WAITING *FOR* THINGS, WAITING *WITH* THINGS.

An Interpretative Analysis of the Technological Mediation of Waiting

Pili Valdivia

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Abstract

Technological acceleration and the regime of productivity have reshaped the way we inhabit time, fragmenting, compressing, and commodifying our temporal experience. In this context, waiting becomes increasingly rare and undesired. Yet waiting, as a temporal and affective state, offers a lens through which to examine our relationship with time, embodiment, and mediation. This thesis, therefore, revolves around the research question: How do technologies mediate the experience of waiting in relation to the perception of time and the self?

Challenging the view of waiting as passive or empty time, the study explores waiting as a state that withholds the possibilities of real temporality. Its broader aim is to reflect on how time is inhabited in contemporary life, and what roles technologies –ranging from money and mathematical time to mobile phones and social media– play in shaping that experience.

Employing a hybrid methodology, the thesis combines theoretical research with interpretative media analysis. Drawing from the philosophy of technology, the philosophy of time consciousness, and cultural studies, it builds a theoretical perspective through a cross-referenced literary review and philosophical sources. These ideas are then expanded through the interpretation of media artworks –musical compositions, photography, textile art, and conceptual art– treated as situated artefacts of mediated waiting.

Rather than presenting new empirical findings, this thesis offers a conceptual synthesis and an interpretation that reframes waiting as a mediated and meaningful temporal experience. By bringing together diverse theoretical voices and media artefacts, it shows how waiting can be rhythmic, existential, and potentially transformative. Ultimately, the thesis's main finding is that research itself may constitute a form of waiting –a process of inhabiting time differently, which can result in the generation of knowledge as a consequence of attentive lingering with things. In this light, mediated waiting becomes a site for temporal reclaim, and for ethical and aesthetic reflection.

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has meant a great deal to me. Not because what I've written is groundbreaking, nor because I will (hopefully) earn a degree with it, but because I had the rare pleasure of dedicating several consecutive months to the activity of thinking. If this project has been successful and reached a happy ending, it is largely thanks to the support of many people who were kind enough to think with me.

First and foremost, thank you to my advisors. To Berna, for your delicate thoughts, your nuanced perspective, and your continuous support. Your caring approach to design and your genuine curiosity for the subtleties and beauties of the everyday world have inspired me for many years.

To Sanna, for your kind but sharp advice, your world-class expertise, and for keeping me on track throughout this process. Your teaching makes something as intimidating as philisophy feel accessible to us all, and your career now serves as a source of inspiration for my own.

Thanks to my teachers over the past two years. Especially Matti, for trusting I would be a contribution to the programme, for securing me the Finnish Scholarship, for your unwavering support and availability, and for being an incredible example of commitment to the education of the New Media discipline.

To the friends who shared these two years with me and with whom I enjoyed spending cold winters, many working meetings and sauna sessions. Special thanks to Nike, Celeste, Markus, Manu, and Sacha who were generous enough to read parts of the thesis and offered thoughtful comments. And finally, to Hannah for her support and feedback, and for patiently waiting with me until the end of this long distance chapter. There's no one else I'd rather pass through time with.

Thank you.

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Flower and Cronopio [01]

By Julio Cortázar (1962)

A Cronopio comes across one single flower in the middle of the fields. First, he goes to pull it up, but considers it to be a useless cruelty and instead kneels down beside it and begins to joyfully play with the flower, i.e. he caresses the petals, he gently blows on it to make it dance, he buzzes like a bumble bee, he inhales its aroma, and finally he lies down under the flower and falls asleep surrounded by a great peace.

The flower thinks to itself – “He’s just like a flower.”

[01] Julio Cortázar, Cronopios and Famas, trans. Paul Blackburn(New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1999),123.

(0) Preface

Personal Statement

Time captivates me as a subject of study, as it is the solvent in which our lives are dissolved. As proposed by Husserl, the perceptual experience occurs within a temporal structure that involves retention, impressions and awaiting –constituting past, present and future. It is through time that we experience ourselves and the world: consciousness exists in time.[01]

Time is also interesting as a technology, for there are few technologies that are interpreted as being something they are not, in the same way technological time is commonly interpreted as *the* time. Yet, we know it is not, for all the clocks in the world can break and time would still exist; and even before time was measured, time was felt, experienced, and lived. That is to say, there is a time that is not technological, that is not quantitative or discrete. That is qualitative time.

The truth is that, in today's synchronised society, the sovereignty of clock-time (*chronos*) makes it especially hard for the qualities of lived-time (*kairos*) to be felt, and we often forget it even exists. A constant feeling of time scarcity and the imperative of always being active is at the heart of the never ending acceleration of the Western world. Time experience yields to its measurement in a synchronised flurry of action.

[01] Christian Beyer, "Edmund Husserl," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Winter 2022 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/husserl/.

As a graphic designer, my practice revolves around the fleeting and it is often concerned with everything which does not perdure. The job of contemporary graphic design is mostly concerned with transient visuals for social media that must be captured in a second, with brands that want to be ever more flexible and malleable, with packages and visuals that are thought for fast-consumption. The process' timeframes are ever more compressed, affected by the development of softwares and technologies that lead us to do more, in less time. Already bothered by the rhythms of contemporary life I saw myself creating visuals and brands at an ever-faster speed, and doubting more than ever that I would produce anything meaningful. For me, or for anyone else.

And so I saw myself exhausted and oppressed by the weights of the clock passing, and that exhaustion turned into curiosity, and that curiosity turned into research, and that research into waiting, and that waiting into emancipation.

Pili Valdivia
Berlin, Germany. 2025

Chapter I

Anticipation

(1) Introduction

Research question and topic

The question I have chosen is pertinent to the philosophy of technology and operations management alike, and it is the question of waiting. What I will attempt to do in this thesis is to broadly explore the role that technologies –from clocks and phones, to ambient music, ferries and money– play in the experience of waiting. **How do technologies mediate the experience of waiting in relation to the perception of time and the self?**

There are several experiences of time that would have served the purpose of exploring the duality between clock and lived time. The experience of waiting is the focus of this work because it is particularly provocative to the accelerated rhythms of contemporary life. As a *waste of time* or a pause, it inherently perturbs the capitalist ethos of productivity and efficiency.[01] There are other time experiences that share these qualities with waiting – like boredom, procrastination, idleness, depression, the use of psychoactive substances, being fatigued or resting. However, less has been said about waiting than about other states of time perception that bother the current socioeconomic system. There have also been less efforts to revindicate waiting as opposed to boredom, procrastination, or rest, which have been re-inserted into the production system by proving their value in it. Consecutively, a quick search on the TED Talks website shows talks named *How boredom can lead to your most brilliant ideas, Procrastination is an advantage,* or *How rest can make you better at your job*, while most talks about waiting carry titles like *Stop waiting for life to happen*, or *What are you waiting for?*

I claim this topic is relevant in a general sense to all people that exist in time and care about their free will; and within the context of the blurred and divergent field of new media studies, as declared on Aalto University's website: "in a technology-saturated world, it is indispensable to understand and study the impacts that technology has on individuals, organisations, and society."[02] However, this research does not focus on either digital or emerging technologies alone, but serves as a diverse interpretation of technologies affecting waiting in a wider sense.

(01) Hartmut Rosa, Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 49.

(02) New Media - Art and Media, Master of Arts (Art and Design) | Aalto University," November 22, 2024, https://www.aalto.fi/en/study-options/new-media-art-and-media-master-of-arts-art-and-design.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the technological mediation of perceived time and the experience of waiting, as an example of a phenomenological and thought-oriented approach to new media concerns, and as an inspiration to the reader to engage differently with the moments of lingering they encounter in their daily lives.

About waiting

Waiting is often defined as a temporal interlude between the anticipation of an event and its actual occurrence. It is an *in-between* time –an interruption or pause– that compels one to endure in expectation. Waiting can be situational or existential,[03] certain or uncertain, individual or collective, brief or prolonged. Placed between hope and desire, it has received far less philosophical and academic attention than either; and in contrast to boredom or idleness –both of which have been extensively examined by some of the most prominent thinkers of our time– waiting remains largely neglected.[04]

Waiting, says Harold Schweizer in his book *On Waiting*, is "as resistant to description and analysis as time or boredom."[05] And although it is a quotidian experience and colloquially known by all of us, it is a "temporal region hardly mapped and badly documented," he says.[06] It is such a common phenomenon, so pervasive in social life and so interwoven into daily social rhythms that it has been viewed as essential to the social experience itself. [07] However, there are not many texts that directly reflect on this experience, let alone the technological mediation of it.

Alternatively, those who have been generally interested in waiting times are business people. There is a considerable body of research in business and administration concerned with how to reduce perceived waiting times in order to improve customer satisfaction, alongside another stream of studies focused on minimizing waiting times within production processes, to cut costs or produce more. Only a few pieces can be outlined that contribute directly to a philosophical, social, or cultural analysis of waiting. Perhaps the most exhaustive among them is the collection of academic essays edited by anthropologist Ghassan Hage entitled *Waiting*. The collection brings together scholars from political

(03) Peter Dwyer, "Words of Waiting", in Waiting, eds. Ghassan Hage (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), 22-24.

(04) David M. Peña Guzman and Ellie Anderson, "Waiting," Overthink, August 2, 2022, https://open.spotify.com/episode/7sUQeqsMkBpwOaz5bLi6zD?si=68b0f0adf5e74397.

(05) Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 1.

(06) Schweizer, 1.

(07) Ghassan Hage, Waiting (Carlton: Melbourne University Publisher, 2009), 9.

science, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology to explore the topic through a plurality of perspectives.[08] The essays investigate the ambivalent nature of agency in the act of waiting, the politics and systemic power structures that shape waiting, its socio-economic dimensions, and the cultural differences that inform how waiting is experienced.[09]

In Hage's introduction to the compilation, he suggests that waiting modes are, among other things, a "function of the technology that society can deploy to regulate them."[10]

> **Such technologies involve the compartmentalisation of space and the provision of a space dedicated to waiting (waiting rooms, airport lounges, etc...). It also involves 'waiting technologies' such as call centres organising telephone communications, or the number dispensing machines that allow people to avoid physically queuing, and with the help of beepers and screens work to make the process of waiting impersonal and independent of any human factors such as liking or disliking someone, and favouring or disfavouring them.[11]**

Even if acknowledged in his introduction, there is not much written in the collection about the technological mediation of waiting.

There is however, a beautifully crafted phenomenological analysis of waiting which, while not addressing its mediation through technology, lays fertile ground for this research to emerge. Harold Schweizer's On Waiting insightfully navigates philosophy of time, literature, poetry, and art to explore the phenomenology of waiting in relation to death, love, despair, and hope. He defines a theory of waiting based on Henri Bergson's concept of duration, that will serve as a starting point for this research and that is captured in the following passage:

> **In waiting, we become –if often uncomfortably– attuned to what Bergson calls the melody of duration that runs its course within us ... the elusive temporality of duration, as soon as it is thought, it becomes measurable, objectified clock time. But waiting is more than a certain amount of time, it is experienced time.[12]**

[08] Hage, Waiting.

[09] Hage, 8.

[10] Hage, 9.

[11] Hage, 9.

[12] Schweizer, On Waiting, 127.

This thesis will continually return to Schweizer's theory of waiting and Bergson's concept of duration –*la durée*– both of which will be further examined in Section (3). In turn, Bergson's notion of duration will be counterpoised with Byung-Chul Han's concept of *non-time*, a concept he describes as the dominant temporal condition of our present era.[13]

Approach and scope

It is Schweizer's analysis of Homer's Penelope in his book *On Waiting*, and his mention of the role of the loom during her twenty years of weaving and waiting,[14] that inspired this research to explore the technological mediation of waiting more deeply.

Drawing from philosophy of technology, philosophy of time consciousness, and cultural and media studies, this thesis arises as a broad phenomenological interpretation of waiting in relation to the perception of time. How can different technologies affect the experience of waiting? How do they contract or protract, fragment or unify the passing of time? What might make waiting feel unsettling? How do technologies mediate the way in which the waiter places herself in the temporal space?

Through a wide lens and an interpretative approach, it does not aim to define a pragmatic explanation of the concept of waiting, its politics or cultural differences, nor does it intend to construct a rigid taxonomy for its experience. It is not an empirical study of waiting situations, but rather an analytical interpretation of different technologies as they alter our subjective experience of time passing, interpreted from an individual's point of view. Finally, this thesis is not a self-help guide on improving patience, though readers –like myself– might gain a liberating awareness of how we perceive and manage time. Conversely, actions to *wait better* will be the most transformative as they are implemented at a structural level, rather than in individual actions.

[13] Byung-Chul Han, The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering, trans. Daniel Steuer, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2017), vi-11.

[14] Schweizer, On Waiting, 45-70.

Structure and methodologies

As has been mentioned, waiting can be understood as the temporal interlude between the anticipation of an event and its actual occurrence. The thesis has been structured accordingly, mirroring the experience of waiting, in three chapters: **Anticipation, Mediated Waiting, and Occurrence,** which resembles the most humble of the structures –an introduction, body and conclusion. *Chapter 1: Anticipation* is concerned with laying the basic grounds and defining key concepts, based solely on literary review. Basic grounds that are rarely basic, and are maybe the most complex axioms and claims. To build any theoretical piece –or any piece whatsoever– mostly means to commit to narratives upon which to construct one's own. The axioms that underlie this thesis are borrowed from other authors and scholars, but are inevitably shaped by my own experiences, culture, and beliefs. The concepts of waiting and time perception are no easy matters to deal with, nor are the technologies through which they are mediated. Combine those together and we get a soup of paradoxes, subjective interpretations, and biased statements.

For building on this conceptual foundation, *Chapter 1: Anticipation* includes three sections. *Section (1) Introduction* delineates the research question, scope, approach, structure, methodologies, constraints and limitations of this thesis. *Section (2) Human, technology and the world* introduces insights from philosophy of technology, outlining a perspective on the symbiotic and deeply complex entanglements between humans, technologies, and the world. It also presents the notion of technological mediation, drawing from the post-phenomenological school of thought. It also defines technology in the scope of this thesis, based on Marshall McLuhan's media theory and Bernard Stiegler's idea of technologies as discourses.

The last section of the chapter, *(3) Broad context and philosophical foundations*, will situate the research within a broader social context by discussing concepts such as *acceleration* as described by Hartmut Rosa and Paul Virilio, *non-time* as defined by Byung-Chul Han, or duration as defined by Henri Bergson. These concepts will be foundational for the understanding of the following chapter and the ideas developed in relation to the perception of time. Finally, this chapter asks where waiting is positioned within this context, drawing from Harold Schweizer's theory of waiting.

After the *Anticipation* in *Chapter 1,* we enter directly into the waiting space, that temporal state that we inhabit in the expectation of something to come. *Chapter 2* is called *Mediated Waiting* and will explore the **technological mediation of waiting in relation to the perception of time and the self.** As mentioned above, waiting can take multiple shapes and forms. There are existential waitings –like awaiting the love of your life, a sense of meaning, or a child to be born– and situational waitings –such as waiting for a train, for a bus trip to conclude, for a friend to show up, or for an advertising to finish playing on YouTube. These pages will focus mostly on situational waiting, defined by Peter D. Dwyer as an experience "fully embedded in time, engaged and never passive."[15] Adding a loose criterion to this definition, we can say that in situational waiting, the subject feels as though waiting is the main activity, that which they are *primarily* doing.[16] And so, when a pregnant woman is asked what she is doing, she will rarely answer that she is *waiting*, even though she is indeed expecting –her child to be born. The waiting is naturally real, but it occurs mostly at an existential level, as she does other things in her daily basis. Yet, when a boy is sitting at the bus stop –and even if he is doing other things like scrolling on TikTok– he might acknowledge that what he is *primarily* doing is waiting for the bus to arrive.

The way in which *Chapter 2: Mediated Waiting* is approached, is similar to the way in which a person enters a waiting room. As the waiter waits, she mingles with things, she picks up an object and then drops it, she sits, she stands, she walks, she hesitates, she acts. There is so much she could engage with, but she navigates the waiting space freely and grabs what interests her as she pleases. In a similar manner, *Chapter 2: Mediated Waiting* swings from object to object, from concept to concept, delivering on the promise of being a broad interpretation of an extremely complex temporal phenomenon. Methodologically combining literary review, interpretative media analysis, and philosophical inquiry, *Chapter 2* dwells directly and indirectly on the research question and investigates the elusive relationships between mul-

[15] Peter Dwyer, "Words of Waiting", in Waiting, eds. Ghassan Hage (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), 26.

[16] Peña Guzman and Anderson, "Waiting."

tiple technologies and the experience of waiting. Accordingly, this chapter has no sections, but it is structured as a cloud of ideas and concepts that sometimes relate to each other and sometimes don't.

Among the ideas developed in *Chapter 2: Mediated Waiting* are the breakage of mathematical time, the duration of things, waiting in the internet, the role of timekeeping devices, and fleeting mobile media. While this is only the beginning of what could become a far more extensive and in-depth mapping of technological forms, the selected artefacts allow us to reflect on different dimensions of waiting and time –including history, identity, relationships, and economics. All of these technologies mediate the experience of waiting and the perception of time itself, woven together in a complex mesh of multidimensional affects and effects.

To support and extend the theoretical reflections presented in *Chapter 2: Mediated Waiting*, a series of **five interpretative essays are interwoven with the chapter.** These *Media Analyses (In-betweens)* have been developed to either expand or exemplify the concepts developed throughout *Chapter 2*, and through them we witness how waiting becomes a matter of ethics and aesthetics. Each essay engages with a specific piece of media art –ranging from photography, to sound, to embroidery and drawing– and serves as a starting point for applied reflections from the previous ideas. Rather than functioning as standalone case studies, these *Media Analyses (In-betweens)* offer a situated interpretation of how waiting is mediated through technological forms and how it resonates with the surrounding theoretical material –opening interpretative spaces where abstract concepts find aesthetic and cultural grounding.

The art works discussed span the past century, a period marked by an accelerating tension between measured time and lived experience. The selection seeks to include voices from both the Global South and North, and to reflect gender balance in authorship. Still, this curation and its interpretation remains partial and incomplete and represents one point of view among infinite interpretative possibilities.

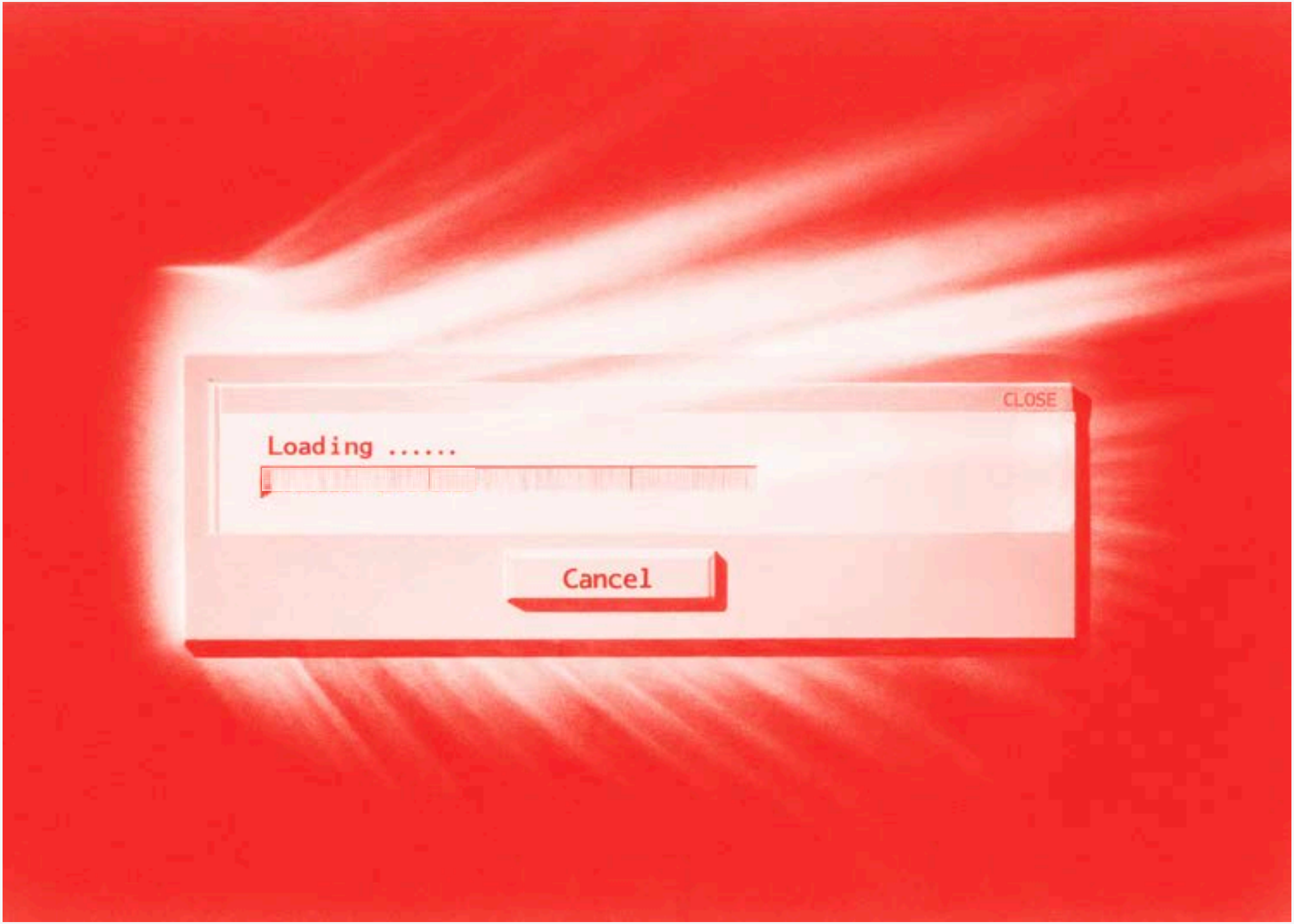
Finally, the last chapter, *Chapter 3: Occurrence* takes the reader back out of the rhetorical waiting room and forms a conclusion. However, what we are left with in the occurrence of the expected event, is not a conclusion in the conventional sense, but an extended lingering. Weaving together the concepts, media analyses, and phenomenological observations developed throughout the thesis, *Chapter 3: Occurrence* asks whether waiting might offer not only a site of expectation but withhold meaning in itself. **The occurrence of this waiting resists resolution and expands further on the possibilities of research as waiting.**

Considerations and limitations

To speak of technological mediation as if it could be isolated, defined, or universally applied is already to distort its nature. Thus, it is worth noting that **technological mediation is never culturally neutral.** While theoretical models may extract a single technology and study its effects in a singular way –*ceteris paribus*– such clarity rarely holds in lived experience. Neither experiences, nor the mediation of those experiences are universal or isolated. They unfold in tangled layers, through overlapping artefacts, systems, ideologies, memories, geographies, and imaginaries.

