

SYNOPSIS

TIME IN SOFTWARE

We live in a digital world. Computers are a huge part of our daily life, and by now, we probably would not know how to live without them. And it doesn't end here. Digital culture is a continuously evolving field with new technologies constantly being developed – often in attempt to make our lives easier. Accordingly, the digital culture changes us and the way we live. Digital technologies are often advertised in a discourse that values productivity and efficiency – if you look at huge companies, such as Google or Apple, progress, innovation and success are terms that are inexplicably linked to exactly this time maximization where productivity, efficiency and optimization are seen as key ingredients. When digital technologies are such a huge part of our daily life, we cannot help but get affected by this exhilaration and increased focus on productivity that has come to define our fast-paced society. Speed is the characteristic of contemporary life, and the speed is driven by digital technology. For the modern western man or woman, there seems to be an increased tendency of feeling busy or not being able to manage time because there is just too little of it. We need the computer to be able to navigate successfully in our everyday life – at least that is what we are told. In the chapter “Real-time streams”, professor of digital humanities David Berry introduces the idea of how the computer can in this sense be an extension of the mind. (Berry, 2011) Stepping back and reflecting upon the role that technological devices play in your own daily life, you will quickly come to realize that we really do use this extension of the mind; to such an extent that, when we happen to be in a situation where there is no roaming or Wi-Fi access (for instance when travelling) or our mobile phone has shut down (maybe due to cold weather) – we almost feel disabled.

The fast-moving world can be seen as somehow generated through the web, that constantly refreshes with endless streams of new sources of information. This subjective feeling of “being too busy” that I mentioned before is to a large extent linked to the rate of technological development. Sociologists talk about this new temporality, and how we are entering a new consciousness of time (Wajcman, 2016). In this sense, computers are changing the concept of time.

Technological advances have always affected the relationship between space and time in society, particularly during the industrial revolution. There is nothing new about this, but our everyday timescapes appear to be accelerating exponentially. This is due to digital technology, which plays a key role because our experience of time is increasingly mediated by digital devices of all kinds. (Sora, 2016)

In this quote from Carles Sora's article “Rethinking Time in the Digital Age”, it is quite clear that the new temporality is hereby created through our usage of digital devices. In my assignment, I want to

investigate this relation we have with technology, and how it simultaneously affects the concept of time as well as our daily lives.

For this investigation, there is a need of firstly trying to get a brief understanding of how time and the need for keeping track of time has presented itself in both the analog and the digital world. In sociologist Judy Wajcman's book "Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism", light is shed upon the widespread perception that life is faster than it used to be – following this idea is a perception that what is to be blamed for this is smartphones and the internet. Wajcman gives a historical and sociological perspective that explains the motifs behind our use of technology, and how technology leads to the end of linear clock time. She argues that the digital is annihilating time, as the boundary between work and leisure becomes gradually more blurred. To support this argument, I will include perspectives from the book "Time and Temporality in the Network Society", where Robert Hassan's theories of an asynchrony temporality are presented among other things.

Hassan believes that the true temporality of networks is asynchrony, because the huge ecosystem of the Internet allows each user to engage with different spaces and times independently of their "real" local time. (...) Hassan uses social media and chat rooms as an example: there is no relationship between these communication spaces and the actual local time of the users. This is a huge challenge, given that all spaces are time contingents that shape our experience. (Sora, 2016)

The new temporality is hereby defined by the difference between the real world and the digital world which are two worlds that are not always synchronized with each other. Wajcman argues that we have shifted away from a traditional working week to a much more flexible pattern of doing things, which contributes to this predominant notion of business. This can also be seen as an effect of the technological devices giving us the ability to structure and coordinate in different ways than we did before. There are a variety of examples of how devices and apps help us in order to navigate through modern life – again, this sense of the computer being a mind extender. One example would be how we constantly have access to Google Maps and GPS signals that can guide us to the place where we want to go without having to plan or investigate anything beforehand. This is definitely a valuable tool to, very literally, navigate through daily life. In 2016, Google Maps introduced a new feature that can tell you how busy a place is in real time in cities where there is access to enough real time information (Derek, 2016) – Google Maps also has this feature that can show you if a road is very busy and hereby encourage you to consider other options, so you will not end up getting stuck in traffic. Basically, it helps you save time – it maximizes your time – it makes you more productive. Accordingly, you are able to fit into the life style trend of exhilaration.

These features reflect a tendency of the growth of the so-called ‘real-time web’. After creating a definition of time in both the analog and the digital world and analyzing to what extent temporality can be seen as changing due to our contemporary use of technology, I plan on taking a different approach that will investigate what real-time means in a technical manner. In “Real-time Streams”, David Berry argues that “*the way we have traditionally thought about the Internet has been in terms of pages, but we are about to see this changing to the concept of ‘streams’*” (Berry, 2011, p. 143).

These streams are computationally real-time and it is this aspect that is important because they deliver liveness, or ‘nowness’ to the users and contributors. Many technologists argue that we are currently undergoing a transition from a ‘slow web to a fast-moving stream... And as this happens we are shifting our attention from the past to the present, and our “now” is getting shorter’ (Berry, 2011 quoting Spivak, 2009).

Berry uses the term ‘riparian habitus’ to explain how the user is simultaneously connected and disconnected to these endless data streams. In my paper I will end up discussing how this asynchronous and ambivalent relationship that we have with technology changes what philosopher Martin Heidegger would refer to as ‘dasein’; basically, my investigation will try to conclude on why and how the human perception of time changes in the digital age.

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