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Introduction: On the beat: Owning/reclaiming time against white chronocentrism

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"What happens to a dream deferred?" As we unravel the myriad of interwoven – and often subtly concealed – ways in which white Western hegemony has affected the lives of peoples under colonial and racial subjugation, and who are still ensnared by institutionalized racism, the question asked by Langston Hughes continues to resonate. In his poem titled "Harlem," Hughes laments a stagnation in African American social progress, an imposed immobility forcing the New York neighborhood, here used as a synecdoche for the Black experience in America writ large, into a deathly stasis. Nina Simone, a friend and enthusiastic reader of Hughes, will later voice the same frustration in one of her most eloquent songs, "Mississippi Goddam," composed at the zenith of the Civil Rights Movement. There is a section of this piece in which Simone alters the traditional call-and-response structure typical of much African American music in a rather poignant way. Instead of using it to establish a proper dialogue between performer and choir – a formal strategy meant to emphasize the collective and ideally democratic dimension at the roots of Black music – she has the singers answer each of her political demands with a sharp and tone-deaf rebuttal. Her claims for "desegregation," "mass participation," and "unification" are met with a monotonous "do it slow" that sounds like a firm denial. The imperative to wait – for emancipation, equal rights, and, simply put, for better days to come – directed by those in power at a subjugated group is really to be understood as the political will to infinitely and indefinitely postpone the advent of a truly egalitarian society. Martin Luther King knew that well when he wrote how the establishment's standard response to African American revindications, "wait!," actually meant "never" (King 1964, 83).

Notwithstanding the undeniable peculiarities of the Black American experience, the perception of living in a temporal lag, which is maybe better defined as a temporal deficit, extends to dynamics of colonization and racial domination tout court as a manifestation of "the universal and timeless psychology of oppression" (Shannon 1991, 136), produced by "unequal

temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power, and knowledge" (Hanchard 1999, 253). Although not immediately recognizable together with more evident and murderous forms of oppression like colonial occupation, segregation, and racial capitalism, European time and the historical systematizations that proceed from it have always been used as a discursive construct through which experience is produced and, more importantly, policed (Fleming 2019, 282). Oppressed, racialized people everywhere have been forced to live in a time that, using the words of William Shakespeare, we could define as being "out of joint" – out of synchronization, not in line with the teleological narrative of endless progress which, from the Enlightenment to contemporary liberal democracy (and neoliberal capitalism), has been part and parcel of the ideological discourses of Western cultural and economic supremacy.

The reasons for this discrepancy are at the very roots of European colonization. Non-Western peoples' alleged cultural and constitutional inferiority was constructed and reinforced throughout modernity by means of ad hoc narratives that turned the colonized into an abject, racialized Other, and presented their submission and enlightening as a moral imperative for civilized Europe. This process was reflected in the racialization of space: borders were drawn, and systems of segregation were established to strengthen racial hierarchies. A subtler, although no less destructive, form of violence sustained the onslaught of Western expansion across the globe – that on indigenous time(s), epistemes and ontologies. Mastering time was in fact crucial to European hegemony and the expansion of the colonial project, to the point that we cannot separate the conquest of land from the encroachment of white Western chronocentrism. As historian Giordano Nanni affirms, "European territorial expansion has always been closely linked to, and frequently propelled by, the geographic extension of its clocks and calendars" (2012, 2). The sentiment of racial and cultural superiority that drove colonization was also bolstered by a "temporal hubris": a deep-seated anthropological and historical bias that allowed colonizers to imagine themselves as being part of a "time-conscious civilization in opposition to a time-less Other" (Nanni 2012, 3).

The assumption that non-Western peoples were unable to properly conceptualize time as a linear progression and were thus unable to conform to the rhythms of European life – the droning beat underlying commerce, expansion, and occupation – pushed them into a time warp when it came to defining their place in history as devised by the dominators. Again, the modern Western mind conceived of time and history as quintessentially linear – progressive narratives that described an "ordained movement from proverbial darkness to transcendent light, from unknowingness to certain knowledge, from formlessness to perfect form" (Russell 2009, 2). The supposed dissonance between colonized societies and the scientific and technological advancement that Europe boasted of laid the ground for a "denial of coevalness" (Fabian 1983, 31), the idea that those peoples existed outside civilized time. This justified the colonial project as a mission to teach those who were frozen in the infancy of history how to

keep pace with modernity. It also gave authority to its perception of the Other as primitive, capricious, aimless, and lazy, and in need of control by a superior civilization. Concepts like "primitiveness" and "backwardness" became tools in the establishment of culturally constructed, time-based structures of power that considered the European conception of time as natural, while other temporalities were nothing but anomalies, remnants of atavistic ways of life that needed to be corrected or wiped out.

