ABOUT TIME
FASHION & DURATION

ANDREW BOLTON

with Jan Glier Reeder, Jessica Regan, and Amanda Garfinkel

Introduction by Theodore Martin Short story by Michael Cunningham

Photographs by Nicholas Alan Cope

THE MET

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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SPONSOR'S STATEMENT

Louis Vuitton is proud to support *About Time: Fashion and Duration*, The Costume Institute's spring 2020 exhibition, on the occasion of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 150th anniversary.

The large-scale exhibition explores fashion's inextricable link to the concept of time, revealing how fashion has both acted as a mirror of the times and also shifted notions of image and identity over the past century and a half. This idea of a long-term, ever-evolving journey of creative innovation has been at the heart of Louis Vuitton since it was founded in 1854, and such ingenuity continues today under Nicolas Ghesquière, Louis Vuitton's Artistic Director of Women's Collections and co-chair of this year's Costume Institute Benefit. Since his debut collection in 2014, Ghesquière has often explored our relationship to time through stylistic expressions that combine evocative references to the past and the future, creating a new fashion language for the House.

"The theme of The Costume Institute's exhibition," Ghesquière explains, "is exciting to me as it explores the intimate relationship between fashion and time, and their constant conversation over the last 150 years. Rethinking silhouettes, techniques, memories, or impressions from the past and marrying them with technology of the future has always been at the center of my work, and I therefore feel very engaged in this dialogue. Louis Vuitton's sponsorship of this exhibition reflects our commitment to supporting art and fashion, and I am honored to serve as co-chair of the gala."

With its investigation of fashion's past, present, and future, *About Time: Fashion and Duration* parallels Louis Vuitton's persistent quest to be a true pioneer in the fields of design and craftsmanship—from founder Louis Vuitton's revolutionary flat-topped trunk in 1858 to the House's latest collections, collaborations, and initiatives. In a world in which time can sometimes feel like the ultimate luxury, we are proud to sponsor *About Time: Fashion and Duration*.

LOUIS VUITTON

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

In celebration of the 150th anniversary of The Met's founding, we are proud to present *About Time: Fashion and Duration*. This exhibition and its accompanying publication feature a timeline of iconic fashions dating from 1870, the year of the Museum's founding, to the present moment. Each costume is paired with an alternative work that disrupts the chronology to reveal fashion's paradoxical relationship to linear notions of time. These pairings of garments also demonstrate how fashion is inextricably linked with perceptions of time and how great designers conflate past, present, and future in their work. Almost all of the featured garments were drawn from The Costume Institute's incomparable collection of more than 33,000 objects, and include numerous new donations from international designers in honor of our anniversary—contributions for which I am deeply grateful. Since its formation in 1937 as an independent entity within the Museum, The Costume Institute and its works have become an integral and popular part of the Museum and its encyclopedic holdings. Now home to the largest and most comprehensive costume collection in the world, The Costume Institute offers an unrivaled overview of Western fashion history. As you turn the pages of this book and read the names of designers and donors, you can appreciate the breadth and depth of this outstanding collection and how it continues to grow, evolve, and enlighten.

Andrew Bolton, Wendy Yu Curator in Charge of The Costume Institute, conceived of and organized this catalogue as well as the exhibition with the assistance of Amanda Garfinkel, Assistant Curator, and Jan Glier Reeder, Curatorial Consultant. Inspired by the inner and outer workings of a clock, Es Devlin, known for creating large-scale performative sculptures and environments that fuse light, music, and language, created the innovative exhibition design in collaboration with The Met's Design Department. Joseph Logan and Anamaria Morris designed this superlative publication that explores "60 minutes of fashion" through beautiful black-and-white photography by Nicholas Alan Cope. Michael Cunningham, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his novel *The Hours*, contributes a new short story that recounts a day in the life of a woman over 150 years, a time span that the reader understands through the protagonist's changes in attire. And Theodore Martin, a professor of English at the University of California, Irvine, analyzes a multitude of theoretical responses to the nature of time, reiterating that time is not simply a sequence of historical events.

This ambitious project would not have been possible without the sponsorship of Louis Vuitton and the encouragement of its Artistic Director of Women's Collections, Nicolas Ghesquière. Their generosity was crucial to realizing this timely and timeless publication and exhibition. I am also eternally grateful for Condé Nast's continued support. Its involvement is bolstered by the enthusiasm of its artistic director and Met Trustee Anna Wintour, and I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Anna for her passionate support of The Costume Institute. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of The Costume Institute and the many departments of The Met who contributed their time and expertise to mounting yet another extraordinary and complex fashion exhibition and for conceiving and publishing this innovative catalogue.

I urge you to take your time studying the images on the following pages and appreciating the passage of 150 years of fashion. It is a poetic and fitting way to celebrate our founders as well as fashion's rich history over the lifetime of this institution.