Consecutively, it is important to mention that the stance of this thesis is culturally dependent. The way a fingerprint reader, a queue management system, or a timekeeping device shapes the experience of waiting may vary widely across cultures, histories, and geographies. Even infrastructural technologies like mathematical time or capitalism, while seemingly global, do not extend uniformly across the world. To assume a shared, global response to a technology –or to design for one– is to flatten difference into default. The default, we know, is rarely neutral; it usually resembles the worldview of those with the power to name it.

This thesis –like any other piece of writing– is inevitably shaped by the author's own positionality: cultural background, upbringing, values, and lived experiences. The aim is that, within this situated narrative, others may find tools to construct their own.



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(2) Human, technologies and the world.

Of extensions and entanglements

It was Marshall McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media: The extensions of Man* (1964) who first put the focus on the form of media as it affects society, instead of the content of media, with his famous phrase "the medium is the message,"[17] pioneering the discipline of media theory. He developed the idea of technology as any extension of the human:

> **After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man-- the technological simulation of consciousness ....[18]**

Like this, we have enhanced our capabilities through technology, either fully delegating them or expanding the field of what was possible for our own naked bodies. The human covered their bodies in clothes to protect from the cold and with metal armors to protect their soft flesh from sharp spears and swords. The horses were enhanced with saddles and reins, which expanded the human's capabilities of control and maneuver. Quickly, our bodies extended into space and time, bridging places and temporalities together.

The extension in space becomes quite literal in the colonization period, connecting two previously disconnected continents through the advancements in navigation, shipbuilding, weaponry, and communication. When the Spanish colonisers arrived at the coasts of Mesoamerica in 1519, the dozen horses that accompanied them made a great impression on the natives. It is said that when they saw the men mounted on the horses, they thought rider and animal were one single beast.[19] The horse, as an extension of the invader's body, would enhance the combat power of the Spanish and give them new shape and capabilities, and it would be perceived by the natives as one unified being in an intertwined interaction with each other. Or better said, there was

[17] Stuart Levine and Marshall McLuhan, "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man," American Quarterly 16, no. 4 (1964): 9.

[18] Levine and McLuhan,5.

[19] "Los caballos, los españoles y Santiago Matamoros," accessed March 18, 2025, http://www.noticonquista.unam.mx/amoxtli/878/859.

no each other, only one being and its constitutive parts. What was regarded as ignorance is indeed one foundational axiom in the western philosophy of technology: that the human existence and technological artefacts are co-constitutive –they shape each other in a dynamic interaction. **The division between subject and object or human and world becomes fictional, as human and world are embedded in each other in an infinite network of messy relationships.**

The link between technology, the world and the human is intricate because it is a meta-relationship. We are not relating to technology as separate beings, but we can arguably say that we are technology and technology is human. At the same time, technology is not affecting the world as a separate entity, but technology constitutes the world, and the world becomes technological. As Colomina and Wigley say in their book *Are we human?*, "we literally live inside design, like the spider lives inside the web constructed from inside its own body."[20] It becomes futile to separate the human from the technology as every part of the body has been shaped by it and functions within its mesh, and it also becomes impossible to divide technology from the world since "the planet itself has been completely encrusted by design as a geological layer," they write. The world of design does not have an outside and humans do not have an inside of technology.[21]

The human is suspended in a complex and continuous back and forth between itself and the artefacts, a flickering that ultimately dissolves the distinction between them. Designed artefacts have as much agency as the animal that seemingly produced them. They transform the animal just as much as they are transformed by the animal. Or to say it the other way, the body and the brain become artefacts. What is human is the radicality of this mutual exchange.[22]

Because technology and humans can be distinguished but cannot be separated from each other, it becomes relevant to look at the relationships between them and not at *them in themselves*, as they do not exist apart from each other. Still, these interrelationships are no easy subject either. Not only human, technologies, and the world are intricately entangled but also the relationships between them are always multiple, symbiotic and reciprocal, continuous-

[20] Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, Are We Human? Notes on an Archeology of Design (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 9.

[21] Colomina and Wigley, 9.

[22] Colomina and Wigley, 24.

ly transforming the parts and the whole. The human, as an incredibly malleable animal, in forming itself, it also shapes the planet, "but equally and simultaneously", write Colomina and Wigley, "the redesigned world redesigns the designing animal. This is the real plasticity that is human."[23]

(23) Colomina and Wigley, 23.

From Phenomenology to Post-Phenomenology

In understanding such a complicated mesh of interrelations between the humans and the world, some philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, considered it was useful to **step back from abstract thinking and go back to things themselves as they manifest in the world.**[24] The philosophical movement of *Phenomenology* arises as a way of studying the relationships between humans and the world, by focusing on the structures of our conscious experiences, or in other words, by observing things as they appear in front of us or *show themselves to us*.[25] From the observation of these experiences from a first-person point of view, according to phenomenology, we can draw knowledge that otherwise would not be accessible to us.

(24) Bas de Boer and Jochem Zwier, Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Technology (Open Book Publishers, 2024), 3.

(25) de Boer and Zwier, 2.

Merleau-Ponty takes the point of departure that "to exist as a human being implies being-in-the-world"[26] and shifts the focus to perception. The way we *perceive the world* becomes to Merleau-Ponty the primary way we have to study experiences. Perception plays such a crucial role to phenomenology because, as Boer and Zwier explain in *Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Technology*, "being-in-the-world presupposes the existence of a body."[27]

(26) de Boer and Zwier, 6.

(27) de Boer and Zwier, 7.

> **Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity.**[28]

(28) David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/.

The main question becomes how our embodied experience forms the basis of how the world is constituted.[29] Don Ihde, founding philosopher of the school of thought of *Post-Phenomenology*, acknowledges phenomenology as the starting point and "keeps up the ambition," as Peter-Paul Verbeek explains, "to think about human-world relations, and the structure of the relations between humans and the world around us," but focuses on the role that technologies can play in that relation.[30] Therefore, the question of **how technologies reveal the world and at the same time reveal themselves in the world** becomes crucial, for as we have seen, we are immersed and fully embedded in a network of technologies from which we can not detangle. These questions can be understood as *technological mediation*.

(29) de Boer and Zwier, Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Technology, 7.

(30) How Technology Changes Us: Lecture with Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmBgJjfjG7Q.

Technological Mediation

Given that experiences play such an essential role in the interrelationship between humans and the world, it is relevant to ask: how do technologies mediate these experiences? How do artefacts serve as instruments we use, while at the same time shape our perception, enhance it or alienate it? How do technologies allow us to see things we could not see, feel things we could not feel, or shape us to stop feeling things we used to feel? How do they, as McLuhan explain, expand human capabilities? In other words, how do technologies affect the strange time-space-self in which one performs this thing called life?

Post-Phenomenology, as Peter-Paul Verbeek explains in his lecture *How Technology Changes Us*, "is not just a new approach to phenomenology, but a way to help us understand technologies."[31] The concept of technological mediation becomes crucial for understanding the relationship between the human and the world, as technology will constitute the relationship,[32] and will actively shape the way in which reality appears to us.[33] Some of the examples mentioned by Verbeek in his lecture, that will help us understand the concept of technological mediation are x-rays –which allows the human to see images that our naked eyes cannot see– or the thermometer –which allows the human to read a representation of temperature through which one interprets the world.[34]

(31) How Technology Changes Us: Lecture with Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek.

(32) How Technology Changes Us: Lecture with Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek.

(33) de Boer and Zwier, Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Technology, 11.

(34) How Technology Changes Us: Lecture with Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek.

In this sense, this thesis will focus on understanding how technologies that are typically involved in the waiting act, shape the experience of the waiter, by shaping their perceptions of time and the self. There are many ways to approach technological mediation and to narrow its scope. In reflecting on the experience of

waiting, one might begin with the material and formal qualities of artefacts, and consider how these shape our perception. Imagine, for instance, that materials begin to melt or evaporate as we wait –how would that shape the waiting? Or imagine nothing at all, and observe things as they are: do objects hold a temporality of their own? Why am I the only breathing thing at this bus stop? Why are the airport gates so far away from the luggage claim? How do these things affect the waiting? Beyond materiality, we might also consider technologies' intended functionality –how a device like the smartphone shapes our habits through its features, guiding our gestures and fragmenting our attention. Or we might zoom out, observing how broader systems, such as capitalism, transform the social fabric, which in turn reshapes our individual experience of time in a recursive loop of mediation. How does this affect the waiting? And so on, and so forth.

Meanwhile, the aim of this research is to freely explore the technological mediation of the waiting experience from a broad perspective, combining all of the above and incorporating other focuses as they emerge. It offers an initial, wide-reaching entry point into the technological mediation of waiting in relation to the perception of time and the self. The goal is to reflect on the subject from multiple angles, while engaging with each critically.

This criticality would not be possible without first acknowledging that technological mediation is never universal. To say that technologies have no essence aligns with the post-phenomenological perspective advanced by Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek, who emphasise "technology's very context-dependent and materially situated relationality."[35] Post-phenomenology names this ambiguity *multistability* –the idea that technologies can take on different meanings or functions depending on how they are used or perceived.[36] This *multistability* is also a starting point to think about technologies as culturally situated. This thesis examines the experience of waiting under technological mediation from a broadly conceived perspective, but it does not claim to be culturally universal. As mentioned in the *Section (1) Introduction*, it rather speaks from within a specific Western, late-capitalist, and digitally networked context –one in which time has been increasingly economised, optimised, and fragmented. While some of the temporal phenomena discussed may resonate globally due to the transnational reach of digital infrastructures, they are still rooted in particular cultural histories, epistemologies, and value systems. The forms of waiting explored here emerge within a technologically saturated life-world where temporality is often subordinated to productivity and acceleration, concepts that will be defined in the *Section (3) Broad context and philosophical foundations*. Recognising the cultural contingency of this framework is essential. Technological mediation is never experienced in the abstract; it is always filtered through social norms, linguistic patterns, material infrastructures, and historical memory.

Furthermore, **this multistable nature of technologies should not be confused with neutrality.** Whether the political character of technology is intrinsic or extrinsic is, in practice, irrelevant: what matters is that it is always there. The only artefact that could be politically neutral, would mean an artefact that appears from nowhere, serves no purpose, and is used by no one –an object entirely outside of context or relation. Of course, it is hard to imagine that this object could *be*. Although no one has heard of such an object yet, if they would, it would already be affected by their relationship to it. All technologies are in contact with something external, either in their conception, design, production, distribution, commercialisation, usage, after-usage, or disposal. That is to say, as stated before, that there is no *external* to technologies. Ultimately, it is this undeniable connection to the web of reality which inevitably imbues technologies with non-neutral qualities, which are always political, ethical and moral.

This thesis treats technologies not merely as tools that extend or alter human capacities, but as actors that participate in the shaping of perception, attention, agency, and time. Although it is not the focus of the thesis, it is inevitably mentioned both implicitly and explicitly, by tracing how technological forms, from airports to the internet, from digital queues to photographic apparatuses, structure waiting. It is in my interest to further expand this research, better attending the politics of mediation, by recognising that every interface is indeed an interface of power.

[35] Robert Rosenberger and Peter-Paul Verbeek, Postphenomenological Investigations: Essays on Human-Technology Relations, Postphenomenology and the Philosophy of Technology (Lanham (Md.): Lexington books, 2015), 28.

[36] Rosenberger and Verbeek, 28.

Technologies as discourses

If we are concerned with the technological mediation of the waiting experience, we might define, even if broadly, what we mean by *technologies*. In this thesis, the term technologies is not confined to tools, machines, or digital infrastructures. Rather, drawing from Marshall McLuhan, it is understood in a broader and looser sense as any extension of human faculties that mediates experience, organizes behavior, or reshapes perception:[37]

> **Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body.[38]**

Furthermore, to repeat McLuhan's phrase: "the medium is the message,"[39] meaning that the transformative effect of a technology lies not in its content but in the new scale, pace, or pattern it introduces into human affairs.[40] He identifies electric light, for example, as a media without content, but whose content is precisely the technology in itself and how it is situated and used in the world. According to this theory, technologies include not only obvious media such as smartphones or watches, but also older media such as chairs, tables and spaces, as they can be understood as *media without content*, that extend on human capabilities and "demand new ratios or new equilibriums."[41]

This definition serves us as a starting point that allows us to understand technologies from a much wider perspective, not even confined to material artefacts but including as well other immaterial and infrastructural systems of human organisation that synchronise, control or order society. The definition of technology given by Bernard Stiegler in his book *Techniques and Time*, becomes particularly relevant, as he understands **technologies as discourses that organises, explain, or describes a certain technique or human skill:**

> **Technology is therefore the discourse describing and explaining the evolution of specialized procedures and techniques, arts and trades –either the discourse of certain types of procedures and techniques, or that of the totality of techniques inasmuch as they form a system: technology is in this case the discourse of the evolution of that system.[42]**

Technology as a discourse, is therefore not limited to the material, but it also includes the systemic infrastructure as a representation of a *certain type of procedure*. This expands the understanding of media or technologies to include broader and more complex systems such as money, mathematical time, architectural infrastructures or even language. Some of these mediums or technologies –such as money and language–, were also recognized as such by McLuhan in *Understanding Media*.

Thus, technologies in this thesis are not defined in a narrow sense as digital, emerging, physical or material, **but as discourses that structure and expand a human faculty, shaping the way in which reality appears to the eyes of our consciousness.**

(37) Levine and McLuhan, "Understanding Media," 3.

(38) Levine and McLuhan, 55.

(39) Levine and McLuhan, 9.

(40) Levine and McLuhan, 9.

(41) Levine and McLuhan, 55.

(42) Bernard Stiegler, The Fault of Epimetheus, Technics and Time / Stiegler, Bernhard 1 (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Pr, 1998), 94.

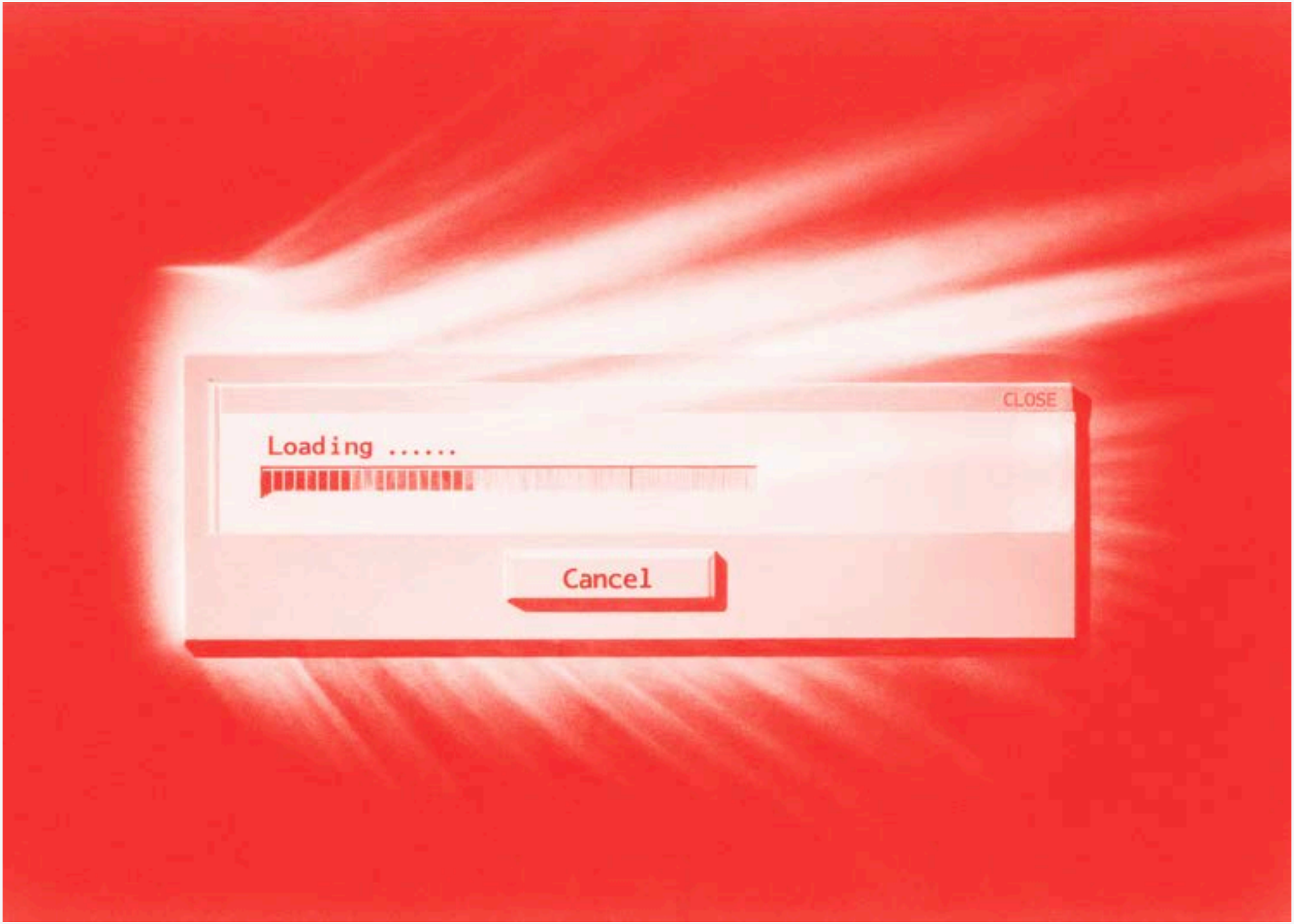

FIG (02)
Loading...2/3(Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

(3) Broad context and philosophical foundations

Technological acceleration

That the pace of life is accelerating, that it is becoming increasingly harder to keep up, and that the world seems to turn faster and faster, are phrases that surface again and again in our contemporary lives. As Hartmut Rosa points out, this sense of temporal compression has long roots, but a qualitative shift occurs in what he terms *late-modernity*. Here, t**he intertwining of technological innovation, the general acceleration of societal processes, and the acceleration of the individual's pace of life, converge into a self-propelling cycle** "that places the three realms of acceleration into reciprocal relationships of mutual escalation," he says.[43] Not only the structure of everyday life is intensified, but also the very rhythms of the social fabric, its processes and expectations.[44]

Perhaps one of the most impactful effects of acceleration, according to Rosa, is the compression of time and space, as high speed means of transport, communication and production have closed the gap within places and temporalities. What once felt far away is now near, as near as a Zoom call or a virtual reality device allows. What once felt long and tedious is now instant, as instant as a Whatsapp message or an AI generated image. This compression of time and space, according to Paul Virilio, ultimately results in a state of *polar inertia*. As Rosa explains quoting Virilio's ideas:

> **This process of dynamization dialectically flips over into a process of rigidification in which humans and even goods themselves practically no longer move. This culminates in a scenario where everything dynamic is a result of flowing streams of data.[45]**

The concept of polar inertia implies, according to Virilio, the *terminal state of acceleration*. In it, the human, after first exploring the world through fast transportation and then letting the world into their homes through fast communications, culminates letting the world into their bodies in the third and final *transplantation revolution*.[46] This embodied acceleration process would lead, paradoxically, to a "growing physical immobility" of, first of all, the human body, "but potentially of the whole material universe," explains Rosa.[47]

(43) Rosa, Social Acceleration, 151.

