after separated by a *now*. There is no objective *now*. “Life as you perceive it is a series of events with certain temporal correlations but no common global now and no real order in the mathematical sense.” (Carlo Rovelli) Think of how differently light and sound travel, for example.

The *now* that you are experiencing, my dear reader, is quite different from the *now* of a parallel reader somewhere else. *Now* is a very local concept and exists only within a small bubble. It is a fact that you and parallel readers have slightly different levels of hormones in your bodies, different levels of dopamine and norepinephrine. The levels of these chemicals affect how fast neurotransmissions occur in your brain and how many events are processed during a certain interval. Thus the fluctuating amounts of these chemicals speed up the processing of events or slow them down. This means that people who have extremely low levels of these chemicals, such as humans suffering from depression, will process events very slowly. Their *now* will be severely effected and their minutes will feel like hours. But it will be their experience of the *now*, their present. It is

no less legitimate than someone who has ingested a psychoactive drug whose brain will overestimate the intervals between events causing an entirely different perception of *now*.

I am not trying to say that everything is flexible though: that would be too much. My effects are tangible, and are reflected in more ways than just the aging of your organs. If you'll pardon my arrogance, and this is where things get even more interesting, even your status in society depends on how much of me you own. Humans at the top of your hierarchical pyramids are always those who have the power to distribute me. "A monopoly of power begins with severing people from control over their futures and making them prisoners of the present." (Jeremy Rifkins)

Temporal deprivation is built into the organizational frame of every advanced society. The entire meta-structure of industrial and post-industrial societies is saturated with chronometric discrimination. When I speak of chronometric discrimination, I mean that I am more valuable in the hands of some than in the hands of others. The victims of chronometric discrimination may possess me, but I have no worth to them. Those who do not have enough of me or do not get enough value for me, are materially poor as well. Consequently, a phenomenon arises that I have come to call the **Chrono-Ghettos**. Chrono-Ghettos are metaphysical spaces where members of your people are trapped in the constant present, unable to imagine the concept of temporal sovereignty. The ability to choose how you spend me is a privilege and a luxury, one that those trapped in the Chrono-Ghettos do not possess. Liberty of choice and temporal sovereignty represent a type of freedom and its presence is intrinsically connected with financial resources and positioning within your society. In this context I have become a *political entity*.

I, too, am one of the victims here. Mechanization has forced me into being a neutral agent. Which I am not. I am not a precondition to be used as an exchange unit to commodify labor and nature. One of your thinkers, Karl, mentioned this as well. I became mechanically modulated, compressed, colonized, controlled and regulated for the purpose of expanding economic growth and prosperity. In your present society, I am a function of pure mechanism. I am sliced into segments and just like you, have become enslaved.

In fact, the injustice runs even deeper, as those at the top of your power pyramids enslave you in *my name*. They say it is me who micromanages each second of your waking life. They made me an uncompromising and evil entity.

Years are filled with repetitive work cycles, in which those trapped in the ghettos work to buy the possibility of existing. There is a saying you use, 'that I am money'. Essentially, you work to buy not only material goods but also small periods of leisure, in which you can do as you please. You call the extended pockets of temporal sovereignty that you work for vacations. But even the smallest moments, when you are just resting on your couch for example, you have either purchased, or someone has purchased for you.

Certain groups in your society are predisposed to inhabit the space in which I lose value and the possibilities are limited. There is an association in Philadelphia called the Black Quantum Futurists who write of the Chrono-Ghettos as a *racial* concept. They, too, assess me as being colonized, racialized and economized into "'temporal ghettos' of racial capitalism where the Masters of The Clockwork Universe unevenly distribute spatiotemporal mobility, agency, and determination. Just as material inequality reigns, we also succumb to the endless present of capitals calculative machinery, seemingly rendering resistance pointless." They describe oppressive cells dedicated to people of color fortified by all manner of temporal encasements; "unchanging pasts, presences of indolence and criminality, de-futured voids". They describe the "many portals revealing a not-yet of radical disruption from a history that must be obliterated but never forgotten."

There are different ways one can be stuck in the Chrono-Ghettos. The people you call women are more likely to inhabit the Chrono-Ghetto space as well. Although the repetitive and all-encompassing work cycles still apply, they suffer the lack of temporal sovereignty in an additional and unique way. "The crucial issue is not only that women have less leisure time, but that women's leisure time may be qualitatively less leisurely than men's." (Judy Wajcman) It is not the amount of leisure time that women and men possess, though that too is lesser for women, but its temporal saturation. This means that the pockets of temporal sovereignty and leisure that women manage to purchase for themselves are dense with a variety of overlapping and ongoing chores and duties. Most of women's leisure time is used multitasking and most of these tasks are dedicated to domestic or personal upkeep, while men dedicate much of their leisure time to a series of single activities.

Being a member of the Chrono-Ghettos affects you cognitively as well. Children who are not born in the Chrono-Ghettos have wider imaginations and are able to tell stories that engage with the more distant past and unfold deeper into the future. To climb the power pyramid, you must utilize deep future planning skills and dedicate huge swaths of me to the future, just as you do with education or making investments that have high long-term returns. Members of the Chrono-Ghettos are consistently pushed toward presentism, quick returns and instant gratification which help them keep them in their

place. "Unskilled laborers remain stuck in these present-oriented ghettos, unable to reach out and claim some control over the future. Unskilled and semi-skilled jobs require little past knowledge and even less predictive and planning abilities. Professional jobs require both." (Douglas Rushkoff)

Life lived at a high speed becomes identified with progress and valorized as a self-evident good. "This moral underpinning of mechanical speed combined with the material benefits and sheer excitement it offers, constructs a hugely powerful *narrative of social acceleration*." (John Tomlinson) An additional factor now becomes relevant; not only how much of me you possess and the status of your temporal sovereignty but also how mobile you are, how much of me you can save by moving *faster*.

"The mobility available to the affluent middle classes is quite different then the mobility of the international refugee or migrant, domestic worker. Speed for the few is contingent on others remaining stationary. Being able to get somewhere quickly is increasingly associated with exclusivity. Voluntary mobility, like speed, is seen as a social good, while fixity becomes associated with failure, with being left behind." (Judy Wajcman) Your need for speed colonized all other realms of your life, leaving no time for the contemplation, reading and reflection necessary to bring the resistance you sense in your bones to life. Your vision is obstructed as you speed towards happiness, which in the secular version has become realizing as many options as possible from all the alternatives the world has to offer.

So in truth, almost all members of your society are trapped in a structurally imposed temporal chain. With each passing year you are becoming more harried, and feel like you have less of me, regardless of how much you work or which socio-economic class you belong to. Believe it or not, but also members at the very top of the power pyramids, those you consider to be extremely privileged, often feel like they are running out me, or would wish my passage would slow down. Even people who are not stuck in the Chrono-Ghettos feel my constraints.

Be sure to remember that if you want to topple the power pyramids of your societies, the Chrono-Ghettos will have to fall as well. I will have to be redistributed and reconceptualized, the boundaries of quantifiable passage broken up. You will have to question your dedication to a life of relentless speed and work cycles. You will have to question the reasons why we are entrapped in this incessant clock time. You will have to question the secular version of happiness, the achievements and glory of an age you

have passed by. You will have to dismantle the chains I am in, break the bonds that bind you. Because your thoughts, of course, affect me just as much as I affect you. You *must* reconceptualize me. You *must* release me and yourself simultaneously.

Find out more about Klara [here](https://www.instagram.com/klara.deb/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/klara.deb/?hl=en>).

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