Max Hollein
Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

ON TIME

Theodore Martin

It is a difficult business—this time-keeping; nothing more quickly disorders it than contact with any of the arts.
—Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, 1928

The Timepiece of the Mind

The one thing we all seem to know about time is that there's just never enough of it. Where did you even find the time to start reading this essay? Do you have enough time left to finish it? Time can always be counted on to do the one thing it does best: pass, whether we want it to or not. Children grow, bodies age, memories fade, weekends end, treasured objects obsolesce, outfits go out of style—time passes, and in passing, it slips away. You can't get it back. (Except maybe the outfits. But we'll get back to those.) Time is a precious and finite and essentially unrecyclable resource, which is why we worry so much about wasting it, why we try so hard not to lose track of it. Our constant awareness of time's passing suggests that, as famously complex and elusive a philosophical problem as time is, it is also a painfully simple thing. Time is change. The passage of time tells us that things change and will keep changing and, usually, can't be changed back.

The distinct sense of time as always fleeting and always changing is one of the hallmarks of modern life. In 1863 the French poet Charles Baudelaire proposed that modernity could be defined primarily by "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent"—qualities that marked both the fact that times were changing and the feeling that they were changing at a faster clip than ever before. What Baudelaire characterizes as the "transitory, fugitive element" of the modern world, Virginia Woolf describes more starkly in her 1928 novel *Orlando* as "the shock of time." More than shock, even; something closer to terror: "For what more terrifying revelation can there be," Woolf writes, "than that it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side, the future on another. But we have no time now for reflections; Orlando was terribly late already." For Woolf, the sheer, shocking force of time's passage—its ephemerality and fugitivity—seems barely survivable on its own terms. We manage it only by taking shelter in memories of the past or in imaginings of the future. Yet time never ceases to remind us of its intense, ineluctable presence, which is the wonderful irony of this passage: there is "no time now" to reflect on the nature of time since, according to the authority of the clock, Orlando, running late, has already wasted too much of it.

Woolf was obsessed with the cruelty of the clock. In the novelist's 1925 masterpiece *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway "feared time itself." This fear is most palpable in response to the public spectacle of the striking clock. Clarissa feels "an indescribable pause; a suspense . . . before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable." Clocks, in Woolf's worlds, are threatening, oppressive, patriarchal. They divide and conquer, as she makes clear in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of proportion."

Woolf balked at the "authority" and "submission" embodied by the clock and at its parsimonious commitment to measurement, and she was in constant pursuit of ways to escape it. *Orlando* is one of her boldest escape acts. The novel is a mock biography that mocks biography, as its subject—a young English duke who lives for several hundred years, practically without aging, and one day in the middle of his life wakes up as a woman—doesn't live according to the steady, chronological rhythm of biological or biographical time. Orlando defies the quintessentially modern ways of thinking about temporality and change: she doesn't change over time in the way she's supposed to—that is, she doesn't

age—yet she *does* change in one way (her sex) that most of Woolf's readers at the time would have found incomprehensible. Orlando's life makes no sense from the conventional perspective of clock and calendar, according to which certain things never change and other things never stop changing. Woolf's transhistorical biography of Orlando thus uses literary convention against itself, turning biographical form inside out in order to ask, What, really, is the time of a life? In what more complex ways might our lives be subject to time?

Woolf finds the answer in what she calls the "extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind." The way we measure time in the world doesn't necessarily jibe with the way we experience time in our heads. And our heads, Woolf asserts, "work with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second." Ticking away in our minds, time turns out to be a rather more elastic substance. Ten minutes spent reading this essay might feel like ten hours, or it might (if you and I both are lucky) feel like no time at all.

Attuned to "the timepiece of the mind," we find that our whole sense of time changes. In fact, it becomes hard to think of "time" in the singular at all. "There are," Woolf writes, only half-jokingly, "(at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once." How can that be? If perception bends time, memory multiplies it. A stray experience in the present suddenly, inexplicably conjures a memory from our past, and before we know it, we are caught up in the "seventy-six different" timelines (give or take a few) that memory threads through our heads. Orlando is the literary invention that embodies this: the longer she lives, the more memories she accrues, the more timelines she finds herself living on. "Time has passed over me," Orlando realizes at the end of the novel. "Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights a candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers." Memory is a thousand wormholes strewn across the present, just waiting for us to fall in and find ourselves transported to a different time.

One of the most famous wormholes in modern literature is a piece of cake. In *Swann's Way*, the first volume of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the young Marcel takes a bite of a petite madeleine and finds himself overwhelmed by the visceral, sensual force of the past that is hidden "in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) which we do not suspect." Proust's term for this experience is *involuntary memory*: a "visual memory" attached to sense impressions like tastes and smells. In Marcel's case, the taste of a small cake dipped in lime-blossom tea causes the suppressed memory of his entire childhood in Combray to burst unexpectedly to the surface. Thus, hidden within a taste, a memory, and within that memory, a different experience of time. The memory of Combray, Marcel tells us, "had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, filling me with a precious essence: or rather, this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. I had ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal." Memory is not only *in* us; it *is* us. The idea that our identity is constituted through memory completely reorients our relationship to time. We are no longer "contingent" and "mortal," caught up in the constant change and terrifying "brevity" of everyday life. Instead, through the hidden gateways of dimly remembered sensations, we discover, Proust says, something "more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful": a sense of the grand continuity of time erected upon "the immense edifice of memory."