(44) Rosa, 20.

(45) Rosa, 102.

(46) Radical Thoughts Podcast, "Backlog: Hartmut Rosa on Social Acceleration," November 11, 2023.

(47) Rosa, Social Acceleration, 284.

The short story, The Aleph by Jorge Luis Borges, is a fictional representation of this extreme compression:

> **The Aleph's diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished. Each thing (a mirror's face, let us say) was infinite things, since I distinctly saw it from every angle of the universe.[48]**

Inside this thing called Aleph, distances do not need to be traveled and time does not need to be experienced. There, "all the mirrors on earth" are comprised, "all space is there, actual and undiminished," each thing is actually "infinite things." So, "what will we wait for when we no longer need to wait to arrive?," asks Virilio.[49] In the Aleph, we wait for the fleeting instant, and the waiting itself becomes fleeting too, the interval implodes together with everything else.

(48) Jorge Luis Borges, The Aleph, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Classics, 2000), 9.

(49) Paul Virilio and Michael Degener, Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy (London ; New York: Continuum, 2006), 120.

Waiting and the technological promise

Artefacts and technologies around us have promised to deliver always more and faster –more and faster transport, more and faster information, more and faster production– with the ultimate utopia of liberating humankind. This liberation would mean the end of labour through automation, freeing us from the feeling of time scarcity –and maybe even from death itself–, and providing for everyone unlimited abundance. Promises that once belonged to religion, have been secularized and now belong to technological acceleration.[50] Acceleration that can be thought, consecutively, as a cultural condition of late-capitalism.[51]

Late-capitalism promotes faster, so the individual can do less –free up time– or have more –reach abundance. However, as Rosa explains, the technological acceleration changes the temporal standards that underlie our actions and plans.[52] And so, the faster the technology, the more intolerable any imposed delay will seem to be. Technological acceleration exerts a growing sense of never having enough time, a restless need to speed up, and a creeping anxiety about falling behind.[53] In other words, the acceleration of technology and life has led not to the liberation from time scarcity, but to the feeling that "the more time we save, the less time we have."[54]

(50) Rosa, Social Acceleration, xxi-xxxiv.

(51) Chiara Vitrano, "Judy Wajcman and Nigel Dodd (Eds.), The Sociology of Speed. Digital, Organizational, and Social Temporalities., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 224 Pages," Simmel Studies 21, no. 2 (2017): 2.

(52) Rosa, Social Acceleration, 128.

(53) Rosa, 79.

(54) Rosa, 16.

The effects that this frenetic speed has in the perception of waiting is that of dogmatism, explains Jonathan Crary in his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*:

> **Now one of the attractions of current systems and products is their operating speed: it has become intolerable for there to be waiting time while something loads or connects. When there are delays or breaks of empty time, they are rarely openings for the drift of consciousness in which one becomes unmoored from the constraints and demands of the immediate present.**[55]

As Crary writes, **the effects that technological innovation and the imperative of speed has had on the experience of waiting has meant its final deterioration.** Waiting in late-capitalism presents itself not only as a bug or as a pitfall in the master plan of time liberation and prosperity. The *empty time* tends to remain, in most cases, still tied to obligation, attention, or stress; still anchored to the "constraints and demands of the immediate present." Waiting as a space "for the drift of consciousness" appears almost as an impossibility. These constraints and demands of the present that Cary writes about, make themselves be felt for the person who waits, not in line with the speeds of society's time, but not fully liberated either.[56]

The non-time of current times

Acceleration is often blamed for the modern crisis of time, as the instant, through a sustained and exponential increase of speed, has become ever more compressed. But maybe, the atomisation of time is not a consequence of acceleration, but a cause. In *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering*, the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han observes that what the late-capitalist societies are experiencing, is not simply an increase in speed but **a scattering of temporal coherence, a breaking apart of the threads that once bound moments together into meaningful continuity.** Acceleration, for Han, is a symptom of that temporal dispersal –a sign that time has disintegrated into points without connection, losing its hold, rhythm, and direction. The feeling that life is accelerating, he suggests, "is really the experience of time that is whizzing without a direction."[57] Acceleration and temporal fragmentation, according to Han, are entangled in a reciprocal dynamic where each amplifies the other. These qualities transform time into *non-time*: **a temporal landscape so atomised that comports no temporality at all.**[58]

If acceleration alone does not cause the dispersal of time, there must be other causes involved. Han suggests that the true engine behind the crisis of time is not technological speed or the acceleration of the pace of life, but it is rooted in the absolute value placed on active life –*vita activa*. The imperative of activity, he argues, "leads to an imperative of work, which degrades the human being."[59] The result from the imperative of constant productivity is, according to Han, a time stripped of any intensity, completely flattened and deprived of any coherent structure.[60] In this light, Paul Virilio's concept of polar inertia feels much too calmed to capture the intensity of non-time as experienced in active life. Hartmut Rosa's notion of *frenetic standstill* may align more closely with Han's view –where movement and activity multiply, but they are whizzing without direction or rhythm. Non-time is not an empty time, but a saturated time, packed with events so densely that any sense of duration is obliterated.

With time converted into a ledger of actions, the capacity to linger –to stay, hesitate, doubt, dwell, tarry– becomes increasingly rare. The frenetic standstill of everyday life, Han argues, "deprives human existence of all contemplative elements and of any capacity of lingering."[61] The modern subject, shaped by the demands of active life, experiences hesitation as a failure to act. This inability to linger is lived by the modern subject who cannot relax –who waits without wanting to, exasperated, yet remains fully immersed in the atomised and schizophrenic dynamics of non-time. They cannot detach from the imperatives of the present moment; they cannot surrender to the experience of time endurance.

In the context of non-time, waiting appears *in-between* the fleeting points, as an inconvenient bridge to be erased altogether. As attention in non-time is placed entirely on the points themselves –on outcomes, events, and instants–, waiting is stripped of any intrinsic meaning. It becomes, as Han puts it, "a corridor without any value of its own"[62]:

(55) Jonathan Crary, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, 1. publ (London: Verso, 2013), 88.

(56) Crary, 88.

(57) Han, The Scent of Time, 19.

(58) Han, vi.

(59) Han, vii.

(60) Han, vi.

(61) Han, vii.

(62) Han, 37.

> **Nothing must evade this instantaneous access. The intervals that work against instantaneity are removed .... Intervals are destroyed in order to produce total proximity and simultaneity. Any remoteness, any distance, is removed. The aim is to turn everything available in the here and now.**[63]

(63) Han, 38.

The instant has fully overshadowed any possibility for the interval, and the interval that remains, is both meaningless –to be filled out with something else– and undesired –to be eliminated at any cost.

Paradoxically, it is precisely in the intervals –in the transitions between fleeting points– that the potential of real temporality emerges, and with it, the potential of meaning. The interval holds open a space that can imbue the flatness of non-time with temporal tension. Not only through the slowness that often accompanies these interludes, but in its *hesitation*, its stretch, its doubts, and its intensity. It is precisely the capacity to dwell in the intervals which imbues non-time with rhythm.[64]

(64) Han, 36.

The problem with the *dyschronia* of non-time is not merely temporal, but existential. The absence of durations or transitions, Han argues, leads to nothing less than a crisis of life itself:

> **Whoever tries to live faster, will ultimately die faster. It is not the number of events, but the experience of duration which makes life more fulfilling. Where one event follows close to the heels of the other, nothing enduring comes about. Fulfillment and meaning cannot be explained on quantitative grounds.**[65]

(65) Han, 34.

According to Han, when time is experienced as a sequence of fleeting points, instead of a continuum –either linear or cyclical–, it loses its temporal character. A point understands no history, it knows no past and no future.[66] A point knows no direction and therefore no sense or purpose. A point cannot carry meaning because narrative depends on the connection between points –on anticipation, transition, and relation. Without duration, there is no accumulation of memory, no coherence of narrative, and no comprehensive horizon.[67] **There is only the here and the now.**

(66) Han, 4.

(67) Han, 31-33.

Non-time is not only a crisis of temporality but of life itself, as it is lacking the duration that could "make life more fulfilling," the repeat Han's words. Existence itself becomes dispersed, leaving behind a subject estranged from the world and from their own experience of *being-in-the-world*. The question of duration then becomes pressing. The emergence of it appears as a necessary counterpoint to the crisis of non-time in its capacity to restore coherence, relation, and consecutively a sense of being.

The duration in-between the points

> **When an illegitimate translation of the unextended into the extended, of quality into quantity, has introduced contradiction into the very heart of the question, contradiction must, of course, recur in the answer.**[68]

(68) Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. F. L. Pogson M.A., Matter and Memory (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1950), xxiii.

Henri Bergson, in his seminal work published in 1889, *Time and Free Will,* argued that ontological and philosophical discussions were stripping time of its inherent temporality.[69] He explained that reducing time to physics and mathematics, turns time into spatial measurements –derived from spatial reasoning and based on spatial quantities such as the Sun circling the Earth. In doing so, according to Bergson, science dealt with time and motion "on the condition of first eliminating the essential and qualitative element of time."[70]

(69) Bergson, xi.

(70) Time and Free Will, by Henri Bergson., n.d., 115.

Bergson identified real time in *durée* –duration–, a highly dynamic form of experiential flow.[71] The translation to english as *duration* is misleading because duration is understood as an extensity, while *durée* represents intensity. Distant from the logic of space and time in mechanics –measurable in flat, discrete, and divisible units– *pure duration* is qualitative, continuous, indivisible and immeasurable:

(71) Barry Dainton, "Temporal Consciousness," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2024 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/consciousness-temporal/.

> **We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnection and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought.**[72]

(72) Bergson, Time and Free Will, 101.

Bergson described time not as a sequence of isolated instants, but as **an interwoven flow of elements, where each moment carries the weight of the whole and can never be repeated in exactly the same way.**[73] This idea of "interconnection" and "succession without distinction" suggests that the static, durationless instant of clock-time is just an abstraction of real time, "an artificial reconstruction, a patchwork of dead fragments," Bergson writes.[74] One can freeze time to measure it, but the real essence of time cannot be stopped in its tracks, nor frozen in its flow, nor cut up into identical solid units.[75] The present moment is not just an instant, but a *current* that encompasses everything that was, continues and evolves. Less like a handful of pebbles, and more like a snowball rolling down a mountain, accumulating material and growing as it rolls, never being quite the same.[76]

Non-time, as Han describes, *lacks real duration*. Not duration as the extension of a point in time, or a "slower" point, but duration as the interpenetration of points in a continuum. "Atomized time is a discontinuous time," Han writes, "there is nothing to bind events together and thus found [find] a connection, a duration."[77] Moments feel fragmented and isolated into instants, stripped of continuity and bonds. What is missing in our current times, is the intrusion of Bergson's duration to give time temporal tension and weight, and to reintroduce the intervals and transitions that are missing. Waiting, tarrying, dwelling, lingering, contemplating, perpetuating, committing, hesitating, doubting, are all "modes that rest in the experience of duration."[78]

Waiting, in this light, is not merely a passive suspension of time but a **lived expression against non-time.** The in-between embodies the experience of time stretching, as one moment flows indistinctly into the next, forming "both the past and present states into an organic whole."[79] While non-time erases the interval between moments, waiting preserves and inhabits it. In lingering, a space for duration becomes perceptible. Waiting is not a withdrawal from time but an active engagement with it, a moment of becoming time within the prevailing logics of non-time.

[73] Bergson, 6.

[74] Bergson, x.

[75] "Emily Herring on Henri Bergson," Philosophy Bites, March 12, 2025, https://open.spotify.com/episode/3ysX-uCdh6b5ql6IPF-nqIyf?si=856c-d02233c24342.

[76] "Emily Herring on Henri Bergson."

[77] Han, The Scent of Time, 18.

[78] Han, 93.

[79] Bergson, Time and Free Will, 100.

Between non-time and duration.

Waiting is an extremely complex phenomenon. At first glance one could define waiting as the time someone needs to traverse between the expectation of something and the fulfillment of that expectation. Some sort of liminal temporal space that connects two events, past and future. However, as Harold Schweizer observes in his book *On Waiting*, "although time is supposed to function as a door or a hall through which we pass anaweres," [80] a closer look shows that waiting is not simply a period of time to cross through.When one waits, as suggested by Schweizer, one *endures* time rather than *pass* through it.[81]

The waiting is in conflict with the logics of non-time as one experiences a different kind of temporality. For the waiter, the hours do not simply pass and minutes do not simply succeed with each other. The time of waiting is a time that stretches and lags, a kind that most people would not like to experience at all.[82] Time feels thick and heavy and it is in this *feeling* of time that non-time is put under scrutiny, for *in non-time the hours are not felt but counted*.

Duration is experienced through the senses, it is lived. How is the *waiter* conscious of her duration?, asks Schweizer. And he suggests that it is in the experience of time "that is felt and consciously endured," that "seems slow, thick, opaque," that she cannot protract or contract to her desire, that the waiter becomes conscious of duration.[83] Waiting represents a brief encounter with Bergson's *pure time*, with the underlying flows of our own temporalities.

According to Schweizer, during waiting, the waiter enters and leaves duration intermittently. They swing back and forth from *thinking* time –when they rationalise the extension of their waiting–; to *living* time –when they lose themselves in the waiting flow.

> **For the waiter who cannot close her eyes and who has awakened from the lull of her absorption in duration, time is suddenly passing in discrete, tedious intervals, marked by her compulsive glances at her watch .... From time to time, the waiter is reabsorbed, self-forgetful. She waits with her eyes closed, she lingers, she tarries, she listens to the**

[80] Schweizer, On Waiting, 2.

[81] Schweizer, 2.

[82] Schweizer, 2.

[83] Schweizer, 16.

> **melodies of duration, heeding it alone. Absorbed by the lull of the melody of duration, the waiter waits in brief, but soon to be interrupted, enchantments.**[84]

[84] Schweizer, 20.

It is in this swing between *rationalising* and *feeling*, between *thinking* time and *being* time, that a momentary intuition arises. The waiter, in this oscillation, experiences a sudden and unsettling awareness –an encounter with time's thickness.[85] The waiter is taken aback by the continuity of her inner life, which collides with the fragmented demands of the synchronised world. This realisation, this momentary intuition that occurs when she suddenly swings from one temporality to the other, is "accompanied by a certain uncanny discomfort."[86] The discomfort arises with the confrontation with her own duration and thus with her own being and mortality.[87] It urges the person who waits to re-insert herself in the comforts of the fleeting. Fast media shows itself as the perfect companion for the waiter to displace the intermittent "uncanny sense of her endurance." She would rather *think* than *feel* time.[88]

[85] Schweizer, 16.

[86] Schweizer, 21.

[86] Schweizer, 17.

[88] Schweizer, 21.

This understanding of waiting as an intermittent experience of time recalls Jorge Luis Borges's famous passage in his essay *A New Refutation of Time*:

> **Time is the substance of which I am made. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger that mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.**[89]

[89] Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (University of Texas Press, 1964), 332.

Borges, like Bergson, recognizes a time that is felt, endured and embodied. The dichotomy between the *time thought* and the *time lived*; the time that passes, and us passing as time. He swings back and forth, from being carried away by the river, to being the river, as the waiter pendulates from calculating the extensity of her waiting, to embodying the intensity of it. "The waiter hovers and shuttles," writes Schweizer, "between absorption and awareness, between self-forgetfulness and self-consciousness."[90]

[90] Schweizer, On Waiting, 19.

To wait in non-time is not an easy task. The imperatives of *active life* favor extensity over intensity, measurements over embodiments. We are not the river, nor the tiger, not the fire, but time is, more often than not, the river which sweeps us along.

As humans experience the world through technologies, it is also through them that they attempt to protract or contract, shorten or lengthen, confront or deflect the perception of time. Different technological artefacts will take the waiter out of duration, perpetuate the crisis of non-time, facilitate the absorption, or distract her from the temporalities of her inner self. The relationship between the waiter and the artefacts that surround her not only affects her perception of time. "Time is the substance which I'm made of," to repeat Borges words, **thus, any mediation of the perception of time, will naturally be a mediation of the self.**

Waiting and agency

The swings between non-time and pure duration are not exempt from policies, nor are the technologies that mediate them as we have already mentioned in *Section (2) Human, technology and the world*. Although this thesis' focus is elsewhere, and the politics of waiting are a broad topic that deserves its own research, it is relevant to touch upon the theme, although only preliminarily and briefly. Waiting as a phenomenon is entangled and encapsulates ambivalent forms in which agency takes shape, which determines the politics of waiting, says Hage:

> **At the most immediate and superficial level, one can rush too quickly to say that waiting is a passive modality of being where people lack agency ... things are beyond our control, out of our hands, and we can only wait for what we wish to happen ... Yet ... there are many cases where agency oozes out of waiting.**[91]

[91] Hage, Waiting, 2.

The passive modality that Hage refers to, implies one is forced to wait by others. This makes the waiter feel controlled, prisoners of the situation, caught in an inability to act, victims of power dynamics, disrespected or ashamed. Other times, Hage says, "agency oozes out of waiting": perhaps when one waits voluntarily, sees it as a break from the hustles of daily life, a brief escape from productivity's demands, or embraces it as a necessary process for something worth waiting for.[92]

[92] Minnegal, Monica. "The Time Is Right: Waiting, Reciprocity and Sociality." in Waiting, eds. Ghassan Hage (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), 1.

The distinction between active and passive waiting adds on to the distinction between waiting *for*, and waiting *on*, which Mon-

ica Minnegal explains in her paper *The Time Is Right: Waiting, Reciprocity and Sociality*:

> **The decision to go hunting, make a garden or build a house is for each individual to make. They need to wait for no one else to initiate that action, merely wait on the world in which they dwell to reveal when the time is right to do so themselves.**[93]

[93] Minnegal, "The Time Is Right: Waiting, Reciprocity and Sociality," 5.

Waiting is not always for something or someone. The waiter hopes for things and hopes with things, and commonly, does both at the same time –"being simultaneously subject and object," Minnegal explains.[94] Waiting for others and things can feel like a complete transfer of agency, "we have no choice but to wait for others to play their part," she says. Yet waiting on others –and waiting with things–, confers agency to them as well. [95] What if the world one dwells on never reveals that *right time* to act?

[94] Minnegal, 5.

[95] Minnegal, 2.

The paradox and ambivalence of agency in the act of waiting make it a complex political subject. Nobody likes to wait, but some must wait more than others; some make others wait, and some communities or people might be forced to wait forever.[96] In some situations, waiting feels like an abuse of power; in others, it points to a dysfunctional system; yet in others, it becomes a necessary *bad* for a greater good. From digital queues and algorithmic controls to the media and devices used to pass time, technology does not simply reflect the ambivalences of waiting, it reconfigures it. The artefacts and objects in the room take on new shape, revealing their true outlines; media consumption provides a temporary escape from the weight of waiting, while also exploiting it for commercial gain; the clocks are used by the waiter to pace and soothe her endurance, while at the same time impose its chrono-norms onto her. Every mediation has implicit politics, and although they are not the focus of this research, they are not to be forgotten or obliviated.

[96] Schweizer, On Waiting, 2.

Chapter 2

Mediated Waiting

As the waiter enters the waiting space, her resolution is turned into hesitation. The occurrence of whatever she expects is resistant, and forces her to encounter the technologies around her, seeking for distraction. How will she occupy her time? How will she soothe the weight of her endurance?

She enters the room and queues patiently. A text on the floor asks her to "wait behind this line." As she approaches the counter, she is slow and timid, but as soon as she advances towards the receptionist, she is asked to act with determination and efficiency. The rhythms that are demanded from her are fluctuant and mediated by the objects and people around her.

The customer's service agent gives her a ticket with a number –A09–, and points to a group of chairs in the lobby. She has been thrown back into the waiting space. She lingers, she picks up a brochure, she puts it away. She picks up her phone, she scrolls, opens one app, closes it, opens another one, closes it. She puts her phone aside. She looks at the clock on the wall. She calculates, "how long have I been here?." A man enters the room, she observes him, but her gaze gets suddenly lost in the tiles on the wall. "How beautiful," she thinks. The tiles remind her of her trip to Portugal, "what a summer."

A screen displays the numbers of the digital queue, which places the waiter in a cartesian grid –A, Q, D for the type of service, followed by a number for the spot in the line. A ring tone announces a new turn, as she glances at the screen: "A02." "Seven numbers more to go," she paces, she counts, she calculates.