As Eduard Glissant poignantly affirms, "History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the world" (1999, 64). This making of history, however, did not go unchallenged. Just like time, whose Galilean and Newtonian conception as a "flow" was tested and complicated by 20th-century physics, the Western idea of the 'march of History' (with a capital H) as championed by G.F.W. Hegel and his acolytes was revealed by postcolonial thinkers as an inherently oppressive narrative that needed to be questioned, fissured, and rearranged in order for other histories and chronologies to emerge from the silence into which they were forced. White History, in Glissant's words, "ends where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together" (1999, 64).

The revolt against Western history started right when colonizers instituted their rhythms of life in the newly annexed territories. "[C]olonial timetables, rituals, clocks and bells always remained prone to their observers' tardiness, sluggishness, dissent, defiance, resistance and procrastinations," writes Nanni. "From the outset, the 'colonised' shaped the new tempo of colonial society […] by exploiting the temporal discourses of their self-styled reformers to their own advantage" (2012, 4). This instinctive, but not at all naïve, temporal resistance to the invader extends beyond the sphere of political praxis to embrace cultural practices that, directed against dominant cultural forms, stand as acts of defiance and contestation of Western discourses on history and, more broadly, of temporal epistemologies exported and enforced by colonialism. In doing so, the oppressed sought to redress their fraught relationship with time and history, at the same time giving form and voice to subaltern orientations towards temporality that, borrowing from Houston A. Baker, Jr., achieve a "deformation of mastery" (1987, 56) fostering the materialization of submerged knowledges, and erased identities.

Disturbing the clock of oppression, worrying about its invariable linear stride with Other narratives, also means re-inscribing non-white peoples' existence in a present from which they have been barred on the grounds of their alleged inability to keep pace with modernity. Since existing outside of the monolith of Western historicized identity equals "not being at all" in the words of Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2001, 4), reclaiming time from the chronographs, calendars and histories of the dominators is ultimately an act of subject-making.

This issue gathers contributions on how white chronocentrism has been critiqued, challenged, demolished, and rebuilt so as to forcibly include its Others – a bottom-up act of

insubordination against the dominant Western, capitalist production and dissemination of time and knowledge. Rather than comparing white time and other temporalities as aporetic or disjunct epistemologies, the essays contained in this issue of *From the European South* investigate the ways in which they clash, interact, and become entangled in an attempt to rethink modernity by bringing non-Western rhythms, chronologies, and histories into the rigid borders of the white European timeframe and forcing it to engage with them.

Issue overview

The issue opens with Mattia Arioli's essay "Indigenous comics against settler time." Arioli turns towards Indigenous comics creators to highlight their rhetorical-artistic strategies in relation to the representation of time. Indigenous artists have deconstructed the traditional comics form, breaking the rigidity of frames to produce unconventional formal-narrative patterns in which time results from "multifaceted and shifting sets of relations." Arioli chooses two graphic narratives, Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance* (2010, 2021) and Michael Nicholl Yahgulanaas' *Red: A Haida Manga* (2009), to show how these artists' defiance of classic forms reflects Indigenous attitudes towards storytelling and time, refusing the settlers' portrayal of Indigenous cultures as primitive and bound to disappear, salvaging the past, commenting on the present, and imagining a future for Native people.

Mauro Carassai and Sean Pessin's essay provides a ground-breaking take on the interrelation of time and racial oppression. In "Central/marginal processing units: race, multitasking, and representations of simultaneity in *The Intuitionist,*" the epistemes and technologies of digital culture are used as hermeneutical tools to unravel the racial allegory staged by Colson Whitehead's 1999 novel. Using Compatible Time-Sharing Systems, a modular computer model, as a machinic representation of white linear logic, Carassai and Pessin contrast this procedure with a humanist, improvisational and performative approach, portrayed in the novel by the titular intuitionists. In so doing, the essay highlights the struggle of Black laborers to retake possession of their own temporality in the racialized timeframe imposed upon them by white hegemony.

Giuseppe Sofo dedicates his article to the Trinidadian Carnival. "'Time to get outta line' carnival time and the aesthetics of resistance in Trinidad and Tobago" provides an insight into the history of Trinidad and Tobago's most celebrated festivity, showing how the conception of time that characterizes the carnival also extends to the twin islands' understanding of time writ large. Sofo expounds how past revolts against colonial power and the struggle for national identity have always been interwoven with the rhythms of festivals and celebrations. In Trinidad, carnival becomes "a constant process of reconquering of time and space," making these rituals "fundamental in the fight for freedom and independence." Music, performance,

and a 'rebellious' clock dictate an unyielding rhythm of cultural resistance that informs Trinidadian life all year long.