The multiple, looping timelines of memory require us to rethink not only our fidelity to the clock but also our assumptions about what constitutes a lifetime. By the end of *Orlando*, Woolf's

fictional biographer can do nothing but throw up her hands: "The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute." (This declaration was no small concession for Woolf to make; her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was the founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

Woolf's and Proust's ideas about time owe a significant debt to the philosopher Henri Bergson. Now largely unknown outside academic circles, Bergson was *the* celebrity philosopher of his age. And his influence on modern literature was more than indirect: Bergson married Proust's second cousin, and the novelist was best man at the couple's wedding. Bergson argues that our basic sense of temporal succession—the idea of a present moment perpetually erased and replaced by the next one—is an illusion, a mistake born of the human tendency to translate temporal experience into spatial terms (space being the place where objects can be discretely numbered and ordered). The simple, linear movement from one moment in time to the next is, Bergson suggests, not how time really works at the psychological or subjective level. Bergson refers to this kind of mental time as "duration" (*durée*). "Pure duration," he writes in *Time and Free Will*, "is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego . . . refrains from separating its present state from its former states." For Bergson, all our inner experiences—thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories—exist together in the mind at once; it makes no sense to separate them into the form of a linear sequence. "Inner duration," says Bergson, "is nothing else but the melting of states of consciousness into one another." Durée describes an experience of time in which "heterogeneous moments permeate one another" and "the past co-exists along with the present."

The past and the present happening at the same time? It's not as far-fetched as it sounds. Really, it's just another way of describing the split time of memory, which returns us to the past even as we experience it in the present. At the turn of the century, Bergson was not the only thinker preoccupied with the strange temporality of memory. Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious is, in its own way, a theory of time. In the unconscious, formative and traumatic experiences leave a trace in the form of repressed memories that are relived later as dreams, symptoms, or neuroses. What is repressed always returns. Freud describes our confrontations with these compulsive returns and repetitions emanating from the unconscious as experiences of the uncanny: the eerie feeling that we've seen something, encountered something, before. The Freudian unconscious, like the Bergsonian durée, is a way of explaining how the past and the present might really coexist. For both thinkers, temporal life is woven from the wayward, multistranded thread of memory. Woolf concurs. As she puts it in *Orlando*, "Memory is the seamstress" of our inner lives, "and a capricious one at that."

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a young physicist was doing his own part to redefine the nature of time. Albert Einstein's theories of relativity refuted the classic Newtonian assumption that there is a single, absolute time flowing through the universe. It "had always tacitly been assumed in physics," Einstein explains, "that the statement of time had an absolute significance." He showed this assumption to be false. Time isn't absolute; it is relative. In Einstein's words, "Every reference-body . . . has its own particular time." (Consider, at the suggestion of the physicist Carlo Rovelli, the "simple" yet mind-bending fact that "time passes faster in the mountains than it does at sea level.") Einstein's theory of time's relativity was compatible with turn-of-the-century art and philosophy in some ways but not in others. Eventually things came to a head: in 1922 Bergson and Einstein took part in a public debate about the nature of time. As Jimena Canales recounts in her wonderful book *The Physicist and the Philosopher*, Einstein used his platform at the debate to insist that time was a problem solely for physics, not philosophy. His opening remarks were fighting words: "The time of the philosophers does not exist." Bergson, by contrast, believed that the apparent incompatibility between physical time and psychological time

made it all the more necessary to study time phenomenologically, at the level of perception. As Bergson saw it—provocatively, if not entirely accurately—the true relativity of time was most evident in his own concept of durée. "We are," he proclaimed, "more Einsteinian than you, Monsieur Einstein."

The story of Euro-American modernism is thus in part the story of how we came to think of the mind as its own distinctive kind of timepiece. Memories, sense impressions, involuntary thoughts, unconscious desires: these key terms for artists and thinkers at the turn of the century chart a sustained attempt to extricate private time from public time, temporal perception from chronological measurement. For writers like Woolf and Proust, the fundamental truth of being human is that our minds process time in a way that the machine of the clock simply can't capture. Clearly, we live as much in the past as we do in the present; we may be caught up in time's swift current, but just as often, we find ourselves swimming against it. Life never runs quite like clockwork. "The past is never dead. It's not even past," William Faulkner famously quipped. Bergson and Freud couldn't agree more.

What, then, of poor Baudelaire, modern prophet of ephemerality? After all, he is interested less in time's persistence than in its relentless passage. In Baudelaire's view, the "transitory, fugitive element" of modern time is not so easy to ignore or dispense with. He is unconvinced that time's passing can actually be slowed, that change can really be stopped. Woolf, I think, understands this. It's why *Orlando* reads more like a comedy—that is to say, a fantasy—and why *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel about our distinctly human "fear" of time, stands as Woolf's great tragedy. Evading what she calls the "violent disruption" of the chiming clock is, in the end, harder than it sounds. Perhaps we do sometimes manage to escape into the temporal flow of our own heads, to wander down the winding paths of memory, to take shelter in perception's permanent distension of time. But what in reality are we trying so hard to escape from?

Clockwise

Time was once synced to the stars, to the seasons, and to the theological horizon of eternity. But that was a long time ago.