She recognises the song in the background. It is *Girl in Red*'s new hit. The music mixes with the quiet muttering of the other people in the room. Another ring interrupts her inner sing-along, "B11." "It's getting cold in here," she observes as she pulls her jacket out of her backpack. She starts feeling her impatience, she should be at work in an hour, and the queue seems to move very slowly, "I don't have time for this," she thinks as she prepares to leave the room. The ring tone again announces the end of her waiting and calms her anxiety: "A09."

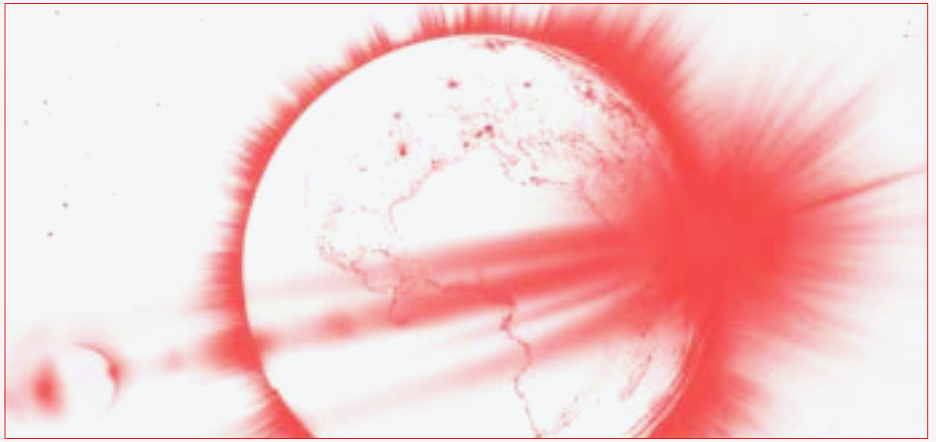

FIG (03)
Earth circling the Sun (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Counting time

Perhaps one of the most ubiquitous systems that affect our lives is the idea of time being something that we can measure, count and even trade. Newtonian time, defined as "absolute, true, and mathematical time, from its own nature, passes equably without relation to anything external."(01) This kind of time runs always the same, at 9.192.631.770 atomic vibrations per second in a Caesium clock.(02) Mathematical time is the structure upon which we have shaped our economical system, our social lives, and in many cases, our habits and mindsets. It has become a standard against which we calibrate and align our beings, as we calibrate the wheels of a clock.(03)

At the risk of broadening too much the limits of what a technology means, one can think about the idea of mathematical time as a technology in itself, a discourse created by humans to extend society's techniques by synchronising, ordering and measuring time. This technology has been continuously refined through metaphysical theories and mathematical equations, coming to rule and order the way in which we structure our lives for centuries. "Soon enough," as Schweizer writes, "Newton's mathematical time seemed not as a human invention but as a divine law."(04)

For Henri Bergson, however, mathematical time was far from a divine law, but only just a reduced reflection of the reality of inner time. As Emily Herring explains, Bergson's philosophy begins with the claim that the concept of time found in mechanical equations lacks any genuine sense of temporality.(05) The idea that we can divide time, measure it and count it, is solidified by Newtonian absolutist ideas of a time that "passes equably without relation to anything external."(06) Mathematical time becomes absolute, an empty vessel that contains the events that might –or might not– be placed into it.(07) In this rigid, unitarian and discrete empty grid, the instants fall into a sequence, resembling Han's non-time, without the need of overlapping or merging, without the capacity of stretching or contracting. Each instant falls directly into a grid compartment that is represented by a specific number –12:00, 13:15, 14:13.

However, for the person who waits, the perception of time, unlike Newtonian mathematical time, is not a line that she can divide into equal units, measure or rationalise; but rather a duration that suggests an indivisible continuation which grows and accumulates. Waiting, as defined by Harold Schweizer, implies the waiter feeling the heavy weight of time, where not all minutes are the same and the instant stretches and lags resisting to fit into the unitarian grid of mathematical time.(08) We *feel* the duration of time as a continuous current and it is in this *feeling* of time, that time inhabits us and reveals its true temporal qualities, away from ticking hands, digital digits and vibrating atoms.

(01)
Robert Rynasiewicz, "Newton's Views on Space, Time, and Motion," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2022 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/newton-stm/.

(02)
"How Do You Measure a Second?," NIST, March 4, 2025, https://www.nist.gov/how-do-you-measure-it/how-do-you-measure-second.

(03)
Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 3.

(04)
Schweizer, 3.

(05)
"Emily Herring on Henri Bergson," Philosophy Bites, March 12, 2025, https://open.spotify.com/episode/3ysX-uCdh6b5ql6IPF-nqIyf?si=856c-d02233c24342.

(06)
Barry Dainton, "Temporal Consciousness," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2024 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/consciousness-temporal/.

(07)
Dainton.

(08)
Schweizer, On Waiting, 2.

FIG (04)
Breakage of a clock (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

The breakage of mathematical time

Drawing from Heidegger's ideas of technological mediation, as explained by Peter-Paul Verbeek, one can observe two distinct ways in which a tool can exist in relation to someone. Ready-to-hand –*zuhanden*–, means the instrument "withdraws from our attention and intentions," Verbeek explains. "If you use a hammer, your attention is typically not with the hammer but with the nail," the hammer is a fluid extension of your body. On the other hand, "when it stops functioning," says Verbeek, "it suddenly demands attention for itself" and it becomes present-at-hand –or *vorhanden*.(09)

(09)
How Technology Changes Us: Lecture with Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek, 2018, 00:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmBgJjfjG7Q.

If we stretch the concept of mathematical time being an instrument, we can argue that it is precisely this instrument that breaks during the waiting experience, appearing in front of the eyes of our consciousness:

> **In waiting ... time no longer seems to serve as a transparent medium or instrument, it is no longer something external to which the waiter could refer, from which he would be separate, of which he could avail himself, through which he could pass to accomplish something, as when one takes a leisurely hour to have lunch.(10)**

(10)
Schweizer, On Waiting, 17.

Typically, mathematical time is constantly usable and available to us. It just works. It fits our daily tasks, it wakes us up in the morning, takes us for lunch and puts us to bed. The waiter refers to it, she uses it as a tool for organising, synchronising, and ordering her life. In waiting, as Schweizer writes, "the hour cannot be turned into lunch."(11) It is no longer something external they can refer to or be separated from. It can not be used as a tool, but the hour *must be lived*, endured, felt:

(11)
Schweizer, 17.

> **"The time that is felt and consciously endured seems slow, thick and opaque, unlike the transparent, inconspicuous time in which we accomplish our tasks and meet our appointments."(12)**

(12)
Schweizer, 17.

Therefore, we can say that during waiting, mathematical time breaks down, leaving its normal technological function. Suddenly, mathematical time becomes opaque and it no longer serves as a system to make sense of time, as the *counting* does not correspond with the *feeling*. The hour is turned into intensity instead of extensity; it is felt, not thought, embodied not applied. The potential of this breakdown is, perhaps, opening a small window of awareness that allows the person who waits to further reflect on the hidden aspects of time's infrastructure.(13)

(12)
Schweizer, 17.

The collapse of mathematical time does not come without discomfort. The person who waits is hesitant. She would like to return to the certainty of mathematical time and so she paces, she glances at the clock, she scrolls on her phone. "She is in conflict with the continuity of her inner life," explains Schweizer, "as she is in conflict with the imperatives of official, synchronised time."(14) The revelation of the intensity of time, can only happen in the displeasure of this disruption, when the time she is feeling does not correspond with the time she is counting, because "time should turn so that we don't have to think of it."(15)

(14)
Schweizer, 24.

(15)
Schweizer, 16.

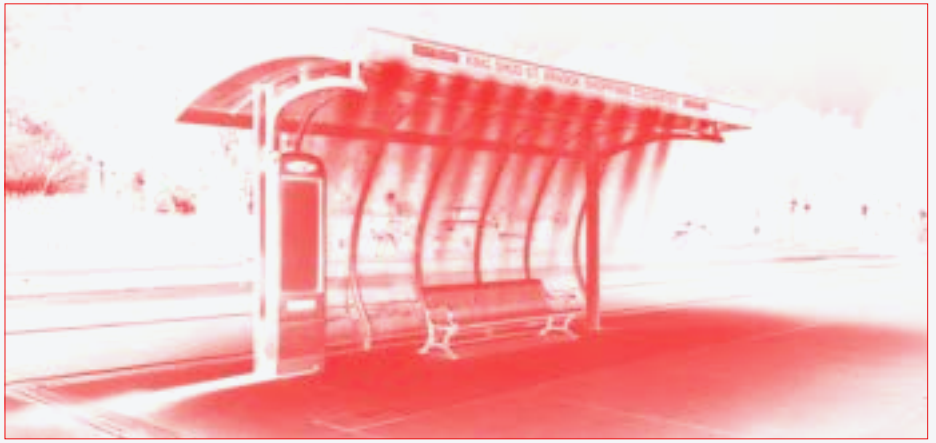

FIG (05)
Bus stop (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

The duration of things

> **Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, or reflecting the effects of a mirror. You thus perceive that each plant, each tree, has its rhythms, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits have their time.**(16)

The soft office chairs and the benches, the side-tables and the counter, the fake plants, the polished ceramic floor and the concrete walls… everything around the waiter has its own rhythms and its own duration. At a perceptual level, we can observe, as Henri Lefebvre suggests in his *Rhythmanalysis*, the rhythms of things under closer scrutiny. We can observe the growth of a tree, the rhythmic movement of the wind on its branches, the twinkling movement of each individual leaf. We can observe all of these rhythms as *changes in space*. However, each thing also withholds an inner duration, that represents a temporality that, according to Bergson, is independent of space:

> **Succession is an undeniable fact, even in the material world. Though our reasoning on isolated systems may imply that their history, past, present, and future, might be instantaneously unfurled like a fan, this history, in point of fact, unfolds itself gradually, as if it occupied a duration like our own.**(17)

Each one of the things that surround the waiter, is slowly unfurling –to borrow Bergson's words–, unfolding itself gradually. All

(16)
Henri Lefebvre and Henri Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life, Reprint (London: Continuum, 2010), 30.

(17)
Henri Bergson, John Mullarkey, and Keith Ansell-Pearson, Key Writings (New York: Continuum, 2002), 176.

the things around the waiter, the material objects, are a part of the same temporal current. It is the same time that goes through them and therefore they are, indeed, a piece of the same whole. Their temporalities "coincide with my impatience", writes Bergson, "that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like."(18) Experiencing duration while waiting involves, as Bergson suggests, sharing time with the things around us.(19)

However, even though the waiter shares with things a portion of her own duration, for most of the time she is not aware of this.(20) The functionality of the things as they are embedded in the fragments of non-time, their usefulness and desirability, render the objects invisible to her awareness. They are technologies *ready-to-hand*, transparent instruments at her disposal. She sits on the chair that is for sitting, without noticing the chair. She picks up the glass that is for drinking, without noticing the glass. In non-time, she can not feel the duration of things, she can only think their function.(21)

The same function has been placed in the waiting act, often to soothe, order, or disperse the waiter's frustration at the encounter with time. The things hide their duration behind their functionality, and at the same time, they redirect the restless waiter back into the comfort of control, measurements, numbers and schedules. "The discrete objects are perceived to elicit a plan of action,"(22) explains Schweizer, but the pacing with the objects "only enacts the impossibility of that action." That plan of action is just an illusion, as the waiter is confined to the waiting space reluctantly. Because she can not act, she paces and she engages with the objects fidgetily, impatiently. Precisely because she is bored, because she lingers with things, because she gazes, she has no plan of action. The certainty that the waiter seeks in the functionality of things is, indeed, the manifestation of the waiter's inner duration, of the fact that she would rather act, well guided by the imperatives of Han's *vita activa*.

(18)
Henri Bergson, John Bergson, Mullarkey, and Ansell-Pearson, 176.

(19)
Schweizer, On Waiting, 26.

(20)
Schweizer, 26.

(21)
Schweizer, 22.

(22)
Schweizer, 38.

You can see the artworks scanning this code.

(Looking at the artworks is not a requirement for the essay's understanding, but it adds up another layer to it).

(In-between 1)

Six types of Waiting in Berlin

Christine Sun Kim
(2017)

The experience of waiting has often been described in rhythmic terms. A slowdown, a pause, an interlude, that somehow interrupts or delays the brisk beat of daily lives. While waiting is frequently associated with slowness, the perception of waiting –and of time itself– is less about speed than it is about variation, temporal tensions, frictions, and detours that can inflect time and turn monotonous counting into rhythmic melodies. Waiting becomes a musical swing, an immeasurable groove that breaks the metric rigidity of time. It is precisely this time variation and hesitation that Berlin-based artist Christine Sun Kim captures in her series Six Types of Waiting in Berlin. As Samuels and Freeman wrote in Crip Temporalities, she synesthetically combines text, image, and sound in a "minimalistic display of the tedium of waiting."[01] Each drawing is both a documentation and an inner interpretation of waiting's temporal textures.

In her drawings, she illustrates through music notation the perception of the time passing in different waiting scenarios –waiting in line at a bank, waiting in line at a grocery store, sitting in an immigration office's waiting room. For Kim, who was born profoundly deaf, the musical notes represent the different rhythms she experiences as she waits: a whole note –slow–, half a note –a bit faster–, a quarter –even faster, another whole –slow again. But the rhythmic notes are not enough to express the intensity of the time felt. Kim's musical scores do not represent waiting as a sequence of empty instants. Her notes and symbols do not simply indicate a slowing of steps or a visible delay. Rather, they visualise a perception of time that has thickened.

In her artist statement, Kim notes: "I have transitioned between musical notes and dynamics, which indicates being either aware of time or losing track of time."[02] This becomes a clear representation of Schweizer's theory of waiting, as the waiter pendulates between thinking time and being time. Waiting in line at a grocery store or at the bank, Kim might not be able to hear the sounds of the outside world in the conventional sense, but she is well attuned to the rhythms of the world and the intensities of her own consciousness. She can hear the music that she is. Her embodied experience of time endures and expresses itself with its own musicality. By founding her own visual vocabulary and representing sound through notation, she reclaims presence in a sonic world.

(01)
Ellen Samuels and Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction," South Atlantic Quarterly 120, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 250.

(02)
Christine Sun Kim and Amanda Cachia, "Six Types of Waiting in Berlin , 2017," South Atlantic Quarterly 120, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 279-83.

Attempting to fix the flow of time into a rigid metric of whole and halve notes, arrests its current –a challenge inherent to visualising duration. Yet by incorporating musical dynamics –piano, forte, pianissimo– Kim restores intensity to rhythm. There's much to be said about Kim's work, in relation to her semiotic vocabulary, to her cultural background, to her way of hearing the world as a non-hearing artist. The focus here is on the contraposition of rhythmic notes versus dynamic marks, as a way of understanding the dichotomy between rhythm and emotional expression, quantity and quality, space and time.

In Rhythmanalysis, Herni Lefevbre critiques Henri Bergson's concept of duration for being too internal, too psychological and individual and for "not having a relation with the physical."[03] The rhythms of the body and their corresponding social determinants are left out, he argues, seeing it as detached from the material world and its power structures. "The concept of (lived or dreamed) time remains abstract", he says, "if one leaves the rhythmic aside."[04] For Lefebvre, rhythm is the materialization, through energy, of Bergsonian time. "Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws", he says,"but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body."[05]

But Lefevbre's material rhythms are not necessarily opposed to Berson's inner time and they can both expand each other, in the same way Kim's work merges and understands rhythms and dynamics. Six types of waiting illustrates the interplay between the measurable and the immeasurable, the quantitative and the qualitative. Time, in Kim's pieces, is not only external –the progress of a queue, the shuffle of the feet, the numbers on the line system– but also internal, felt and heard inside of her –sometimes louder, sometimes quieter. The body can indeed sense the rhythms of the city, the eyes can observe the flux of the waves hitting the shore back and forth, the skin can feel the breeze of the wind and a hand can feel the hammering beat of a living heart. The body senses the world's rhythms, but it also expresses its own.The hesitation of waiting is registered both outwardly and inwardly, in the dragging flow of subjective time.

We think time in quarters and halves, but we feel duration in dynamics. The rhythms oscillate from full notes into semiquavers as the queue slowly moves forward. As the person waiting loses track of time, the quietness of piano takes her out of the realm of the clock. There, she loses herself. There, she becomes time. Pianissimo. Then she is brought out of the

(03)
Henri Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life, Reprint (London: Continuum, 2010), 64.

(04)
Lefebvre, 60.

(05)
Lefebvre, 9.

trance by a gesture, a body, a signal. She enters in the trance again. And towards the end, just before reaching the desk –and after being forced to slow down in a queue– she is asked to speed up, to be efficient, to ask questions clearly, without preamble. The notes become corcheas. The waiting guides the rhythms with a score already written. By whom?

FIG (06)
Chairs and magazines (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

The oscillation of things

As the waiter swings back and forth from non-time and into duration, the objects in the room appear and disappear in front of her consciousness. The transparent function that is hiding the duration of the objects, only momentarily breaks during the waiting experience:

> **The room that waiting prepares for her is no longer the ordinary space of functional, invisible objects among which we move blindly, but a location in which objects have acquired uncanny peculiarity.**(23)

(23) Schweizer, On Waiting, 38.

When the desire to control the perception of time is not fulfilled by the artefacts around the person who waits, when the brochure on the counter is boring, she has no wi-fi or data in her mobile phone and the TV screen is off, the things in the room do not serve her in their functionality and purpose of distraction. They have failed at stealing her attention and so she has turned to their shape and materiality.

The objects in the room reveal their duration as the waiter enters her own inner temporality. As Schweizer notes:

> **The waiter forces objects –notes, words, lumps of sugar, sallow prints, lonely magazines– to confess their differences, their peculiarity, to reveal their distinct outlines, to perform their faint, flat emanations as if they had to justify their existence.**(24)

(24) Schweizer, 39.

As the waiter enters, although only intermittently, the continuity of her inner time, each object reveals themselves and their radiance.(25) She touches them, observes them, cuts them out of the background, delineates "their distinct outlines," to repeat Schweizer's words. She fixates her gaze on the iPhone's screen crack, she analyses the floor, she counts the spots on the wall. The objects in the room are no longer transparent objects, but they have acquired an uncanny peculiarity. Uncanny, because it ultimately confronts the waiter with her own shape and materiality:(26)

(25) Schweizer, 39.

(26) Schweizer, 38.

> **My body exists, then, amidst the aggregate of images that makes up the material world, and, as such, it can only be regarded as one image amongst many which, like other images, receives movement and gives it back.**(27)

(27) Bergson, Mullarkey, and Ansell-Pearson, Key Writings, 14.

As Bergson suggests, the ultimate revelation of *things as things*, of the chair as a pile of wood, of the jacket as knotted wool, of the floor as blocked ceramics … is the revelation of the waiter's own place in a world of things. The waiter finds in "the accidental phenomenology of things," to borrow Schweizer's words, only a "mirror image of her own accidental presence among them."(28) In waiting, the person is confronted –even if briefly and only if allowed by the imperatives of non-time– with her own position within the temporal whole.

(28) Schweizer, On Waiting, 39.

Ultimately, the things in the waiting space share with the impatient waiter, the pendulous oscillation between non-time and duration. As the person who waits uneasily swings from counting time into feeling time, the objects in the waiting space dangle too as they are perceived by an anxious waiter. They are transparent for a while, they are opaque for another moment. They are function and space: chair, sheet, glass, body. They are material and duration: pieces of wood stack together, thin white compressed cellulose, intricate patterns of fragmented reflections, skin and flesh.

FIG (07)
Non-things die (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Non-things in non-time

Although for Bergson, "the universe endures,"[29] and duration "is an undeniable fact, even in the material world,"[30] and even though Schweizer points out how things live by perishing,[31] it seems like nowadays, a lot of things are born already dead. Are all the things in the waiting experience susceptible to temporal oscillation? Are they all capable of leaving non-time and revealing their duration? Can they all reintegrate into the shared temporal whole?

There are *things* that have been compressed to such an extent, that to catch sight of their duration seems impossible. They have been so subjugated to the instant, so compartmentalised within the grid of non-time, so fragmented, that, as a point has no temporality, nor do they. "A computer does not hesitate," says Han, "the work of pure calculation is structured by a temporality that has no access to lingering."[32] In the world of calculation, things know no hesitation, no retardation, no temporal tension, and therefore no duration.

As opposed to Heidegger's concept of a *thing*, which necessarily requires being in time, *non-things* exist in a precipice and hold no duration. "Only being permits lingering," explains Han, "because it 'whiles' and 'perpetuates'."[33] Things that have duration do not only mean things that last, but also things that hesitate, as duration refers to intensity more than to extensity.[34]

(29) Henri Bergson, Arthur Mitchell, and Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, unabridged republ, Dover Books on Western Philosophy (Mineola, N.Y: Dover, 2011), 9.

(30) Bergson, Mitchell, and Bergson, 10.

(31) Schweizer, On Waiting, 25.