The essay by Serena Guarracino, "Disattivare le trappole del tempo: *Traps* di Caryl Churchill; o, cosa è rimasto del femminismo nelle temporalità *queer*," is the only contribution in this issue to address white chronocentrism from the perspective of queer temporalities. Starting from a querelle on Virginia Woolf that erupted in 2023 in Italy following the publication of the article "Virginia non-binaire" by Paul B. Preciado, Guarracino aims at finding ways to go beyond a contraposition between queer and feminist studies that is often articulated in temporal terms. Using Caryl Churchill's "impossible" play *Traps* (1977) – in which many insights of queer theories on the relationship between power and the management of time resonate – as a marginal *locus* of interpellation, the essay goes on to show how its manipulation of time functions as a synecdochic deconstruction of the larger network of oppressive structures put in place by hegemonic institutions. Tracing the legacy of the political movements of the Seventies as mirrored in the play, Guarracino locates the performing body as a site of resistance and disruption, with its metamorphoses on stage defusing the 'traps' created by white normative chronocentrism and offering a "utopian space" in which oppressive power structures can be dismantled and redressed.

The essay by Rahsaan Mahadeo, "Whose youth are the future? Black youth rejecting liberal futurities in favor of liberatory visions of the not-yet-here," begins with a universal shared belief: "children are the future." But this apparent platitude reveals itself as being race- and class-coded because the conjoined forces of sanctioned poverty, institutional neglect and structural racism that are still at work in shaping the United States' social landscape often relegate underprivileged, African American youth to an "anti-future." Focusing on the city of Minneapolis, Mahadeo provides a compelling sociological analysis demonstrating how time can be racialized, how race is temporalized, and how young Black people have come to repudiate the tenets of liberal thought that sustain the national ethos.

Anna Scacchi's essay moves from a similar perspective in asking a challenging question: how do you write a Black coming-of-age story when Black children's temporality does not fit the genre? Adulthood remains elusive for young Blacks, either because they are denied the autonomy and authority of maturity or because they are deprived of the future. Not a week passes without the murder of African American children by trigger-happy police making the news. As of writing, Ryan Gainer, a fifteen-year-old boy with autism, has been killed by a sheriff's deputy in San Bernardino County, California. In "Finna: writing young Blacks into the future," Scacchi analyzes Frederick Douglass's and Harriet Jacobs's slave narratives together with two Young Adult novels, Nic Stones' *Dear Martin* (2017) and *Dear Justyce* (2020), investigating the rhetorical strategies through which African American literature has been trying

to appropriate the progressive narrative arc of a coming-of-age story and carve a Black future against the grain of white time.

The relationship between time and narrative in African American literature is also the focus of Marco Petrelli's essay, "'There are better ways and places to spend your time': historical stillness, quantum narration and Black spacetime(s) in Jason Mott's *Hell of a Book*." Using Mott's 2021 National Book Award-winning novel as a case study, this essay adopts a critical framework equally influenced by narratology, Afropessimism, and quantum physics to speculate on the possibilities of contemporary Black storytelling. But the novel's multi-dimensional spatial-temporal frame seems to suggest, in a manner not unsimilar to Michelle Wright's *Physics of Blackness*, that taking inspiration from the principles of quantum mechanics could open space for a different understanding of the African American experience – and a different way of narrating it.

Enrico Mariani's essay takes us to the Philippines and their ongoing struggle for independence from the colonial past. "The endless revolution of the Philippines in Gina Apostol's novels" analyzes *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* (2009) and *Insurrecto* (2018) to show how these works chronicle an "unfinished revolution" against the yoke of colonialism and its postcolonial aftermath. Mariani pays attention to how the interplay of different cultures, languages and technologies interact with and appropriate time to hinder the creation of an autochthonous historiographic tradition, positing that, in her novels, Apostol aims at destabilizing and reshaping notions on the historical periodization of the Philippines, at the same time drawing attention to the difficulty, and the necessity, to create collective memory and literature in colonized spacetimes.

With "Phantom limbs beating time: Black temporality in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*," Chiara Patrizi focuses on Butler's influential neo-slave narrative to untangle its intersecting timelines, showing how the novel not only revises the historiography around slavery but also challenges deep-seated assumptions regarding Blackness. Building on *Kindred*'s multi-dimensional narrative, the essay affirms how Dana can productively be read as a point in which many (Black) identities intersect. The protagonist's severed arm is at the core of this analysis as the "ghostly embodiment of a peculiar relationship with temporality." The missing limb thus becomes a metonymy for a distinctively Black understanding of time, one in which mourning and trauma force us to rethink agency and witness outside the constrictions of linear time.

The issue closes with a piece of creative writing by Noni Carter. "When the Bones Begin to Speak" critiques the conception of "man" and the "human" as articulated by the Enlightenment in contrast with the Other represented by people of color. The short story sets out to analyze these paradigms as fiction, and, through fiction, denaturalizing Eighteenth-century archives to unearth the discourses and speculations that produced the category of the human. Informed by scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva onto-epistemological pillars of Western

man, separability, determinacy, and sequentiality, the contribution develops around the latter concept – namely, that the 'human' only exists within a given spatial-temporal frame. Carter's creative cross-temporal investigation violates this frame to alter and expand the coordinates of humanity, exploring alternative ways of being.

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