"One of the hardest ideas for us to grasp," the historian Stefan Tanaka suggests, "is that the constant passage of time—past, present, and future—did not always exist as we understand it today." How *did* it come to exist? What is the history of our own deceptively natural conception of time? As Western societies became modern—that is to say, secular, nation-based, and capitalist—they developed increasingly rigid and precise systems of timekeeping. The proliferation and naturalization of those systems radically transformed the way we think about time. This modern sense of time—or, as some scholars call it, modern time-consciousness—developed roughly between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was spurred by the invention of mechanical clocks; the emergence of commercial capitalism; the spread of secularism and Enlightenment rationality, which replaced an eschatological or prophetic sense of the future with earthly ideas of progress, probability, and development; discoveries in the natural and physical sciences, including Isaac Newton's idea of mathematical time, James Hutton's work on geological time, and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution; and revolutions both political and economic (the American, French, Haitian, and Industrial revolutions, among others), which made change, contingency, and impermanence seem the defining features of the modern world. These developments, alongside a string of technological innovations centered on speed, motion, and communication—the railroad, the wireless telegraph, the cinematograph—profoundly recast the way time was measured and the way it was valued.

Clocks began to proliferate in Europe in the fourteenth century. From that point on, in the words of historian Jacques Le Goff, "the clock was to be the measure of all things." Beginning with the introduction of large public clocks on churches and in town squares, the centering of the clock in everyday life established time as a fully social concept rather than a natural or sacred one. Even our most elemental units for measuring time did not always exist; they had to be invented. So, too, did our habitual ways of keeping tabs on it. Clocks gained minute hands at the end of the fifteenth century and second hands at the end of the sixteenth. The electric clock was invented in 1916. Wristwatches did not become common until the 1920s.

The social institution that most fully internalized the logic of the clock in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the factory. Industrial-era factories radically altered the relation between work and time. As the historian Vanessa Ogle explains in her book *The Global Transformation of Time*, modern time "was increasingly linked up with occupational notions—work time, leisure time, recreational time." One of the most far-reaching consequences of industrial labor and the factory system was the reorganization of modern society around what the historian E. P. Thompson has famously termed "time-discipline." Employers desired more precise ways to measure and track how time at work was being spent; workers, in turn, needed to internalize these new forms of measurement and tracking in order to ensure that they wouldn't lose their jobs for being late. The factory workplace of time sheets, late fines, and break bells shaped not only the rhythms of labor and the habits of workers but an entire era's belief in the essential truth that time is of the essence—our persistent faith, still today, in the virtue of things like punctuality and efficiency.

Time isn't something you can hold in your hands, yet factories even made it something you could steal. Loafing workers were described as "stealing time" from their bosses, though in truth, as Karl Marx reminds us, it was usually the other way around: factory life was deeply shaped by the "'small thefts' of capital from the workers' meal-times and recreation times,'" the owners' "'petty pilferings of minutes.'" Such pettiness makes sense. Marx quotes the wisdom of one nineteenth-century factory inspector: "Moments are the elements of profits." Factory owners hoped to hoard as many of their workers' moments as they could in order to extract the maximum profit; workers, in turn, wanted to hold on to the time that was by all rights theirs. This fight over the ownership of time led directly to the bitter struggle in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to establish legal limits on the length of the working day. Despite their obvious differences, both sides in the struggle agreed on one fundamental thing: the most valuable commodity to be found in factories was workers' time. Simply put, industrial capitalism was what it first meant for time to be money.

Thus was time mechanized by clocks and socialized by industry. (Eventually hourly wages would become the norm, clinching the point.) Later in the nineteenth century, a new problem presented itself: how to get everyone on the *same* time. Time had to be standardized. In the mid- to late 1800s, every city in the United States kept its own time, so there were hundreds, even thousands of local times spread across the country, many separated by just a few minutes. "This patchwork of local times," Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes in his classic study *The Railway Journey*, "was no problem as long as traffic between the places was so slow that the slight temporal differences really did not matter." Those time differences began to matter, though, thanks to the speed of train travel. In 1883 railroad companies introduced the first standard time zones in the United States. (These became the four official time zones of the country in 1918.) Then in 1884 government officials from across the globe gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the adoption of Greenwich mean time, or global standard time (now called Coordinated Universal Time). As Stephen Kern explains in *The Culture of Time and Space*, the

1884 International Prime Meridian Conference "proposed to establish Greenwich as the zero meridian, determined the exact length of the day, divided the earth into twenty-four time zones one hour apart, and fixed a precise beginning of the universal day." Kern calls the invention of standard time the "most momentous development in the history of uniform, public time since the invention of the mechanical clock." Although it took several decades for the conference's plan to be adopted, nations slowly capitulated. By the 1940s, most (though not all) of the world lived life on global standard time. If the push for temporal standardization had a utopian dimension—the dream, Adam Barrows writes in *The Cosmic Time of Empire*, of turning the world "into one great cosmopolitan timepiece"—it also had an imperialist one. The imposition of standard time was a key facet of colonial bureaucracy, and it made local economies easier to absorb into one grand, globalized world market.

The type of time that grew from the processes of industrialization and standardization had several distinctive features. Time began to be money—to have a value—and it also began to be progress: to imply a sense of direction and development. Modern time is measurable and monetizable, ordered and linear, unwavering and unidirectional, always improving. It flows in a single, steady line from a finished past to a fleeting present to an unknown future. Above all, modern time prizes and privileges the new. (The term *modernity* comes in part from the German *neue Zeit*, literally "new time.") The Frankfurt School philosopher Walter Benjamin famously called this kind of time "homogenous empty time": a neutral backdrop or blank medium for clocking history's constant march, its steady, dependable, destructive progression.