(32) Byung-Chul Han, The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering, trans. Daniel Steuer, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2017), 70.

(33) Han, 74.

(34) Han, 1–19.

The teleology of technological innovation in non-time pushes for ever-more fleeting things. The purpose of acceleration renders experiences, thinking and history obsolete, replacing them with events, calculations and information. "Everything must have the opportunity to be a part of the present," writes Han, "the consequence is a pushing and shoving of images, events and information, which makes lingering contemplation impossible. Thus, one zaps through the world."[35]

(35) Han, 41.

It is impossible to linger on things that have no temporality:

> **Contemplative lingering presupposes things which last. It is not possible to linger for long on events or images which quickly succeed one another. Heidegger's *thing* satisfies this condition of lasting. It is a place for duration.[36]**

(36) Han, 70.

The world in non-time is flooded with non-things, because non-things fit perfectly in the homogeneous and rigid grid of dyschronia, they emerge and vanish indistinctly. For the waiter who waits *with* things, the contemplative lingering that Han refers to will be conditioned by the duration of the objects around her. "It is not possible to linger for long on events or images which quickly succeed one another," to repeat Han's words. The permanence of things can be well incarnated in the memory of the waiter. Sometimes things may not last in the physical world, but they do so in our memory. They can access duration –and therefore hesitation– in our mind. When things are not forgotten, they let us linger on them, so the lingering becomes rhetorical rather than physical. To dwell, according to Heidegger, means to *stay* with things … to linger on things.[37] Waiting, however, becomes impossible if we do it with things that do not last or that leave no lasting impression.

(37) Han, 71.

FIG (08)
Computer time (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Loading, checking system...

The internet is an infrastructure of immediacy and hyper-connectivity. Originally developed as a tool for resource-sharing among remote computers, the tempo-spatial compression is at the very core of what the internet is for: bridging distances between what is remote, both in space and in time. As the technology developed, those distances became smaller and smaller, and the *inter-connection* network turned into an *over-connection* network, where the agents are no longer simply connected but seemingly merged. We all inhabit the internet space, in apparent constant simultaneity. What Virilio anticipated as *polar inertia*, was made possible by the internet:

> **We're heading towards a situation in which every city will be in the same place –in time. There will be a kind of coexistence, and probably not a very peaceful one... When can we go to the antipodes in a second or a minute, what will remain of the city? What will remain of us?**(38)

Virilio's concerns become ever more relevant, as individuals remain increasingly still, while no longer needing to move to be anywhere. Data and information flow around them faster than ever, and everything is accessible in the blink of an eye. Waiting on the internet becomes both counterproductive and undesirable, as the intervals have been destroyed in favor of complete proximity and instantaneity.(39)

(38)
Paul Virilio and Sylvere Lotringer, Pure War (New York, N.Y: Semiotext, 1997), 64.

(39)
Han, The Scent of Time, 38.

In *The Philosophy of Software: Code and Mediation in the Digital Age*, philosopher and media theorist David Berry explains how the internet has shifted from being a network of temporarily static web pages, to a space of *real-time streams of data*.(40) But if the temporal structure of non-time is point-like and fragmented, how does this *real-time stream* fits within the rigid grid of non-time? Is not fluidity a characteristic of duration? The real-time streams of data that Berry describes are, in fact, an illusion. Strictly speaking, their real-timeness merely mirrors the present, as data will always be processed, encoded, and decoded, even if that happens at a speed imperceptible to human senses.(41)

More importantly, the internet has and will always operate within *computational time*. Computers do not understand qualities; they function within a binary, discrete, and quantitative world of zeros and ones:

> **The nature of digital networks is, in fact, fundamentally discrete, fragmented and discontinuous. For one, the computer clock forms the basic infrastructure for organising and maintaining sequences and components of computation. Information can only be written on the rising and falling edges of a clock cycle, which are also known as ones and zeros, on/off states or 'flip-flops'**(42)

This is to say, that the very nature of internet time mirrors the structures of non-time and goes in detriment of any experience of duration. However, while this occurs at an essentialist level, the phenomenological experience of the internet often feels like a stream –not a discontinuous sequence– and often feels like the present –like we are connected to what *is happening*. As Marijke Goeting suggests, through "interface mechanisms such as hyperlinking, suggestion algorithms, infinite scrolling and pull to refresh", internet platforms are able to "produce the desired sensation of flow and endlessness."(43) Paradoxically, she also acknowledges that "the particular nature of computational time is a discrete succession of events with a granular structure, rather than a continuous stream or flow."(44)

It is not only the temporal grid of the internet that makes waiting within it impossible. Beyond its quantitative and discrete

(40)
Yinyi Luo, "The Philosophy of Software: Code and Mediation in the Digital Age," Information, Communication & Society 20, no. 12 (December 2, 2017): 143.

(41)
M. C. Goeting, Fast, Fluid, Fragmented: Art and Design in the Digital Age (Arnhem : ArtEZ Press, 2022), 172, https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/handle/2066/248715.

(42)
Goeting, 211.

(43)
Goeting, 207.

(44)
Goeting, 178.

structure and the illusion of real-timeness and present, is **the disconnection between points that erases the experience of duration.** The multi-directional –or non-directional– structure of the internet, with its hyperlinks, multi-tabs and multi-windows, leaves the user *navigating* without a map or a plan of action. The points are isolated; the different sites and content are connected by hyperlinks, but there is no clear narrative or path and the transitions hold no meaning. As Han writes:

> **The internet space does not consist of phases of continuity and transition, but of discontinuous events and facts ... Time in this internet space is a discontinuous and point-like now-time. You move from one link to the next, from one now to another. The now does not possess duration.**[45]

[45] Han, The Scent of Time, 40.

On the internet, all paths are possible, and no one direction is preferred over another, keeping the user always in control to change paths at will. Even in loading screens, buffering, and digital queues, there is a permanent possibility of leaving and coming back, or just leaving altogether. The amount of possibilities available on the internet makes it impossible for us to linger on any point, for the time of waiting is only entered, as Schweizer writes, "with reluctance and resistance."[46] The internet is a space without temporal friction, and for the waiter, this becomes a liberation from the temporal friction that is waiting. Connecting to the internet offers immediate relief, as she directly connects to the structures of non-time and the abolition of transitions to which she has become so accustomed.

[46] Schweizer, On Waiting, 16.

You can listen to the album scanning this code.

(Listening to the album is not a requirement for the essay's understanding, but it adds up to the experience and it is a nice album).

(In-between 2)

Ambient 1: Music for Airports

Brian Eno
(1972)

The act of waiting is embodied and perceived with all the senses. The waiter is not only affected by the surrounding visuals, but her ears –which have heard longer than her eyes have seen– also play a role in the waiting perception. These perceptions are enlarged as the waiter enters the space of duration.[01] In airports, it's not just passport controls and tourist advertisements, but also the soundscape, together with the physical space, that shapes how we experience time delays.

Muzak –also known as elevator music– was created to fill in the unsettling silence of waiting. It was made to be played in lifts, waiting rooms, calls on hold, airport lounges and retail spaces aiming to appease the weight of the time endurance or stimulate consumption.[02] In Jones and Schumacher's words, by "creating a dynamic sense of forward movement in the listener," Muzak fosters "the illusion that time was passing."[03] Just like dumb scrolling on social media disperses the waiter's visual attention in favour of a fleeting sequence of blinking visuals, Muzak soothes the anxious ears with entertaining tracks: easy to digest, catchy and happy.[04]

Ambient music comes to disturb this type of distracted waiting, presenting an alternative to background music for commercial spaces.[05] That "sense of forward movement" Jones and Schumacher describe in Muzak is countered by Brian Eno's Music for Airports –one of the first ambient albums ever composed. Eno's album replaces the forward sequence by translating the language of lingering into an ethereal composition of atmospheric moods.[06]

The concept behind ambient music itself was born in a situation of waiting. The almost mythological tale places Brian Eno in a hospital room while he recovered from a car accident. The moment of natural waiting, imposed by a convalescing body, revealed a new genre of music designed to create soundscapes that are neither catchy nor intrusive, but instead live alongside the sounds of life:

> As soon as I got the scar from that accident, a friend of mine came ... I was confined to bed, I couldn't move. As she left she said, 'should I put a record on?', I said, 'please'. She put the record on and then left. The record was much too quiet, but I couldn't reach to turn it up. And it was raining outside. The record was 18th century harp music. So I lay there, first kind of frustrated by the situation, but then I started listening to the rain, and listening to the odd notes of the harp that was just loud enough to be heard above the rain. And this was a great musical experience.[07]

Shortly after this epiphany, Eno was waiting at the airport in Cologne. Inspired by his musical experience at the hospital and annoyed by the Muzak-like playlist, he was drawn to reimagine the airport's soundscape. "I suddenly thought of this idea of making music that didn't impose itself on your space," says Eno, "but created a sort of landscape that you could belong to, you could be part of."[08] In 1978, Music for Airports was born. Unlike Muzak, which overrides the surrounding noise, Music for Airports fuses –like the harp with the rain– with the airport's soundscape. It does not demand or distract, it is instead composed for cohabiting.

Which rhythms can be heard alongside Music for Airports? The sound of the ambient track merges with the beep of the check-in machines, with the whispers of the expectant crowd and the megaphone announcements. Is that all there is? Schweizer's theory of waiting provides us with a hinge of something else, the inlaid rhythms of the waiter's own enduring body:

> The waiter's momentary intuition of her own duration –as it occurs, for example, when we suddenly, but always only intermittently, hear our heartbeat– is accompanied by a certain uncanny discomfort.[09]

We hum to the melodies of Muzak, we scroll down our TikTok feed, we pace and check the time in our smartphones, we try all we can to soothe the weight of time. But in that "momentary intuition", in that intermittent moment of awareness that Schweizer mentions, we wonder, we hang on a note, we stare indefinitely at the intricate pattern of the QR code on the boarding pass. We open our eyes. We close them. We listen outside, we listen inside. While waiting, but "always only intermittently", we enter the space of duration. Pure waiting swings us in and out of the "strange phenomenon" of our "own existential enduring", to quote Schweizer's words.[10] It is in this uncomfortable –but occasional– embodiment of time, in this "momentary intuition" that we can hear, as long as the soundscape allows it, the sound of waiting. Music for Airports allows the waiter to hear, alongside the pianos and the pads, and always only on and off, the rhythms of her own breathing or the beat of her own heart. With this, she can hear as she waits, the rhythms of her own temporality.[11]

(01) Henri Bergson, The Creative Mind, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Thx Pruasophicax, Librasy, Inc., 1946), 113.

(02) Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher, "Muzak: On Functional Music and Power," Critical Studies in Mass Communication 9, no. 2 (June 1992): 163.

(03) Jones and Schumacher, 160.

(04) Jones and Schumacher, 162.

(05) Victor Szabo, "Unsettling Brian Eno's Music for Airports," Twentieth-Century Music 14, no. 2 (June 2017): 305.

(06) Szabo, 305.

(07) Brian Eno - Music For Airports Interview, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykJg-vE3k-E.

(08) Brian Eno - Music For Airports Interview.

(09) Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 21.

(10) Schweizer, 18.

(11) Schweizer, 18-21.

The ultimate confrontation with the finite nature of our existence is perhaps the deepest reason we resist waiting. "We have no interest in listening," writes Bergson, "to the uninterrupted humming of life's depth. And yet, that is where real duration is."[12] That Music for Airports was created precisely for spaces like airports –where the fear of death is often near, and waiting is inevitable– makes this confrontation all the more poignant. As we wait for the airplane to lift us up from the safety of the ground, Music for Airports also embraces the sound of fear. It welcomes the anxious inner voice reviewing last week's crash headlines, Googling once again how likely it is for a plane to fall.

That honesty and rawness clashes, claims Eno, with the atmosphere of the airport's waiting lounge:

> I was thinking about flying at the time, because I thought that everything that was connected with flying was kind of a lie .... They always played this very happy music, sort of saying 'you're not going to die, there's not going to be an accident, don't worry' ... I thought it would be much better to have music that said: 'well, if you die it doesn't really matter.'[13]

Music for Airports was created for waiting in a space that holds the possibility of death. "I wanted to create a different feeling, that you were sort of suspended in the universe and your life or death wasn't so important", says Eno.[14] That is, really, ambient music. More than Muzak that –like non-time– is whizzing, "productive" and indulging, Music for Airports is music for waiting. It acknowledges the realness of the surroundings and the diversity of its timescapes, allowing the waiter to hear beyond the incommensurable cycles of voices, beyond the pads and the pianos, beyond the ticks of the clock, and into the music that we are.

Ambient, as described by Eno, is supposed to be "as ignorable as it is interesting."[15] It allows the person to swing in and out, much as Schweizer describes the waiting experience itself. But it is also its ethereal composition that resembles the art of lingering. The forty-eight-minute-long album is composed of four pieces that accentuate the concept of interpenetration and duration. The recordings overlap each other in a non-periodical repetition of "sonic interactions", to borrow Victor Szabo expression. These sound events "overlap indiscriminately, and dissipate into indefinite long echoes" says Szabo in his piece

(12) Henri Bergson, The Creative Mind, 125.

(13) Brian Eno - Music For Airports Interview.

(14) Brian Eno - Music For Airports Interview.

(15) "Music for Airports Liner Notes," accessed May 5, 2025, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/MFA-txt.html.

Unsettling Brian Eno's Music for Airports.[16] Although phrases come back in a loop, they never come back the same, always overlapping with something else, never predictable, never matching, never falling straight into the metrics of a beat. This avoids the piece, as time in the waiting experience, to ever rest "on certain ground."[17]

It is precisely this unfulfilled expectation that makes Music for Airports uncanny, as the experience of waiting itself. The lack of resolution, that the listener craves for to release a quick shot of dopamine. As John Lysaker writes about the album, the uncanny feeling is unsettling only if "one insists on keeping a beat that is not there." But "once one accepts its absence", he says, the track acquires a different kind of energy –"elemental forces in eddies and currents, neither still nor raging."[18] What troubles us in the waiting experience, similarly, might not always be the waiting itself. Perhaps the unsettling feeling of being robbed of time is only unsettling if one insists "on keeping a beat that is not there."[19] Perhaps that time we think we are being robbed of was never ours to hold in the first place. Coming to enjoy Music for Airports may not be so different from learning to surrender to the experience of waiting –resisting the urge to impose on it the frantic cadences of productivity and optimization.

(16) Szabo, "Unsettling Brian Eno's Music for Airports," 311.

(17) Szabo, 311.

(18) John Lysaker, "Turning Listening Inside Out: Brian Eno's Ambient 1: Music for Airports," The Journal of Speculative Philosophy 31, no. 1 (January 31, 2017): 13.

(19) Lysaker, 13.

FIG (09)
People stuck on the phone (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Fleeting media

If the temporalities of the internet fit non-time comfortably, the same is true for the content it hosts, which is increasingly fragmented and transient. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues, at a fundamental level, digital content is an *event* rather than a *thing*, as it is the execution of coded actions repeatedly run to make content accessible to the user.(47) This insight helps us understand why contemporary digital media is rarely opaque or particular in the philosophical sense of the word, which turns contemporary digital media into a non-thing.

Modern media –which is mostly digital– presupposes instantaneity and frugality. "Strictly speaking, [new media] is no longer something *ready-to-hand*", writes Han, noting that instead of the hands, it immediately reaches the eyes.(48) "The age of the new media is an age of implosion", he says, "space and time implode into here and now."(49) In a similar way television used to structure time and life into a linear and oriented timeline,(50) new media –which exists primarily in the realm of quantitative computational time– structures time and life into a temporal dispersion. These logics enchant the waiter who does not want to be taken out of the comforts of her own crisis.

Among the forms of media the waiter consumes to escape the endurance of time, mobile media –and particularly social media– is perhaps the most pervasive, and the mobile phone the favorite

(47)
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Crisis, Crisis, Crisis, or Sovereignty and Networks," Theory, Culture & Society 28, no. 6 (November 2011): 106.

(48)
Han, The Scent of Time, 61.

(49)
Han, 61.

(50)
Maren Hartmann et al., eds., Mediated Time: Perspectives on Time in a Digital Age (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 303.

artifact to display it.(51) In mobile media, the content is not just an event operating under quantitative logics, but is also point-like.(52) Social media compresses media into instants: a ten seconds reel, a catchy image, a five seconds viral clip. The speed at which this stimulus is presented has made lingering with it impossible.(53) This ephemeral content rarely tarries in the brain of the waiter who lets it enter and leave suddenly without leaving any mark on her consciousness. As Han writes:

> **The images only fleetingly touch the retina, and do not attract lasting attention. Quickly they eject their visual stimulus and fade away. In contrast to knowledge and experience in the empathic sense, information and experienced events produce no lasting or deep effects.(54)**

Having immediate access to these media through the black mirror in her pocket, the uncomfortable waiter in the queue, waiting room, or bus stop –feeling out of sync with the rhythms of contemporary life– seeks social media in an attempt to get reintegrated into the pace of society. She will find in the stream of reels and in the swipe of posts, an easy way back into the relief of the *quasi-present* moment and the familiarity of non-time.

This thesis has emphasized that meaningful temporality requires *temporal tension*, which presupposes variation. "What makes time meaningful is not its sameness," explains Han, "but its difference."(55) One might think, then, that social media's constant pursuit of novelty would imbue it with meaning and intensity. Yet it is precisely social media's obsession with the different and the unique, which results in sameness. Social media becomes homogeneous in its diversity, flattened by the urgency of the new.

Moreover, there is nothing that binds the media content together. Although the waiter consumes it in a sequence that, as Berry suggests, resembles a stream, the elements are ultimately dispersed and segregated. There is no narrative arch and no clear path to turn the content into a whole. The images and videos are presented in a dispersed sequence that can be abandoned, reconfigured, skipped or fast forwarded at any moment. Waiting with social media is impossible, as real duration cannot emerge from a fragmented system designed for fast consumption and

(51)
Hartmann et al., 335.

(52)
Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, trans. John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 32.

(53)
Han, The Scent of Time, 40.

(54)
Han, 41.

(55)
Han, 41.

ephemeral engagement. The only potential for waiting in non-time would be to linger persistently on a single element, but social media structures are designed to prevent such lingering, ensuring any encounter with waiting is immediately absorbed back into the fleeting media.

FIG (10)
Wall Street traders (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Money, the fire that consumes me

"Time is the fire that consumes me, but I am the fire," writes Borges.(56) But outside of all the theory and philosophy, and in the atomised reality, *I am not the fire*, but time seems to be, precisely, *the fire that consumes me*. The constant feeling of time scarcity that is paradoxically enhanced by technological development, leads the waiter to perceiving waiting as wasting.(57) The person who waits never *has enough time*, she is always *running behind the clock*, she feels in constant temporal debt. But what exactly is she wasting when she waits?

The idea of mathematical time being made of interchangeable numerical units, is closely related to modern life being imbued with a rigidity, precision and determination, arguably required by the modern metropolitan society to function in synchronisation and order. As Rosa explains:

> **Time that is 'operative' in modern society is decisively shaped and formed by the reification and commodification of time characteristic of the capitalist production process, i.e., by its transformation into a scarce good to be managed from the standpoint of efficiency, which is responsible for the fact that time is experienced as a linear, abstract magnitude without any qualities.(58)**

(56)
Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (University of Texas Press, 1964), 332.

(57)
Hartmut Rosa, Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 49.

(58)
Rosa, 161-162.

Time and money are now interchangeable, "one can convert time and money into each other like two currencies."[59] Time has been transformed into "a scarce good to be managed from a standpoint of efficiency," to repeat Rosa's words. This commodification has inserted time as a resource into economics, defined by Lionel Robbins as "the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses."[60] If time is scarce, then, it becomes a subject of economics and a resource to be administered.

Benjamin Franklin's famous "time is money" statement, at the beginning of his essay *Advice to a Young Tradesman*, is a clear representation of this interchangeability to the eyes of a merchant:

> **Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expense; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.**[61]

What Franklin writes supports the general belief that every choice one makes on how one *uses* time, is giving up on something else on how one *could be using* time, for example, earning "five shillings." And the aphorism grew so deep inside of us that waiting now seems like burning money we do not have, or giving up on all the wonderful things we cannot do because we are too busy making money in the first place.

The effects that the economical infrastructure –and money as a financial instrument– have on our perception of time, is guided partly through the commodification of time. The experience of waiting is not exempt from these determinations, as the waiter fills with anxiety for giving up their time, as an equivalent of either their labour or their leisure. "It is now time itself," writes Rosa in *Social Acceleration*, "that the capitalist entrepreneur buys from his employees and no longer the product of their labor."[62] The waiting time feels like a waste, and yet, as Schweizer proposes, "we might think of waiting also as a temporary liberation from the economics of time-is-money."[62] Here lies one complex paradox of waiting and agency, given by the fact that the waiter is often a victim of a power dynamic that forces her to wait, while at the same time she might find in this forced waiting time a brief liberation from the same economics that subjugate her in the first place. Unfortunately, the liberation that Schweizer proposes is only fleeting and almost fictional, as it cannot perdure outside of the waiting room, where the waiter is immediately reinserted in the pressures of the prevalent economy.

However, the waiter might encounter, even if only temporarily, the substance of time that has been annihilated otherwise by the system of time-commodification. What is lost when we let economic determinations and clock measurements assign time a monetary value, is the content of time itself. And yet, the content of time itself during the experience of waiting is inconceivable – because immeasurable– to the eyes of economics.[64] Time during waiting cannot be measured, but felt and embodied. What Borges so beautifully writes, that "[time] is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire," does not end there. It continues admitting the determination of global infrastructures: "The world, unfortunately, is real", he writes, "I, unfortunately, am Borges."[65]

(59) Rosa, 377.

(60) Lionel Robbins, "An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science," Macmillan, 1932, 16.

(61) Benjamin Franklin, "Advice to a Young Tradesman," 1748.

(62) Rosa, Social Acceleration, 162.

(63) Schweizer, On Waiting, 2.

(64) Schweizer, 2.

(65) Borges, Other Inquisitions, 332.

You can see the artwork scanning these codes.

(Looking at the artwork is not a requirement for the essay's understanding, but it adds up another layer to it).

(In-between 3)

Ralph Smith; 21 years old; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; $25

Philip Lorca diCorcia in the *Hustlers* series (1990-1992)

Ralph Smith; 21 years old; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; $25 is the full title of one of the photographs in Philip-Lorca diCorcia's Hustlers series. Taken between 1990 and 1992 in Los Angeles California, the series documents male sex workers, each one photographed in semi-staged encounters. DiCorcia paid the men the amount they would have charged for sex, and included their name, age, hometown, and rate as the title of each work.[01] Not much more was exchanged between the photographer and the subjects, only maybe a few words and a ride back home.[02] The result is a body of portraits that hovers between documentation and fiction, exchange and power, waiting and flash.

Ralph Smith is photographed on the curb of a fast-food drive-thru, illuminated by a fluorescent sign and surrounded by the markers of urban transit. Typical liminal spaces like gas stations, parking lots, porches, sidewalks or bus stops, are not so liminal for the street escort who inhabits them as a working space. What does the car mean to the taxi driver? The hallway to the concierge? The boat to the fisherman? The streets are suddenly transformed into reception rooms for new or recurrent customers, that will briefly take the sex worker out of the waiting they are in.

The city around him is composed of layered flows that are revealed by the artifacts and technologies that give it shape. "The interaction of diverse, repetitive and different rhythms," writes Henri Lefebvre, "animates, as one says, the street and the neighbourhood."[03] In his Rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre reminds us that those rhythms are not neutral –they are social, institutional and affective.[04] The cars, the traffic lights and the streets imbue the city with a rhythm that is fast and directional. The drive-thru totems and the gas station dispensers permeate consumer exchange with a pace that is structured and efficient. The rhythms of the subject's bodily presence, held still. The rapid shutter of diCorcia's camera, the tempos of the man behind the lens and his agenda, the quick and spare notes that he takes from his subject: Ralph Smith; 21 years old; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; $25.

All of these rhythms are frozen in a photograph, which also awaits as a work of art. "The photograph cuts across time and discloses a cross-section of the event or events which were developing at that instant," writes John Berger in Understanding a photograph.[05] Photography selects and fixes. As an exemplary technology of the era of mechanical reproduction, it replicates the logics of non-time flattening the durations and temporalities of the city into an instant. But the rhythms of the city are not all that is flattened in the picture:

> Since these days one is more likely to find male escorts online rather than on the streets, what is problematic in these editorials' proposition is how the nostalgic appropriation of gay subculture... ends up representing a gay identity as a fixed marginalized territory.[06]

The quick shutter also silences the hustlers' voices –if they were not silenced already– and freezes gay identity for the gaze of us all. Photography, like other technological means for recurrence, eliminates the temporal interval that is responsible for understanding. It provides us with instantaneous access to temporarily and spatially remote memories, draining them from the temporality and locality that once gave them meaning. But paradoxically, the photograph withholds the possibility of duration in interpretation, as a work of art that demands waiting in itself, lingering and focus. The encoding and the decoding of an image encapsulates its own rhythms that live alongside the rhythms of that which is captured in it.

If any sign of time is to be pulled out from the image, it might only be spatial time: distances. The long exposure technique allowed diCorcia to capture the trace of the flashing cars behind the waiter. Only through the sustained state of an opened lens can we trace a line of lights. In other words: it is the duration, the enduring attention, the sustained openness of the eye that allows the tracing of any path, of any narrative, of any meaning.

The idea of time as money is already engraved in the title of these pieces. $25. $50. $40. "If you just tried to do this in Union Square, you'd have more trouble finding people willing," said the former chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, Peter Galassi. But "these guys" were "already selling their time," he continues.[07] In similar lines, diCorcia himself claims that "the guys commodified themselves, and commodities have prices."[08] As problematic as it sounds, the problem does not lie in the claim not being true, but in it being incomplete. The commodification of time is not, and was not, limited to the hustlers. diCorcia's time is commodified too. The idea of time as money was too engraved in his practice as a photographer, in Galassi's practice as a curator and goes well in line with the commodification of the body and the self so engraved in the

(01) "Hustlers," David Zwirner, accessed March 6, 2025, https://www.davidzwirner.com/exhibitions/2013/hustlers.

(02) Arthur Lubow, "Real People, Contrived Settings," The New York Times, August 23, 2013, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/25/arts/design/philip-lorca-dicorcias-hustlers-return-to-new-york.html.

(03) Henri Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life, Reprint (London: Continuum, 2010), 30.

(04) Lefebvre, vii–viii.

(05) John Berger, Understanding a Photograph, ed. Geoff Dyer, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 90.

(06) Itai Doron, "Tinker, Soldier, Sailor, Thief: The Visual Representations and Appropriations of the Male Sexual Outlaw as a Gay Fantasy Figure in the Arts and in Fashion Imagery," Critical Studies in Men's Fashion 3, no. 2 (September 1, 2016): 8.

(07) Lubow, "Real People, Contrived Settings."

(08) Lubow.

Hollywood entertainment industry –or in post-modern society for what matters. If anything, the time of the marginalised has been decommodified, as Schweizer writes, as "the poor will always be with us; the poor will always wait. Their time is not money."[09]

It is tempting to read Ralph's stillness as symbolic, to project existential longing onto his body, as if he were waiting for redemption, change, or rescue. Most of the critique and comments related to this series perpetuate, in one way or another, the monolithic and deep-rooted myths about prostitution as an inherently exploitative and undesired occupation, which is not always necessarily the case.[10] To speculate about the existential waiting of the men –for meaning, future or other opportunities–, would mean to again sustain those narratives and not to acknowledge that prostitution can well be a choice. As Ralph said to diCorcia during his photoshoot "this is a job, and I approach it professionally."[11] Ralph may be waiting, but his waiting is not necessarily existential, or at least not more existential, again, than the waiting that any of us could experience sitting under a Del Taco sign.

However, it would be thoughtless to ignore the fact that the photos were taken during the turbulent early nineties, a period in the US defined by the AIDS crisis and the culture wars, a time when sex work, particularly among queer men, was heavily stigmatised, criminalised, and often life-threatening.[12] To stand still in public, to wait in view, was not only an act of work, but an act of exposure. As a sex worker, Ralph's presence in the frame is not just aesthetic, but political. He is established at the margins of the social and economical system, and so is his waiting.

This image remains relevant because it captures a fundamental tension. There is the system that does not wait –fast food, fast cars, fast cities– and the lives that do, disidentified with capitalist chronologies. Ralph's time is not structured around productivity, advancement, or efficiency. His time has not yet been fully optimised or engineered, his waitings not fully annihilated. In this sense, his presence resists absorption into the flows of the normative city. He becomes a disruption to the contemporary rhythms of an accelerated life.

His body does not comply with the teleology of the drive-thru behind him. The drive-thru is a space for passage and transit, almost a part of the highway itself. It allows the driver to get what they want without leaving their car, without changing their route, without losing any time. The car becomes more than ever an extension of the self, a double skin made out of metal and pipes. "A mobile space which can take us anywhere," says Augé, "a space where everything is at hand and nothing is lacking."[13] Confined to a few square meters, the whole world is accessible to us within that metallic armour. Against this image, Ralph Smith sits still, his case is just that of his skin.

Illuminated by the sign fluorescent reflection and pushed aside from the system, Ralph's activity keeps him constantly in the interim, in the interlude between one customer and the following, between one night and the next. The sex worker lingers, who knows for how long, while the timeframes of the fast-food chain have been chronometrically measured, minimised and optimised. In this way, the image becomes a portrait of the contemporary city: a space of overlapping rhythms, where some want to wait, some are forced to wait, some do not need to wait, and some will have to wait forever.

(09) Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 6.

(10) Ronald Weitzer, "Prostitution: Facts and Fictions," Contexts 6, no. 4 (November 2007): 28-33.

(11) Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Philip-Lorca diCorcia: Hustlers, First Edition (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013).

(12) Deanne B. Ancker, "The Making of a Nightmare: AIDS Storms Hollywood. Pdf," 1992.

(13) Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, trans. John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 4.

FIG (11)
Concrete but blurry (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

The lack of temporality in language

Stiegler's idea of technology as a discourse, opens up the limits of what can be considered a technology. Regarding language, he asks: "is not language itself, qua skill, a technique, and a potentially marketable commodity?"(66) To this he notes that "language becomes indissociable from technicity and prostheticity: it must be thought with them, like them, in them, or from the same origin as theirs: from within their mutual essence."(67) How does the commodification and atomisation of time has its effects in many aspects of life, including language? And how does language, simultaneously, affects the way in which we think about time, and consequentially, of waiting?

For Bergson, language is indeed one of the main reasons why we can not conceive the real temporality of time, as language tends to solidify our impressions:

> **... our perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas occur under two aspects : the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property.(68)**

Therefore, and *because* duration is indeed ever changing, inexpressible and confused, language cannot refer to it without freezing its mobility. "Here, however, lies the danger," writes Bergson, to commit "to a confusion which arises from language, and which is due to the fact that language is not meant to convey all the delicate shades of inner states."(69) English language as a system of techniques is flawful when it tries to refer to temporality and the states of the mind. Consecutively, speaking about time drains it from all essential temporality.(70)

Said differently, the way in which we refer to time by the means of words, imbues it with sharp and precise distinctions, with a certain discontinuity, that does not correspond with the qualitative aspects of duration. "Language," writes Bergson, "is ill-suited to render the subtleties of psychological analysis"(71) and therefore it has led us to confuse extensity with intensity, counting with feeling, quantity with quality.(72) Hence, it forces us into non-time and shapes our understanding outside of the realm of duration. Language, like the numbers on the clock, is time *thought* rather than *felt*.

Because we have confused quantity with quality, the ways in which we talk about time –at least in English and Spanish, two of the most spoken languages in the world– echo the idea of time as a resource. "Just like money, time is always scarce, regardless of how much one has," writes Rosa, "and exactly like money one can *lose it, invest it, waste it, save it, allocate it,* etc..."(73) This way of talking about time reinforces the idea of it as an interchangeable atom, a homogeneous discrete unit that can be traded and managed to our liking.

Time being a resource aligns with the logics of non-time and deviates from Bergson's real temporality which cannot be divided or measured, therefore cannot be *used, wasted, invested, spent, saved, allocated* or even and most importantly *possessed*. Real temporality as experienced during waiting, is not for us to manage, but for us to feel: one cannot *have* or *not have* time, but rather time goes through us; "I *am* the fire", to repeat Borges' words.(74) The time of pure waiting is not to be managed or used but rather lived, experienced and felt, for in a pure experience of waiting "nothing is left but time."(75)

(66)
Bernard Stiegler, The Fault of Epimetheus, Technics and Time / Stiegler, Bernhard 1 (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Pr, 1998), 94.

(67)
Stiegler, 145.

(68)
Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. F. L. Pogson M.A., Matter and Memory (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1950), 129.

(69)
Bergson, 160.

(70)
Bergson, xi.

(71)
Bergson, 13.

(72)
Bergson, xxiv.

(73)
Rosa, Social Acceleration, 377.

(74)
Borges, Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952, 332.

(75)
Schweizer, On Waiting, 12.

They just wait...They have become time passing, vessels of time, time's bodily manifestations. We are 'empty personae,' as Theodor Adorno puts this, 'through which the world can truly resonate'.[76]

(76) Schweizer,12.

Language, with its constraints and limitations, mediates our experience of waiting too. The embodiment of time does not allow its rationalisation, as duration is not a succession of independent events or measurements, but it is the accumulation of time experienced, "the melting of states of consciousness into one another," to quote Bergson's own words.[77]

(77) Bergson, Time and Free Will, 107.

As the waiter enters, although only temporarily, the realm of pure duration, the language with which she colloquially refers to time becomes superfluous. She cannot *use, save or invest* time to her liking, even if she would want to convince herself otherwise. As soon as she turns waiting time into "operative" or "productive" time, she leaves duration and re-enter, for better or for worse, the dissipated and frenetic whizzing of non-time. The transformation of the way in which we talk about waiting –as time that is *wasted, killed or lost*– does not take into account the essential temporality of time and its real duration and therefore reinforces its fragmentation. The dialogue from Butchner's play, Danton's Death, reveals a hint of what it would mean to speak differently, when Camille says "Hurry, Danton, we've no time to lose," to which Danton responds: "*But time is losing us*."[78]

(78) Georg Büchner et al., Danton's Death, A Methuen Paperback : Methuen Theatre Classics (London: Methuen, 1982), 25.

FIG (12) Waiting at an immigration office (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Waiting spaces and the non-place condition

One might imagine a waiting space entirely detached from all technologies and physical context –a space like, for example, the purgatory. In this mythical christian interstice between Earth and heaven, the soul finds itself suspended, stripped of all means of distraction, of any tools to contract or protract time. Deprived of any external artifacts by which to pace, rationalise, or objectify the wait, the christian soul is supposedly left with no other choice than to succumb to the feeling of the purge. It is a waiting reduced to its purest form: introspective, undiluted, and suspended in time. [79]

(79) Catechism of the Catholic Church - I Believe in Life Everlasting," February 22, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20190222071948/http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm.

On Earth, believers and non-believers do not wait untethered. We lean, we sit, we lie down. As Ghassan Hage notes, the relationship between waiting and technology often entails "the compartmentalisation of space and the provision of a space dedicated to waiting"[80] –waiting rooms, airport lounges, bus stops, train platforms. Unlike purgatory, earthly waiting is situated: it takes place not only in time, but also in space.

(80) Ghassan Hage, Waiting (Carlton: Melbourne University Publisher, 2009), 11.

Marc Augé's distinction between anthropological places and non-places offers a powerful lens through which to examine the spatialities of waiting and how they affect our perception of time, the self and its relationship to others. In his book *Non-Places*, he explains how anthropological places are spaces where identity, memory, and social relations are inscribed and reinforced: the village square, the family home, the historical monument, to

name a few.[81] He claims that in late-modernity –or what he calls *supermodernity*– what reigns is not the anthropological place but the opposite: *non-places*. Non-places have been designed not to be inhabited, but they are there "to be passed through", writes Augé, "they are measured in units of time."[82]

> **If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places...**[83]

As examples of non-places Augé mentions airports, hotel lobbies, supermarkets, refugee camps, means of transport and railway stations, among others.[84] These examples overlap with spaces for waiting in many cases, which lead us to ask what are the similarities between waiting spaces and non-places? Are waiting spaces anthropological? Or are they indeed, stripped of history, identity and relational traits? How does this space mediate the experience of waiting?

As spaces designed to be passed through, Augé's non-places do not exist in isolation, but they form a network of transit. The highways, the gas stations, the shopping center, they are all integrated into a net of movement that reinforces the idea of activity and motion, so engraved in our current times. The role that anthropological places have in this network is that of a deviation. The historical landmarks, the monuments, the village square, the city centers, they have not all been eliminated, but removed from this network, constituting a detour:

> **Our towns have been turning into museums (...) while at the same time bypasses, motorways, high-speed trains and oneway systems have made it unnecessary for us to linger in them. But this turning away doesn't come without some feeling of remorse, as we can see from the numerous signboards inviting us not to ignore the splendours of the area and its traces of history.**[85]

Intuitively, one might think that waiting spaces would be removed from this transit network, as they are a pause or an interlude, and therefore a pain point in the movement plan. However, many waiting spaces today are designed to sustain the constant movement, and are thus well integrated into the network of transit: "the installations needed for accelerated circulation of passengers and goods," writes Augé, "are just as many non-places as the means of transport themselves … or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked."[86]

As described in the marketing article *Keep them busy, keep them flowing?*, "actively occupying wait time effectively enhances service customers' wait time perceptions,"[87] Or in other words, the imperative of activity finds its way into the waiting experience to calm the uneasy body that would always rather act than stay still. Perhaps for this reason, if delays cannot be eliminated altogether, services will make an effort to integrate the waiting experience into the flow of motion and activity, so we pass through it inadvertently. If we must wait, we must do so as we walk, as we move, either physically or mentally –always already in route. The traveller at the airport, thus, will rather wait for her luggage as she walks long corridors to baggage claim, than to do so standing next to the gate. These has been precisely designed for a wait that happens in movement.[88] The drive-thru, on another hand, has been quite literally integrated into the highway, and designed so that the waiting occurs *as she goes*. Waiting spaces have been reconfigured for perpetual transit, to soothe the anxieties of the waiter that would rather act than think. The architecture and technologies of the waiting space replace the possibility of dwelling with the demand of a constant march.

The contraposition of anthropological places to non-places developed by Augé ends with a list of check-points:

> **Thus we can contrast the realities of *transit* (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of *residence* or *dwelling*; the *interchange* (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) with the *crossroads* (where people meet); the *passenger* (defined by his destination) with the *traveller* (who strolls along his route...), the *housing estate* (...), where people do not live together and which is never situated in the center of anything (...), with the *monument* where people share and commemorate; *communication* (with its codes, images and strategies) with *language* (which is spoken).**[89]

(81) Augé, Non-Places, 58.

(82) Augé, 104.

(83) Augé, 78.

(84) Augé, 79.

(85) Augé, 73.

(86) Augé, 34.

(87) Sebastian Böddeker et al., "Keep Them Busy, Keep Them Flowing? The Effects of Actively versus Passively Occupied Wait Time," Journal of Business Research 189 (February 2025): 1.

(88) Richard C. Larson, "OR Forum—Perspectives on Queues: Social Justice and the Psychology of Queueing," Operations Research 35, no. 6 (December 1987): 897.

(89) Augé, Non-Places, 107–108.

And thus, we can think about the contemporary space of waiting (supermarket queues, drive-thrus, airport lounges, passport controls, train stations, busses, online queues, and so on) much closer to being a *housing estate* than a *monument*, much more like an *interchange* than a *crossroad*, much more mediated by *communication* than by *language*, much more guided by *transit* than by *dwelling*. And this is, perhaps, the biggest paradox.

You can see the artwork scanning these codes.

(Looking at the artwork is not a requirement for the essay's understanding, but it adds up another layer to it).

(In-between 4)

Ferry between Helsinki and Stockholm

Martin Parr in *Bored Couples* series
(1991)

It is 1991, and a couple (soon to be a bored couple) boards a ferry in Helsinki. A nearly twenty hour-long trip awaits, as they cross Mariehamn and reach port in Stockholm. Twenty hours confined in a shared designated space in a state of transit and time endurance. How will they fill their time?

Some have called waiting the ugly cousin of boredom. Closely related, the former hasn't gotten as much attention as the latter. Walter Benjamin described boredom as a state where time becomes perceptible–and so is waiting–a dragging awareness of duration. In Parr's photography, the couple embodies this temporality. Their postures and disengaged gazes suggest a heightened awareness of the passage of time.