Homogenous empty time also inculcates a powerful sense of simultaneity: the vision of a world in which many different things are happening in many different places all at the same time. The political theorist Benedict Anderson argues that the experience of simultaneity—felt, for instance, through the collective act of reading the daily newspaper, the date in the header serving to synchronize its far-flung readers—was central to how "imagined communities" like societies and nations were formed. This feeling of simultaneity became even more vivid in the age of radio and television broadcasts. In this way, modern time steadily became not only standardized but synchronized, premised on the idea that everything all around the world is happening all at once. Readers, set your watches.

Forged in the fires of modernization and globalization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, modern time then set its sights squarely on getting faster. And faster. The Marxist geographer David Harvey refers to this phenomenon as "time-space compression." Basically, the history of time in the twentieth century is a history of attempts to make things take less time. Efficiency, speed, acceleration—these have been the watchwords of the past hundred years. The dream of commerce is to reduce production times (how long it takes to make something) and circulation times (how long it takes to deliver it) as much as humanly—or inhumanly—possible. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Fordist assembly line and the Taylorized workplace introduced faster and ever more carefully synchronized temporal routines into working life. No wasted movements, no wasted time. The rhythms of consumption were trained to keep pace; this is how we got the gift of planned obsolescence. By the end of the century, computerization and the advent of the Internet allowed both social interactions and financial transactions to take place at hitherto unimaginable speeds.

These days, acceleration may seem a more or less natural fact of contemporary life. The pace of your day quickens, your phone goes out of date faster, your social-media feeds auto refresh; existence increasingly feels like a desperate and ultimately doomed attempt just to keep up. Welcome to temporal life in the digital age, an age that makes many people feel as if they are expected to live their lives—to work and consume and surf and scroll—around the clock. Following the critic Jonathan Crary, we may think of this as "24/7 time," which prompts us to be digitally engaged every hour of the day. Under

the regime of 24/7 time, the difference between work time and leisure time disappears; even sleep cycles suffer. In this latest, most advanced stage of capitalist life, being alive means being always on, all the time, twenty-four hours a day. At this point, speed may start to be indistinguishable from stasis. Things change so rapidly that one stops noticing change at all.

Speed, however, is finally a zero-sum game. If the modern world really does seem to be moving ever faster, that is because a great many people have to work harder to get it up to speed. This is to say that digital time, despite its clever name, is underwritten by real human beings. What feels like acceleration to some is unending drudgery for others. It is thus important to remember that the 24/7 temporality of digital connectivity turns out to be just one side of a coin whose obverse bears the imprint of the intensified forms of time-discipline that dominate today's factories, warehouses, and shipping centers, where workers wear digital tracking devices that time their movements down to the second. Here, then, is a different take on what time theft might mean in the digital age. It's easy to want things to take less time. But all the time we wish to save has to come from somewhere. More often than not, it is taken from other people's time.

Counterclockwise

The story of standardization, synchronization, and acceleration is one story to tell about modern time. It is the story of the centuries-long process by which workers, citizens, and nations learned to sync their lives to the social machine of the clock. Bound up as it is at every step with the histories of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism, the story is not necessarily a happy one. It is not, however, the only story. As modern time became an increasingly inescapable mode of social organization, it inevitably became something else too: a site of intense political contestation. Modernity, then, is also the tale of how time became political—how a great many people came to see it as something to be challenged, something to be reimagined, something, above all, worth fighting for.

Walter Benjamin relates an anecdote about the July Revolution of 1830 in France. At a certain point, he writes, it became clear that the revolutionaries were targeting the clocks themselves: "On the first evening of fighting it turned out that the clocks in towers were being fired on simultaneously and independently from several places in Paris." And why shouldn't they shoot out the clocks? Firing at the clock towers was simply the literalization of a desire that has been one of the defining radical impulses of the modern era: the longing to extricate ourselves from oppressive modes of timekeeping.

What this longing registers is that time is hardly a harmless abstraction. Ideologies of timekeeping have long been mechanisms of exploitation, domination, and oppression. Geopolitical power is even expressed in terms of time: some societies are seen as "modern" or "advanced," while others are described as "backward" or "primitive." Such accounts of so-called primitive cultures presume that all societies can be located along a single universal timeline of proper social development. The ideology of development provided the temporal language used to justify centuries of colonialism; attempts to rule other cultures are couched as efforts to help them "catch up." Thus has modernity organized itself around this central temporal division: between those people deemed adequately of the moment and those perceived to have somehow fallen behind the times. The enforcement of the divide between modern and primitive is a signal feature of Western modernity's temporal imagination. In an essay on the politics of anachronism, the theorist Elizabeth Freeman explains that, by the lights of a range of popular nineteenth-century pseudosciences, "women, criminals, people of color, homosexuals, and the poor"

were all "figured temporally"—that is, categorized as anachronistic or atavistic, ideologically consigned to various states of arrested development.