Cruiseferries, as a technological artefact, are a space for waiting in transit–and a rather peculiar one. The massive queues waiting to get in like milking cows, the artificial lighting, onboard slot machines, the decadent luxury, the unsettling sense of opulence. An outlandish mixture between airport and casino hotel, cruise ferries comfortably fit as non-places (to borrow the anthropologist Marc Augé's term). As defined by Augé in 1992, the relational, historical and identity-defining characteristics of an anthropological place are missing and exchanged for transience, anonymity and, more often than not, a persuasive invitation to consumerism.[01] "A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants", he writes, "he becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver."[02]

The proliferation of non-places is one of the characteristics of super-modernity.[03] There is a tight relationship between non-places and waiting-places, as they both are transitional spaces measured in units of time. Waiting rooms, platforms, airports, buses and ferries are spaces that have been removed from the temporality of the whole, to hold their own temporality detached from any marker that references the outside world. Monica Minnegal explains about waiting spaces, that "the boundary between past and future is absolute; the future will comprise a new world order, and the past no longer provides any guidance as to what form that order will take." The past and how we got there, doesn't tell us anything about those places; and those places do not tell us anything about where we are going and the future. "There, we merely wait for the waiting to end," she says.[04]

Modern means of transport hold a prime spot as waiting spaces, not only because in them we linger, but also because they have fundamentally transformed the way in which we inhabit time and space. Hartmut Rosa asserts that advancements in transportation technologies, kicking off with the railway in the nineteenth century and all the way to Parker Solar Rocket, are primarily responsible for the phenomenon described as "the annihilation of space by time." The experience of space is, to a great extent, a function of the time it takes to traverse it. Increased transportation speeds are at the root of the modern experience of spatial compression or shrinkage.[05]

For the waiting experience as a passenger, this is crucial, for the traveler experiences a suspension of normal rhythms where time and space perception is dislocated. While physical motion continues, the individual exists in a state of temporal limbo, caught between departure and arrival. Then, travellers inhabit these spaces challenged by the waiting act. They expect to board, depart, and land, and after it all, with their souls lagging behind upon arrival, they feel displaced from their bodies, which have been rapidly catapulted by machines across lands and oceans.

In this peculiar habitat, the flow of time feels slow for the bored couple, whose gaze has found the moment in time and place to fixate, to pause, to linger. Her look seems to be fastened on something floating in the air, but the truth is her thoughts have become the object of her own attention, experiencing what Augé calls "the flip of the gaze."[06] Whatever hangs in front of her is irrelevant, as she seems to have disconnected from the objects and technologies around her. During her waiting, the gaze itself has been turned into the object of her own deception.

Conversely, his gaze has been fixed on the aquarium. He might be bored, but he has found a striking subject for his waiting glance. The aquarium and the fishes in it, confined to a still smaller and more alien environment, are serving their purpose as a mesmerising parade for the man who waits. On the opposite side of the glass, the fish spinning and turning in circles have its own temporality and endures time too, awaiting nothing in particular, awaiting everything to die as a spectacle for the human gaze.

The presence of an aquarium in a space like that is not arbitrary. They have been placed to distract and give us a sense of nature in a highly artificial space. However, the fishes in the

(01) Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, trans. John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 87.

(02) Augé, 103.

(03) Augé, 103.

(04) Monica Minnegal, "The Time Is Right: Waiting, Reciprocity and Sociality," in G.Hage (Ed.) Waiting (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 95.

(05) Hartmut Rosa, Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 72.

(06) Augé, Non-Places, 94.

aquarium, unlike the videos in a TikTok feed, are dominated by predictability and standardisation. The circling of the fish becomes a stream of repetitive cycles that represent a mirror of capitalist modernity, and a mirror of our own turns and twirls. And just like Harold Schweizer describes the waiter that can see herself as a thing among things, the man can also see himself as an animal among other animals, as a being among other beings, as a part of an integrated orchestra of rhythms and bubbles confined to a slightly bigger tank.(07)

(07)
Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 40.

However different is the object of their waiting gaze, they wait as a couple. But do they really? In pre-modern societies, waiting was often integrated into collective activities and established routines; here, a sense of detachment, from each other and from the journey itself, is conveyed in the photograph. They wait next to each other, but they are indeed waiting alone, experiencing their lived time that is no one's but their own.

Between them, the table represents the default object, the most generic piece of furniture that has, just like the rest of the space, been disembodied by its relational, historical and identity-related features. White, shiny, basic, and soulless, the furniture of the non-place offers no context beyond its functionality. Says Hannah Arendt:

> To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in between, relates and separates men at the same time.(08)

(08)
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition: Second Edition, ed. Margaret Canovan and a New Foreword by Danielle Allen (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 52.

And so, the table between the bored couple does exactly that. It unites them as a couple waiting together, but it also separates them, emphasising the idea of the isolated waiting, of the confrontation of their own individual time.

Martin Parr's Ferry between Helsinki and Stockholm captures the ferry as a microcosm of modern life–a space where time is simultaneously annihilated and painfully felt, mediated by technology as a space, as a distraction and as an infrastructure. However, the couple has entered a state of individual time endurance that also signifies a liberation from Benjamin Franklin's famous idea of "time is money," and that might carry one of the few opportunities for agency in a synchronised world.

FIG (13)
A09 (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Take a number

In anthropological spaces, the identities of the inhabitants are constructed through memory and recognition.(90) Contrary to anthropological spaces, waiting spaces –as non-places– strip away the identity of the person who waits. Inserted into non-time, the waiting space struggles to turn events into history and memory, and data into recognition and humanity, removing the necessary conditions for identity to arise.

The modern waiting spaces are almost an antithesis of a *place of memory*, to borrow again Augé's terminology.(91) They exist as spatial limbo. The airport lounge is perhaps the clearest example: suspended between origin and destination, the terminal is a symbol of *placelessness*.(92) In recent years, there has been an attempt to reintroduce a "sense of place" into terminals by incorporating local culture through stores, restaurants, or advertisements.(93) However, these elements do not imbue the airport lounge with history, but instead, they invite us to experience those places of memory that, as Augé writes, are being "listed, classified and promoted" but only "assigned to a circumscribed and specific position."(94)

The compression of the waiting space and its integration into the network of transit, also makes it hard for them to hold any history, in the same way as the compression and fragmentation of mobile media makes it hard for it to hold duration. Restaurant reservation apps, airline boarding passes, automated turnstiles, and self-check-out kiosks are only a few examples of spaces that have been compressed into zones of transit rather than lingering. The network of transit that characterizes Auge's supermodernity, has already been removed from history – or history has been removed from it. Thus, the waiting room and its lack of history is not so different from the broader system of non-places in which it is embedded, that feels for the modern passenger equally liminal, sterile and atomised.(95)

But not only history is obliterated in the waiting space. Recognition, the second compound for the arousal of identity, is also suppressed by the quantification of the subject. The waiter cannot recognise herself in the numbers that are assigned to her. She has been given a spot on a cartesian grid ruled by discrete letters and numbers –A09, B11, 112. However, those numbers carry no meaning for the person who waits. "The help of beepers and screens," writes Hage, "work to make the process of waiting impersonal."(96) We become either a spot in a queue, a numbered seat, a blue slot on a Google Calendar, or an hour in an itinerary. This final quantification of the self, the annihilation of history and recognition, results in the complete loss of the waiter's identity. She is no longer a singular individual, but an anonymous *average man*.(97)

On the flip side, for this *average man* the waiting space has also been turned into an *average place*, and therefore, its architecture has been homogenized: waiting rooms at a city hall, at the dentist and at a service point all look rather similar. "The present is merely a 'waiting room'," says Minnegal, "disembedded from what may have brought us to this place and what will take us out of this place."(98) There is not much in the waiting space that points to the past, and no hint of the anticipated future. Likewise, there is not a lot that points to the individuality of the person who waits, where she comes from or where she goes.

(90) Augé, 42–74.

(91) Augé, 78.

(92) Wei-Jue Huang, Honggen Xiao, and Sha Wang, "Airports as Liminal Space," Annals of Tourism Research 70 (May 1, 2018): 1.

(93) Huang, Xiao, and Wang, 1.

(94) Augé, Non-Places, 78.

(95) Augé, 104.

(96) Hage, Waiting, 4.

(97) Augé, Non-Places, 100.

(98) Monica Minnegal, "The Time Is Right: Waiting, Reciprocity and Sociality," in Waiting, eds. Ghassan Hage (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), 5.

FIG (14)
Passport control (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

The price of anonymity

The loss of identity that is mediated by the waiting space, its architecture, placement, function and interiorism, can sometimes feel like a liberation. An opportunity to be whoever inside a waiting space where one is nobody. However, this role-playing does not come without a price:

> **To get into the departure lounge of an airport, a ticket –always inscribed with the passenger's name– must first be presented at the check-in desk ... so the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has given proof of his identity.**(99)

(99)
Augé, Non-Places, 101.

As Augé proposes, the waiter gains access to anonymity only by first disclosing their identity.(100) In the lounge at a doctor's office, anonymity can be accessed only after checking in at the reception; the waiting room in a Zoom call can be accessed only after logging in; the driver who waits in a drive-thru discloses her identity *a posteriori*, through credit card payment; the caller is requested to identify themselves either before or after being put on hold –or both, over and over again to each new person they get connected to. Waiting spaces require, through different technologies and either *a priori* or *a posteriori*, for the waiter to demonstrate their legitimacy before being allowed their anonymity.(101)

(100)
Augé, 102.

(101)
Augé, 102.

Consecutively, and according to the paradoxical nature of the waiting space, the technologies in the room not only will enhance the waiter's anonymity, but will also mediate the registration of her identity. The data that this identification produces is often recorded in a dataset. Identities are collected through technological payment methods like credit cards or mobile apps, cameras and facial recognition systems, check-in or check-out terminals, digital IDs, biometric sensors, and behavioural tracking tools, as anonymity emerges not as a default absence of identity, but as a mediated removal of it.

This removal is not all bad, and the moral implications are –as often– much more nuanced than deterministic. As the waiter is reduced to a number, the relief from her usual determinants may, as Hage suggests, result in the elimination of "human factors such as liking or disliking someone, and favouring or disfavouring them."(102) The individual is nothing more than what they bring to the space, what she does there and what she experiences. In this sense, the waiting space does not simply strip away identity but can create a temporary neutrality where social markers are suspended, and everyone is, for a moment, just one among others.

(102)
Augé, Non-Places, 101.

FIG (15)
Self-checkout (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Please wait, your request is being processed

As waiting spaces have been compressed and optimised for transit, their relational traits –another one of the defining characteristics of anthropological places– have also been minimised and homogenised. Unlike places for living that create the *organically social*, the waiting space as a non-place creates *solitary contractuality*, to quote Augé's terminology.[103] The elimination of the other is mediated through specific spatial configurations and technological systems.

(103)
Augé, 87-94.

Again, the compression of the waiting timeframe undermines for the waiter the possibility of encountering anything and anyone outside herself. The waiting interval is now short in its extension, well in line with customer services and experience optimisation guidelines, which makes it harder for the person who waits to interact with others. Scenarios that once required lingering –such as waiting in a restaurant lounge– can now be bypassed entirely through online reservations. She arrives just in time, and the space of social encounter vanishes.

Within that short interval that is left, the potential *other* has been removed and the relational interaction has been standardised by replacing language with communication, which is mainly mediated by information that comes about in the shape of text.

> **Real non-places of supermodernity ... have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us ....This establishes the traffic conditions of spaces in which individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but "moral entities" or institutions (airports, airlines, Ministry of Transport, commercial companies, traffic police, municipal councils)**[104]

(104)
Augé, 96.

Language, essential to the development of relationships, is systematised in the waiting space through impersonal texts. Messages appear in the form of instruction signs, numbers, or advertisements, crafted for a mass –for the average man– rather than for the individual.[105] These interactions are mediated by devices that display messages like *Waiting for the host to start the meeting* or *Your transaction is being processed, please wait*. In some cases, these texts are superficially personalised with name fields –for example, *[Name], your car will arrive shortly*. This customisation creates an illusion of familiarity and relationality– a double-edged sword that, on the one hand, individualises the waiter by name, while on the other, reduces them to a statistical data point, reflecting back the data that she herself has disclosed as her identity.[106]

(105)
Augé, 96.

(106)
Augé, 100.

The text is often a medium by which the waiter communicates with the entity that is enforcing or designing the wait. In most cases, this communication occurs unilaterally. The platform or the space requires the waiter to obey and follow the instructions that are communicated to them through the text, while the waiter has little room to express herself back to the counterpart, that is often not a person, but an organisation or a non-human entity. The relational becomes impossible, because the only thing that the waiter can encounter in this situation is a reflection of herself. "The only face to be seen," writes Augé, "the only voice to be heard … are his own."[107] But this must not be mistaken as a pure experience of her inner self, for in non-places she encounters herself only as a reflection.[108] The encounter with the self in the non-place-non-time constellation is only just an image, as non-time produces also a crisis of the self that is too atomised and disintegrated into a sequence of instants.[109]

(107)
Augé, 103.

(108)
Augé, 103.

(109)
Han, The Scent of Time, 43.

The real self, runs underneath the current of non-time, outside of the places of transit and the places of inhabitation. "Below the time of clocks and schedules that constitute our conventional identity," writes Schweizer, "below the official appearance of the self with well defined states, below this mere shadow of the self projected

into homogeneous space run the uncasing, confused, ever changing and inexpressible currents of duration."[110] In contrast to the mirrorly reflection of the self produced by waiting spaces as non-places, the waiting that occurs in spaces for dwelling allows for a different kind of encounter. In such moments, Schweizer explains, we attune ourselves to our own being: "it is a feeling that is unmeasurable, perhaps immeasurable."[111]

Finally, the rise of self-service systems amplifies the solitude of waiting, eroding any relationality left. These systems are typically mediated through machines that give commands and instructions: Please take a number, Select your order, Please take a seat. A direct, but ever more silent communication with self-checkouts are the ultimate encounter of the waiter with a reflection of herself. The person who waits is at last connected to others only by the messages she receives, and the codes she obeys. "The space of non-place creates neither singular identities nor relations; only solitude and similitude," writes Augé.[112]

(110) Schweizer, On Waiting, 22.

(111) Schweizer, 17.

(112) Augé, Non-Places, 103.

You can see the artwork scanning these codes.

(Looking at the artwork is not a requirement for the essay's understanding, but it adds up another layer to it).

(In-between 5)

Verdad, Dónde están, Justicia

Anonymous Arpillerista in *Marijke Oudegeest Collection* (1973 - 1990)

On September 11, 1973, Chile's democratic government was overthrown in a military coup. The armed forces dissolved the national congress and installed a self-appointed dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet. What followed was a regime sustained by repression. The Chilean nation got divided between allies to the regime and the oppositors that established a dissident culture under a state of fear and constant vigilance, black lists and censorship.[01]

Between 1973 and the return to democracy in 1990, more than forty thousand people were prosecuted, detained, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, executed, or forcibly disappeared.[02] Anyone suspected of opposing the regime was at risk. Hundreds of people, mostly mothers, sisters and wives saw their beloved ones be taken away.[03] The search for the disappeared began almost immediately. In the absence of information from the authorities that would not disclose the destination of the political prisoners, more and more family members would meet in the search and eventually the Aggrupation of Family of the Disappeared Detainees (AFDD) was founded in 1974.[04]

In this hostile environment, hundreds of women whose family members had been detained or disappeared were drawn into the most profound of waitings, a hearttrending dwelling, navigating between despair and the burning hope of finding them alive. They searched and demonstrated. They waited –some for months, others for years and decades– for their husbands, sons, and brothers to return home, for their bodies to be found, for justice to be done. Out of this waiting, an organised artisanal practice emerged:

> After what happened in the coup d'etat, the women family members of the disappeared detainees gathered in the Cooperation for Peace in Chile Committee to fraternize, share their pain and the search of their beloved ones that were detained and could not be found in the detention centres. In these long hours of waiting, an artist woman approached them and proposed to them making something out of a bag of fabric scraps. There starts the work of this group of women that started cutting and pasting scenes of what was happening.[05]

In this state of profound waiting, the women organised themselves into small groups and began to meet regularly to embroider, developing particular textile pieces known as arpilleras.

(01) Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos Mexico, "Golpe de Estado y muerte del presidente Salvador Allende, inicio de la dictadura militar más cruenta de la historia de Chile," 2023, https://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/documentos/2023-08/FRI_SEP_11-1.pdf.

(02) Manuel Délano, "Chile reconoce a más de 40.000 víctimas de la dictadura de Pinochet," El País, August 20, 2011, sec. Internacional, https://elpais.com/diario/2011/08/20/internacional/1313791208_850215.html.

(03) "Nosotras - AFDD," accessed June 17, 2025, https://afdd.cl/nosotras/.

(04) "AFDD - Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos," accessed May 14, 2025, https://afdd.cl/.

(05) Verónica Sánchez and María Luisa Ortiz, Arpilleras: colección del Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Segunda edición (Santiago de Chile: Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2019), 16.

These colorful works, were made by stitching scraps of fabric onto a burlap backing to depict scenes of daily life and political struggle, often framed with crochet.[06] While they were initially sold to support families living in precarious economic conditions, the arpilleras quickly became more than a source of income. They emerged as a powerful medium for documenting their stories of resistance, grief, and solidarity. Through fabric and thread, the women denounced the cruelties of Pinochet's regime and bore witness to the human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship.[07]

The textile pieces quickly became a dissident medium of testimony and expression for many groups of women living under oppression, solidifying into a cultural and social practice that gained recognition both nationally and internationally.[08] They depicted scenes of demonstrations, massacres, torture, grief, and hope. "Just as my eyes saw it, I had to make the arpillera," says arpillerista María Teresa Maderiaga.[09] Through their practice, the arpilleristas embroidered the threads of pain, memory and resistance, collectively giving shape to the embodiment of time, collectively becoming the time that passes.

The arpillera, as a waiting artifact, is both prosody and rhetoric. The art piece works as an embroidered poetry, where the repetitive rhythms of each stitch trace the stretched and faltering cadence of the waiting act. The medium also carries its own rhythms and temporalities, mirroring the slow, meandering time of uncertainty. Simultaneously, the pieces communicate and document reality, turning poetics into politics. "What the arpilleristas do is to paint reality," says Winnie Lira, executive director of Fundación Solidaridad, which holds one of the largest contemporary collections of arpilleras, "to embroider with little scraps what is happening." In this context, the waiting object does not merely protract or contract time, but arrests it within its motifs. It turns non-time into historical time which, Byung-Chul Han explains, carries duration:

> Mythical and historical time possess a narrative tension. They are formed by a specific interlinking of events. The narration gives time a scent. Point-time, by contrast, is a time without a scent. Time begins to emit a scent when it gains duration; when it is given a narrative or deep tension; when it gains depth and breadth, even space.[10]

(06) R. Darden Bradshaw, "Chilean Arpilleras: Writing a Visual Culture," Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, July 24, 2019.

(07) "Arte, Mujer y Memoria: Online Exhibition," MOLAA | Museum of Latin American Art, accessed May 14, 2025, https://molaa.org/arpilleras-online.

(08) Sánchez and Ortiz, Arpilleras, 12.

(09) Sánchez and Ortiz, 16.

(10) Byung-Chul Han, The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering, trans. Daniel Steuer, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2017), 18.

The collective aspect of the practice reveals a waiting that is also shared. Arpillera workshops became places where women gathered to express their frustrations together. Most pieces remain anonymous, credited only to the group or association that hosted the gatherings. The therapeutic effect came not only from the tactile encounter with the material or the storytelling that can be heard through the pictures in the cloths.[11] They would find in each other a shared sorrow and turn it into a shared hope.

Each week, the arpilleristas gathered in a form of communal waiting, to share the hope and despair they were in. This profound waiting can only exist in duration, a time where the metrics signify nothing, for every moment of uncertainty means an eternity:

> Hope is purely qualitative, an inward intimate waiting, as intensity rather than extensity, not determined by prediction and anticipation. Like despair, from which it is often only thinly divided, hope is endured, felt rather than known in the depths of the self.[12]

Therefore, the hope and the despair that are "purely qualitative," bind the women together around the arpilleras: a mutuality that understands no measurements, no counting, no spatialisation. It is a pure endurance of time, bound in feelings whose intensity consists, as Bergson writes, in being felt.[13]

Included in the collection of Museo de la Memoria in Chile is the arpillera Verdad, Donde están, Justicia –Thruth, Where are they, Justice– embroidered anonymously in a workshop between 1973 and 1990. The piece measures nearly fifty centimeters wide by forty centimeters high and depicts a group of women demonstrating and spreading posters that demand truth, answers and justice. Where are they? They ask again and again –for what they have been deprived of , along with their husbands, is the very possibility of closure and peace. The image portrays a form of waiting that is vocal, loud, and active. The women are organised in public space; they gather not just to wait, but to demand: Truth, Where are they? Justice.

Waiting, in this piece, takes a dual form. On the one hand, there is the public and active waiting, performed in the streets through demonstrations, activism, and vocal demands for truth and justice. The women wait visibly in the public space, with posters, pamphlets, megaphones, and printed photographs of their loved ones. On the other hand, the arpilleristas engage in a collective, private, and introspective form of waiting that unfolds within the workshops' walls and through the making of the arpilleras. Demonstration becomes stitching, and stitching becomes pacing. This pacing is the hope of killing time, of emptying all the time left until their loved ones return. Paradoxically, time is not being killed but imprinted. The pacing artifact becomes an object of memory.

The private waiting that takes place in the intimate yet communal workshop space of the workshop, is felt. Each stitch is the pacing of a heart that longs and yearns for the return of those who were taken away. "[Despair and hope] are the deepest experiences of duration," writes Schweizer, "they cannot be reversed into the measurable dimensions of clock time." Collectively, yet also profoundly within each woman's own heart, the arpillera becomes a tool for coping with the passing of a time without answers, with a shared endurance of time. Painfully, not every waiting finds its occurrence.

(11) Sánchez and Ortiz, Arpilleras, 16.

(12) Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 117.

(13) Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. F. L. Pogson M.A., Matter and Memory (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1950), 186.

FIG (15)
Vending machine (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Waiting to consume

Waiting spaces have been invaded by communication that arises as opposed to relational language. Information, which belongs to the temporality of non-time, is the prime material of communication and it is often placed as a dispersed and non-directional sequence of isolated points.

> **[information] does not possess any narrative width or breadth. It is neither centred, nor does it have a direction. Information falls down on us, so to speak ... The disappearance of this track leads to a proliferation of information and events which whizz around without direction. Information has no scent... Rather, information represents a new paradigm. An altogether different temporality is inherent in information. It is a phenomenon of atomized time, namely point-time**(113)

The intervals between each piece of information, between one advertisement and the other, between one sign and the other, according to Han, are not transitional but empty. At an existential level, Han writes, this emptiness evokes discomfort, as it resembles death.(114) As he suggests, the consequence is a "compulsion to remove, or to shorten, empty intervals,"(115) which helps explain the underlying tension of the waiting experience. "The deeper experience of waiting," says Schweizer, "is not in its quantity, not in how long I have to wait, but in the fact –the existential fact– that I am enduring." Faced with this discomfort, the person who waits feels compelled to act rather than simply withstand.(116)

(113) Han, The Scent of Time, 17.

(114) Han, 17.

(115) Han, 18.

(116) Schweizer, On Waiting, 23.

In this eagerness to act and to escape the discomfort of endurance, informational communication is indeed very suitable, as it perpetuates the structures of non-time and is designed to trigger action, either through direct calls to action or through marketing psychology. Brands and companies invest significant efforts and resources into branding and advertising, with the hope of transforming their information about products, services and events into storytelling and visual narratives their consumers can connect with deeply. However, the ultimate goal of this content will be, in most cases, still subscribed to the imperatives of activity and conversion, and therefore still tied to a cacophony of images and words that hysterically respond to the current present, to the here and now.

The denial of pure waiting that is engraved in the current waiter creates a prime opportunity for media, entertainment, and consumerism to enter the waiting space, for "the magazines in waiting rooms, the entertainment on television, the computer games, the snacks, the cigarettes – amount to a lucrative industry," writes Schweizer.(117) The airport lounge is filled with duty-free stores, kiosks, and vending machines. Bus stops and metro platforms become hots-pots for advertisements, and supermarket queues are lined with impulsive last chance products like chewing gums and Snickers. Anything fits, as long as it distracts the waiter from the sensation of time.

(117) Schweizer, 8.

The consumer who engages with the designed distraction, with the transitory nature of products and events, inevitably exits the space of duration. "Consumerism and duration contradict each other," says Han.(118) The society of consumption holds its particular temporalities, according to Han, in non-time:

> **In the consumer society, one forgets how to linger. Consumer goods do not permit a contemplative lingering. They are used up as quickly as possible in order to create space for new products and needs. Contemplative lingering presupposes things which endure. But the compulsion to consume does away with any duration.**(119)

(118) Han, The Scent of Time, 93.

(119) Han, 93.

The consumerist waiter, driven by the imperatives of the growth economy, consumes things – either media, entertainment or products – to keep himself occupied, favouring activity over contemplation.[120] The waiter as consumer succumbs to shopping, to desiring objects, to longing for expensive cars– all in the hope of being relieved, for a moment, "from the consciousness of a time that is always also the consciousness of our own mortality."[121] In this way, consumption is not merely a distraction from waiting, but a method of denying duration –and with it, the awareness that we are passing through time, that we are indeed the river, the tiger, the fire.

(120) Han, 93.

(121) Schweizer, On Waiting, 27.

FIG (16) Gatekeeper (Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Time turned into space

Think of this: When they present you with a watch they are gifting you with a tiny flowering hell, a wreath of roses, a dungeon of air.[122]

(122) Julio Cortázar, Preamble to the instructions on how to wind a watch in Cronopios and Famas, trans. Paul Blackburn (New Directions, 1999).

Of all technologies that mediate the experience of lived-time, maybe the most evident link arises from timekeeping devices that establish a hermeneutic relation with mathematical time. The history of timekeeping devices can help shed a light on the role technology plays mediating our perception of time passing. From the inexorable shadow cast over the pointer of a sundial, to the sand continuously flowing through the hour-clock, to the fragmented time of digital clocks displayed on our smartphones' interfaces, the way in which we *read* time will inevitably mediate the way in which we *think* time.

A beautiful example of this mediation was illustrated by Byung-Chul Han, where he talks about the ancient Chinese *hsiang yin*, or incense clock. As the incense stick burns and the fragrance of it fills the room, Han says, it "turns time into space; it thus gives it a semblance of duration."[123] While the incense free itself from the solid bar and the ashes keep its shape on the plate, the scent of time is not fragmented but continuous. The fragrance of one moment interpenetrates the following, in the same way a musical note merges with the next note and was, at once, affected by the previous. Time becomes more than the discrete succession of interchangeable unitarian moments. It literally holds an intensity.

(123) Han, The Scent of Time, 57.

> **The incense fills the room with the scent of pine and cedar. The fragrant room is soothing, and sets the poet's mind at rest....Time stands still within the scent of pine and cedar. It comes to rest, so to speak, within the clear image. Framed within a figure, it does not trickle away. It is held, even arrested, within the scent, in the scent's hesitant whiling.**[124]

[123] Han, 57.

The scent accumulates in space, just like a snowball accumulates snow rolling down a mountain. It does not fade, it does not leak, it does not get lost. It persists. Hence, time is not something that we can lose, waste or kill but rather something that we inhabit, experience and accumulate. It is the temporal experience of the Bergsonian *la durée* which is finally being mediated by the *hsiang yin*.

As the years passed by and science and technology did its duties, timekeeping devices evolved to something rather different. Nowadays, the ultimate timekeeping device in western societies is the smartphone. It is interesting how time is, in most cases, displayed in the home screen with such a prominent presence, like saying: *these are the most important numbers you should know*. It leaves no possibility for the user to get rid of it, to hide it, to skip it, adjust it to their liking, or hack it. *Clock-time* is imposed as the *home-time,* the gate-keeper and entering portal to access all that lives within the synchronised world.

The shape of time is untied from its reality. What we see on our screens are not the atoms vibrating, oscillating in a precise and consistent dance of frequencies. We don't see the sand flowing, the sun shadow passing, or the incense burning. We don't even see the pendulum swinging, in an uninterrupted back and forth of temporal fluctuation. Time has suddenly detached from the direction that gave it meaning and physicality. Thereby, it became something virtual that switches, unit by unit, minute by minute, fragmented, completely alienated from the reality that justifies its form and shape. The time on timekeeping devices is not continuous, but a fragmented and homogeneous succession of abstract units.

This consecutive progression of disconnected numbers on a screen creates a time with no duration, with no intensity, a flat time that is nothing more than a persistent sequence of present moments, completely detached from one another. Time becomes fungible –each unit is essentially interchangeable and indistinguishable from one another–. Fungible time knows no history, and no past. The time passing on the phone leaves no trace, upon which a narrative can be built or meaning derived. There is no accumulation, no scent in the room, no water in the vessel, no melted wax. Numbers fly away and pixels vanish.

For the person who waits, timekeeping devices become an object for pacing. A way to return yet again, to the certainties of time that can be measured, to the marching drum that rules the post-modern world. The waiter will check just to confirm, once again, that the time is running slower than she thought, that the flow of the clock numbers do not correspond to the uncanny feelings she is experiencing.[124] It will be precisely the pacing, as Schweizer suggests, which she performs to escape the feeling of duration; the agitation, the glancing at the clock, the manifestations of the characteristic vacillation of endured time:

[124] Schweizer, On Waiting, 18.

> **He waits, he vacillates, he wills it – he wills it not, he paces, he looks at his watch. His pacing performs the conflict implied in his impatience. His pacing is to his body what the stirring of the water is to the sugar. If the stirring of the water is to accelerate, indeed to terminate, duration in a desired object, pacing enacts the waiter's desire simply to walk away from the body that endures.**[125]

[124] Schweizer, 18.

The timekeeping device in the waiting room attracts the waiter to objectify her waiting. She glances at the watch, she counts the minutes that she has been there, calculates the minutes that are missing, she measures and fragments the continuity of the time that she is. In doing so she displaces the intermittent feeling of being time –of being the river– and lets time be the river that sweeps her away.

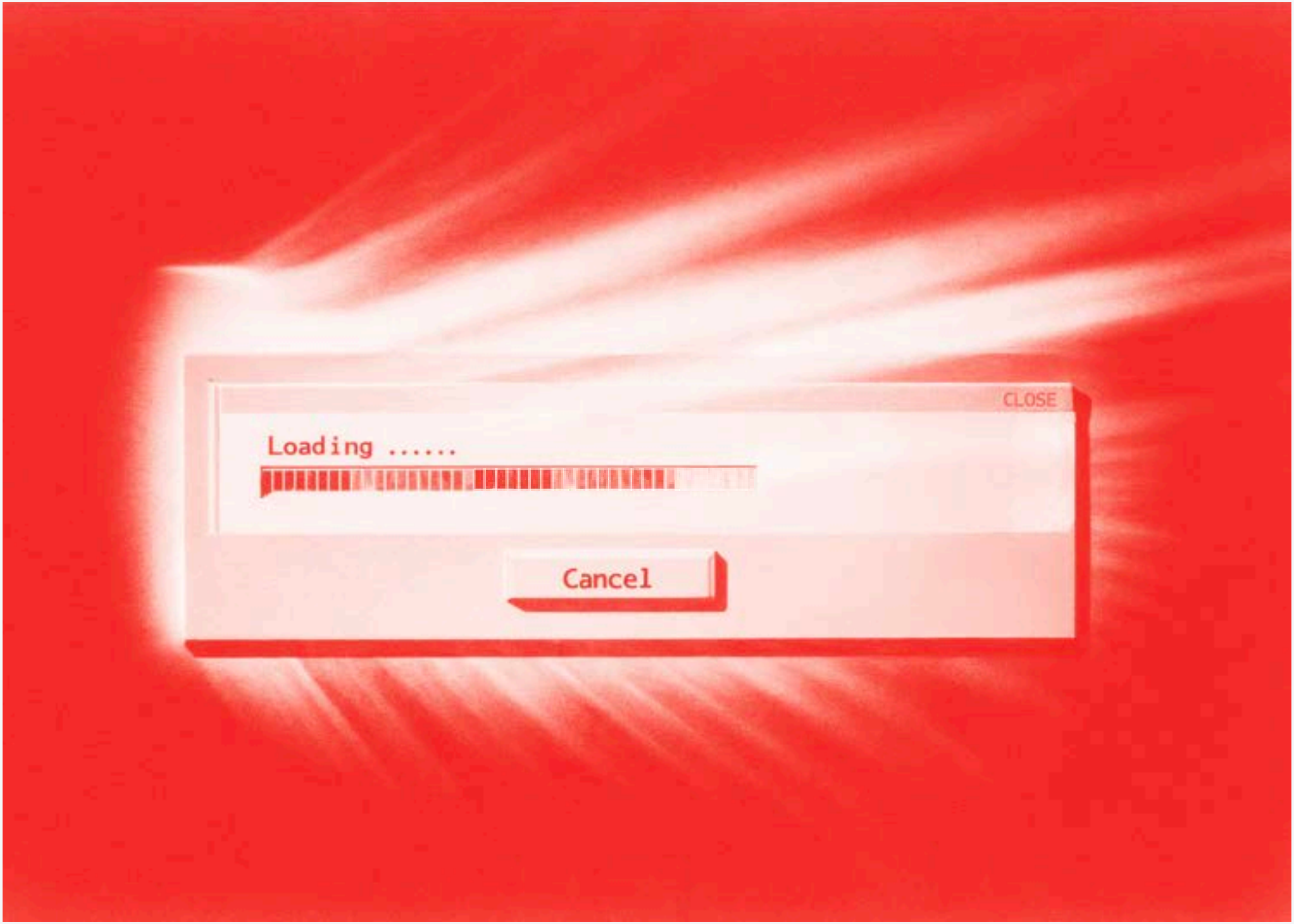

FIG (17)
Loading...(Image generated by Pili Valdivia using Krea.ai. Berlin, 2025)

Chapter 3

Occurrence

I have conducted this thesis in a timeframe of ten months.

During ten months –an extension of time that I can count– time sometimes felt heavier and lighter, thicker and thinner, faster and slower. At some points, the research progressed smoothly, and the words I wrote became a reflection of the continuity of a sort of inner flow. In other moments, the concepts showed great resistance, ideas became tangled and the thesis experience felt eternal, dallying and worn out. The changing digits in my phone's clock became utterly useless in the phenomenology of such an experience of time.

For 304 days, I have reflected on the research question: how do technologies mediate the experience of waiting in relation to the perception of time and the self? Without awareness, I entered the question as one enters a waiting room. I picked up the objects that caught my attention as they appeared, and observed them from different angles. I encountered many technologies –mathematical time, money, spaces, language, the internet, computers, mobile media, advertising media, clocks, to name a few. I observed their functionality and their materiality, as the waiter examines the floor tiles in the airport lounge or the texture of a bus seat, and their uncanny peculiarity.

For 26.265.600 seconds, I have lingered with the literature, the authors, the ideas and philosophies, like the waiter grabs a brochure, her mobile phone, her book. Some of them trapped me for longer, some of them pushed back at me. And so I picked them up and let them go as they wished.

Yet, a more complete –and perhaps more current– mapping of emerging technologies as they mediate the waiting experience and the perception of time and the self could still be explored to expand on this thesis. This expansion could well include waiting in virtual reality time, waiting in the artificial intelligence era, waiting with quantum computers, and so on. This thesis aims to be a good foundation for such research to be developed.

Towards the end, and after 241.582.362.915.599.965.067 oscillations in an atomic clock, the expectations for a certain kind of resolution became inevitable. However, acknowledging the complexity of the topic and the elusive nature of a pragmatic conclusion, I became aware of the fact that this thesis would do much better without a concrete occurrence. The lack of the occurrence would, indeed, place the value of the waiting experience in the experience itself, as opposed to placing it again on the eventuality of some expected thing.

And so, I came to the realization that what I have meant, over and over again, when I have told my friends that "this thesis changed my life," is not that the content of the thesis changed my life. It was not the only words that I have somehow managed to sort out, nor the ideas that I have humbly woven together –borrowing ideas from many others– that revealed to me something worthy of a conclusion. Instead, the thesis process as such has become a turning point in my understanding of the perception of time and the self, as mediated by technologies.

I have dwelt on the research question. I have slept on it, hustled with it. I have felt the time stretching out long, I have felt it running fast. I have felt myself displaced from the rhythms of contemporary life and absorbed in it. Thus, the understanding that the thesis has been, in itself, an act of waiting becomes, perhaps, the most relevant and valuable insight. And this waiting has revealed to me a reconnection with my own temporality and a profound sense of fulfillment.

> **The predilection for seeing everything I care about approach me from a distance, the way the hours approached my sickbed. Thus, when I am travelling, I lose the best part of my pleasure if I cannot wait a long time in the station for my train. And this likewise explains why giving presents has become a passion with me: as the giver, I foresee long in advance what surprises the recipient.**[01]

Walter Benjamin's words inspire the reformulation of waiting into a different kind of feeling. One that represents, indeed, "the best part of my pleasure." One that is not object-related, but that holds in itself a valuable experience. Thus, I can only conclude by knowingly identifying *research as waiting*, and **pointing this out as an unforeseen opportunity for further exploration and development.**

(01) Walter Benjamin and Walter Benjamin, Berlin Childhood around 1900, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 15.

Research as waiting acquires meaning not through what it leads to, but through what it holds. It constitutes a form of lingering, of contemplation, of *dwelling on* and *staying with*, and by doing so, it reinserts temporality into the dyschronia of non-time. Talking about the country path, Han writes:

> **The back-and-forth frees it [the country path] from having a goal without exposing it to destructive dispersion. A peculiar gathering is intrinsic to it. It does not follow a course towards ... but lingers. It silences the direct, spasmodic time of labour into duration. As a place for contemplative lingering, the path symbolizes a dwelling that does not need a goal or purpose, one that can do without theology or teleology.[02]**

(02) Byung-Chul Han, The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering, trans. Daniel Steuer, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2017), 67.

The research as waiting will, as the country path that Han writes about, protect itself from "destructive dispersion," as it "silences the direct, spasmodic time of labour into duration," without the need for theology or teleology. As opposed to the initial definition of waiting given in this thesis, which describes it as a temporal interlude between the anticipation and the occurrence of an event, a different kind of waiting "does not expect anything concrete," explains Han, "rather, it refers to what evades any kind of calculation."[03]

(03) Han, 74.

The lack of goal is crucial, as it will inevitably lead to a lack of acceleration. As Han says, "only in the face of a goal does acceleration make sense."[04] Research as waiting, will be much like *thinking* as opposed to *calculating,* to borrow again from Han's theories:

(04) Han, 75.

> **Thinking, in the empathic sense, cannot be accelerated at will. That is where it differs from calculating or from the pure use of the understanding. It often moves in roundabout ways ... A special temporality and spatiality is intrinsic to thinking that rises above calculating.[05]**

(05) Han, 108.

Thus comes the unexpected realisation, that perhaps the greatest bet for this specific project was the lack of an artistic outcome. The deliberate –but somewhat blind– decision of not making an artwork in parallel to this research was based mostly on time

constraints, and the desire to engage for as long as possible with the ideas, without draining them into something consumable. Only now, after the written component is done, I came to realise the success of this choice, as it kept the *goal* or *purpose* elusive, allowing for a contemplative lingering deprived of furious activity.

Research as waiting must be approached with an open and flexible agenda, one that reveals itself as it comes. Only in this way is the research liberated from the time pressures that "destroy all that has the character of a detour, all that is indirect," writes Han, "and this, makes the world poor in forms."[06] Waiting is in itself a *detour,* a hesitation, a pause, and in thus welcomes the discontinuous progress. Progress that may linger far too long on what seems useless. The lack of a section structure on *Chapter 2: Mediated Waiting*, is a reflection of the complex and aporetic character of thinking as opposed to the linear calculation.

(06) Han, 109.

The discursive technologies of writing and language have revealed their unique outlines as this research has progressed. Language and words have crystallized as the means by which I have measured time. The words that I have read, together with the words that I've written, have paced my directional waiting, the waiting towards an occurrence. Like Penelope's weaving I have *thought* time through the fabrics of language. And the "count words" tab (cmd + shift + C) in Google Docs has mediated the hope to connect again, like the waiter that I have been, with the metrics of a synchronized world. The words I have deleted, on the other hand, represent the pure duration:

> **Waiting that is simply to be endured does not have the clarity, tightness, and patterns of the fabric that Penelope is weaving during the day; during the night the threads of time are a tangle: anarchical, cyclical, multidirectional, unrepeatable and impossible to measure.[07]**

(07) Harold Schweizer, On Waiting (USA, Canada: Routledge, 2008), 58.

The tangled concepts and the serendipitous finds in *Are.na*; the days of break, the transitions, the in-betweens, the times of leisure, and lingering contemplation of everything I have read; all of these represent the detours that have imbued the frantic activity with temporal tension. They are the unraveling of the "patterns of the fabric" that, like Penelope, I wove during the days.

Those are the times when I felt time, when I endured in real temporality. Words, thus, became the means by which I paced and waited.

The *research as waiting* will allow the researcher, that in this case is also the waiter, **to be rewarded for their patience with understanding.** Just like in the Hustlers image by diCorcia, the flashing lights will only show themselves in response to a long-exposure open lens. In the same way, there are things that can only reveal themselves in contemplative lingering. Thus, research as waiting can, indeed, open up new forms of knowledge and meaning:

> **One must tarry, linger, draw closer (such are the implications) to disentangle this epistemological conundrum. What is revealed in a closer looking that lingering affords is the astounding, impenetrable gratuitousness of all phenomena.(08)**

(08)
Schweizer, 75.

I can say from my own experience, that the research as waiting, as circling around, as hovering and lingering *with a question* –as opposed to *for an answer*– has truly felt much less dispersed and much more gathered than any other goal oriented activity that I have performed in the past years. It has also safeguarded me from any sort of anxiety or stress that often characterizes the thesis process. Hence, I can only recommend trying this or a similar approach. And so, returning to the preface where I mentioned my worries about the meaning of the work of a graphic designer and, ultimately, the purpose of any activity as performed in non-time, I might close just as I started:

I saw myself exhausted and oppressed by the weights of the clock passing, and that exhaustion turned into curiosity, and that curiosity turned into research, and the research into waiting, and the waiting into emancipation.

Text
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Image References

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Perhaps the greatest mistake
was to believe
that time belongs to us,
when the matter of fact is that
we
belong
to
time.

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