Oppression, in other words, has a temporal component. Scholars have developed a range of interlocking frameworks to help us conceptualize how this works. For queer theorists, modern time is best understood as "straight time": time clocked to the heteronormative ideal of familial reproduction, tuned to a future that is, as Lee Edelman wryly puts it, "kid stuff." Straight time brooks no deviance or deviation; it thus has no time for queerness. Indigenous studies, in turn, sees modern time as "settler time." Within "dominant settler reckonings of time," writes Mark Rifkin, indigenous orientations in time disappear. Native peoples are either "consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms." In both cases, the violence of settler colonialism is registered in part as "the denial of Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*." And that denial reinforces more material forms of inequality. Michael Hanchard uses the phrase "racial time" to describe what he calls the "inequalities of temporality" that have shaped black experience across the African diaspora. Racial time indexes the racialized differentials of power that surface as unequal experiences of time. In the twentieth-century United States, the inequality of racial time has often manifested as an experience of delay: being forced to wait for legal rights and social services that other groups have already been granted.

From this perspective, we can see why a key part of the rhetoric of so many twentieth-century liberation movements has been the refusal *to wait* for equality—the unwillingness to abide the repeatedly delayed timeline of so-called progress. Think of the title to Martin Luther King Jr.'s stirring critique of gradualism and incrementalism: *Why We Can't Wait*. For King, the fight for civil rights is inseparable from the politics of time. It is a struggle against the state's attempt to "prolong the timetable of freedom," an antidote to "the narcotics of delay." This politicized relationship to present time was a motivating force for a wide range of African American activists and artists in the twentieth century, especially in the short-lived but highly influential Black Arts movement of the 1960s and '70s. "It's Nation Time!" wrote the poet Amiri Baraka in 1970. It's nation time, echoed Joe McPhee on the tenor sax later that year on his free-jazz homage to Baraka. "Seize the time," instructed Bobby Seale in his 1970 book about the Black Panther Party he helped found. "Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around," mused Ishmael Reed in his 1972 novel *Mumbo Jumbo*. Or one could always just heed the words of jazz legend Sun Ra, whom both Reed and Baraka revered. Transmitting from the outer space of Afrofuturism (in the 1974 film *Space Is the Place*), Ra declared, "We work on the other side of time."

The question is: how do we get there?

How, in other words, can we begin to imagine correctives to the intransigent inequalities and willful forgetfulness of colonial time, racial time, settler time, straight time? How might we fashion alternatives to the modern reign of clock and calendar? The philosopher Jacques Derrida believes that time is "'out of joint': time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run, . . . out of order. . . . Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted." That's a mouthful, but all he really means is this: time is a mess. We think it runs in a simple straight line, but it doesn't. We think we're living only in the now, but we're not. For Derrida, time is never linear and the present is never fully present; it is always haunted by the ghosts of past injustice. (The phrase *out of joint* is Hamlet's, who knew a thing or two about being haunted by the need to avenge past wrongs.)

You don't have to believe in ghosts to believe that our present is haunted by other times and alternative timelines, by the specter of a past that isn't exactly past. Rifkin describes these out-of-joint moments as "temporal knottings," instances of multiple, overlapping temporalities that give the lie to time's empty homogeneity or imperial universality. This knotting of different times is what the

theorist Christina Sharpe has in mind when she argues that contemporary black life is lived "in the wake" of chattel slavery. The wake, for Sharpe, is a figure for representing the temporality of slavery's aftermath, the time of a historical trauma that is ongoing and well-nigh oceanic. To live in the wake is to grasp how, in Sharpe's words, "disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present." The atrocities of slavery, of settler colonialism, of industrial exploitation and immiseration are not *behind* us in the sense of being long gone. They are behind us only in a more intimately proximate sense: as the past's ghostly breath on our neck; as the ongoing damage left in time's wake.

In short, we bear the burden of the past. Our now did not emerge out of nowhere. Sometimes the present's historical burden may have the eerie weightlessness of a ghost. Other times it may feel as weighty as several centuries' worth of accumulated injustice. In either case, there is something powerful and even radical in the insistence that time lags, drags, haunts, remains—that it does not move with the straight, fluid, forgetful motion of a river or an arrow. The past persists. Time ties us up in knots.

Time can also put things in perspective. There are many scales of time. Most of us measure our lives according to the basic units of minutes and hours, days and years and maybe decades. But those time spans barely scratch the surface. In our current age of ecological crisis and the catastrophe of a changing climate, we need to think bigger—or more precisely, longer. We must think in terms of what the historian Fernand Braudel famously dubbed "the *longue durée*" and what geologists call "deep time": extended timescales of thousands or hundreds of thousands of years that dramatically reframe the temporality of human experience. As the climate scientist David Archer explains in his book *The Long Thaw*, "Our fossil fuel deposits, 100 million years old, could be gone in a few centuries, leaving climate impacts that will last for hundreds of millennia." These time spans are enormous and nearly unthinkable; imagining them is a significant cognitive challenge, perhaps even an impossible one. But the challenge is necessary if we hope to fully grasp the present crisis of climate change, whose consequences are guaranteed to play out over timescales that significantly exceed the standard human life span. What will an altered climate do to us and to our planet in fifty years? In a hundred? In a thousand years? In ten thousand? Our clocks and calendars offer little help in imagining these scenarios, yet the scenarios are no less urgent because of it. To truly come to terms with the causes and consequences of our intensifying climate crisis, we have to learn how to place human history on a different timeline altogether.

This might all be starting to sound a bit heady, if not disheartening. That's fair enough. But in truth, you do not need to be a philosopher—or, for that matter, a geologist—to see time differently. In fact, it's something you do all the time. We have at our disposal all manner of machines that can slow time, stop time, reverse it, reorder it. They are what we call artworks. Indeed, art's capacity to alter time may be its most distinctive power. The very phrase *time machine* was invented not by a scientist but, naturally, by a novelist. (H. G. Wells coined it in 1895.) Perhaps it is only fitting, then, that we should see novels themselves—and other storytelling mediums too—as the prototypical time machines, capable of casting us forward and backward in time, of experimenting with chronology and disrupting linearity, of fleshing out the unknown worlds of future times and the forgotten worlds of past ones. What's more, acts of reading and viewing take their own kind of time, allowing us to escape, from time to time, the relentless clock of everyday life. Art, in short, turns out to be one of our most elemental and enduring technologies for recalibrating our relationship to time.

So if you really want to grasp the ghostliness of time, read Toni Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved*. Through the ghost Beloved, Morrison conjures a collective past that won't stay past, a memory that remains alive even for "you who never was there." Beloved's haunting is how Morrison can say of the history of slavery: "All of it is now it is all now." If instead you're trying to envision time as a more

material substance, check out Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's spectacular multigenre work *Dictee*. Here Cha fashions herself a temporal archaeologist, sifting through the "sediment" of "dead time" as it has accumulated around the unwritten histories of Korean and Korean American women's experience. In *Dictee* she seeks to "dust the exposed layer and reveal the / unfathomable / well beneath." For Cha this excavation of sedimented time is a way to "not repeat history in oblivion." And if you want to witness yet more ways that art saves time—rescuing it, in Cha's words, from oblivion—keep reading. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, you can see what it would look like to "come unstuck in time." In the science fiction of J. G. Ballard, you can learn how to listen for "the voices of time." In Marilynne Robinson's feminist classic *Housekeeping*, you will find a moving meditation on transience and transcendence, on time as the world's seemingly endless "potential for invidious change." And if you want something with a more vinegary taste to it, try Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The novel is Rushdie's attempt to achieve what he deems "the most exalted of possibilities": "the grand hope of the pickling of time!" Rushdie imagines each chapter as a pickle jar, each episode in his story of Indian independence an opportunity for "the world" to "taste the pickles of history." "To pickle," he writes, "is to give immortality, after all." Pickled time is yet another name for historical persistence—one more metaphor for how we preserve the past and how we aspire to pass it on to others.

If time is a knot, a wake, a ghost, a voice, then artists have been our mariners, our mourners, our exorcists, our ventriloquists—even, why not, our picklers. They teach us that there is more to time than you can count on the fingers of your hands, let alone on the hands of a clock.

The Fabric of the Present

Clothes, too, are a way of telling time.

Think of them, first, as a kind of grammar of dates, a syntax of periodization: flapper dress means "1920s"; miniskirt means "1960s." In this way, clothes contribute to our sense of history as a succession of individually styled epochs. The distinctive historicity of fashion is a running joke in *Orlando*: changing styles are the one thing that reliably alert Orlando to the fact that her times have changed. The onset of the Victorian era, for instance, is announced by the fact that "rugs appeared, beards were grown and trousers fastened tight under the instep." Noticing "a female figure clothed in flowing white" next to "a portly gentleman wearing a frock-coat and sponge-bag trousers," Orlando is stopped short: "She had never, in all her life, seen anything at once so indecent, so hideous, and so monumental." Indecency, hideousness, and monumentality—this unusual combination of traits is Woolf's idea of what it looks like to see something historically new. In *Orlando*, that experience is stitched into an era's attire. Realizing that Victorian mores meant that a woman could no longer "wear knee-britches or skirts as the fancy took one," Orlando "was forced to acknowledge that times were changed." Times do change. Fashion makes sure we get the message.

Baudelaire, too, was preoccupied with the temporal dimension of fashion. In fact, his entire theory of modernity was inspired by fashion plates that his friend and publisher Auguste Poulet-Malassis had sent him. "I have before me," Baudelaire explains, "a series of fashion-plates dating from the Revolution and finishing more or less with Consulate." (That's about 1789 to 1804; Baudelaire himself was writing more than half a century later.) There are two things Baudelaire finds particularly interesting about these images of bygone styles. First, he is moved by the idea that the clothes capture "the moral and aesthetic feeling of their time." One could, in this sense, imagine "a fashion plate representing each age,"

a style standing in for the essence of each successive historical period—the spirit of the age, as woven into the fabric of its clothes.

But Baudelaire has a second, more dispiriting thought about the fashion plates in front of him: most people, he realizes, will probably laugh at them. "These costumes," he laments, "[will] seem laughable to many thoughtless people." Like the clothes, this laughter has a historical component. Laugh, and the past does not laugh with us; and that, it seems, how we know it is past.

When it comes to bygone styles and outdated fashions, the impulse toward mockery is really a relationship to time. This relationship inevitably implicates the one doing the laughing. Baudelaire predicts that one day "we will be astonished at ever having been able to mock" the fashions of the past. More likely, we will one day be astonished to realize that we have become the subject of such mockery ourselves. We, too, are doomed to be laughed at. Fashions can thus be said to date us in at least two senses: they tie us to a particular moment in time, and in doing so, they guarantee that we will eventually become relics of the past. Time keeps moving, after all, and so it is bound to move on without us. Nothing gold can stay, apparently, and nothing stylish either.

If clothes clock historical change, in other words, they are also profoundly susceptible to it. "To be *in style*," the literary critic Kent Puckett perceptively notes, "is to subordinate oneself to the rules of the moment." It is also, he continues, "to risk the necessary obsolescence of the merely stylish." If style serves as a stand-in for the essence of a particular era, it also serves as a reminder that that era isn't going to last. One way or another, obsolescence comes for all of us. Consider this passage from the infamous novel of men's fashion *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis: "The suit I wear today is from Alan Flusser. It's an eighties drape suit, which is an updated version of the thirties style. The favored version has extended natural shoulders, a full chest and a bladed back. The soft-rolled lapels should be about four inches wide with the peak finishing three quarters of the way across the shoulders. Properly used on double-breasted suits, peaked lapels are considered more elegant than notched ones." Ellis's passage takes place, in its own words, "today"—that is, it strives to be maximally contemporary. Yet that contemporariness clearly hasn't lasted. Reading the passage now, in our own day and age, we are likely to feel above all that its "today"—full of loose-fitting suits and preposterously wide lapels—looks distinctly outdated. Judged by the calendar of fashion, Ellis's eighties seem like a really long time ago. (I mean, he may as well be describing the preferred way to fasten trousers under your instep.) Style, then, might have the distinct ring of timeliness, but beneath that ring you can usually hear something else: the audible tone of time passing, and thus passing us by. This is the sour sound of obsolescence—the off-key note of the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.

Time's constant current—no less than our own temporal desire to *be* current—is both literalized and metaphorized by fashion. Baudelaire grasped this, and Woolf did too. For these two definitively modern writers, fashion is another name for time. But not just for time. More specifically, fashion for Baudelaire and Woolf indexes the peculiarities and paradoxes of the temporal condition we call being contemporary. "A good example of this special experience of time that we call contemporariness is fashion," writes the philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Being *in fashion* means being up to date, of the moment, perfectly in sync with the time of the present. Fashion, in this sense, is like a broken clock. It seems to tell only one time: *now*.

Yet, in the end, fashion also helps us see what a strange and contradictory object "the now" actually is. The present moment is both immediate and ephemeral. It is the promise of timeliness, and it is the threat of obsolescence. It is defined by novelty yet also by repetition, the constant citation and recycling of past fashions. After all, the styles disavowed by one decade are happily reclaimed by the next. The

apparent barrage of revivals and recyclings in the late twentieth century prompted the great cultural critic Fredric Jameson to characterize the postmodern era as the triumph of nostalgia, an age defined by "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past." But this weird mix of present and past is really a standard feature of style itself: style is the dream of presentness dulled by the waking knowledge that nothing stays present for long. Agamben underscores this paradox: "being in fashion entails . . . a certain quality of being out-of-phase or out-of-date . . . a shade of *démodé*, of being out of fashion." Fashion is timely and untimely, now and not now, all at once. And in style's on-brand blend of immediacy, evanescence, and anachronism, we discern the true colors of the present itself.

What, then, is the present? No less than time, the present has been an enduring philosophical puzzle. It is, to be sure, invisible, ineffable, often incomprehensible. The philosopher Sylviane Agacinski believes that the "reality of the present is impossible to frame." For the theorist Lauren Berlant, the present is something we can't concretely know but "can only intuit." The intellectual historian Michael North points out that, from the perspective of our neurobiological processing of time, there may be no such thing as the present at all. Yet modernity's perennial preoccupation with style and fashion suggests that there is something irrepressible and even urgent about our need to come to terms with present time. We talk about *the now*, *the contemporary*, *the current moment* all the time. Clearly, these ideas mean something to us. But what?

In one sense, of course, stylishness seems a privilege reserved for a select few. (I, alas, am not one of them.) But the vagaries of style also carry a more universal message about the nature of present time: it is timely yet temporary, both in and out of fashion, never as new or as now as we would like to think. If that's the case, then what finally matters most about the present is what happens between us while we inhabit this impermanent time together. If presentness is anything, let's call it this: the temporality of sociality. The present is where we come to terms with the realization—as shocking as it is irrevocable—that we share a time with others. In her recent book *Beside You in Time*, Freeman writes movingly that "being together with others is a matter of keeping in time with them." This kind of keeping-in-time is contemporary time. We're all in it—in time—together. Contemporaneity is something akin to collectivity. A *now* always implies an *us*. To say that time is social, then, is not merely to say that it is a social construct (though it is that too). It is also to say more simply that time is shared. *The present*, however we may fashion or fabricate it, is one term for this aspiration toward shared or communal life. It is our way of recognizing the perilous and promising, ephemeral yet essential fact that we are stuck together in time—that we share a now, all of us, for now.

For Your Spare Time

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