

# Temporal Design: Rethinking time in design

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*From critiques of acceleration, to efforts to frame present actions within more extended futures, designers have been increasingly concerned with how perceptions of time influence practices and how these perceptions can be influenced by design. In this paper, we argue that perspectives of time in design are highly influenced by dominant narratives that describe time as uniform, external to practices, and in a state of continuous acceleration. We propose Temporal Design as a shift from pace, direction, and subjective experience towards looking at time as emerging out of relations between cultural, social, economic and political forces. We argue that this pluralist perspective helps to demystify problematic experiences, potentially enabling more inclusive ways of understanding time.*

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In this paper we contribute to work focused on identifying ways in which design could help to promote more positive ways of approaching time. Nowadays, this focus is often spurred by a perceived condition of universalised acceleration and an interest in inspiring actions that could lead to more desirable outcomes in the future. A critique of acceleration, and consequent questioning of design's traditional support for productivity, efficiency and time-saving, is commonly proposed by projects within the *Slow Design* (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2009) and *Slow Technology* (Hallnas & Redstrom, 2001) movements. Many of these projects, however, often reduce the original proposal of temporal diversification to a dichotomy between fast and slow (as discussed in Pschetz, Bastian, & Speed, 2016). Anticipation of future conditions can be identified in numerous speculative design movements such as *Critical Design* (Dunne & Raby, 2001), *Design for Debate* (Dunne & Raby, 2007; Kerridge, 2009) and *Design Fictions* (Bleecker, 2009; Sterling, 2011). The focus on the future, however, can limit exploration of temporal expressions in the present (Pschetz et al., 2016). Critical scholarship on the role of time in social life can help support arguments and interventions that question norms of time and expand possibilities for design.

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is a strong tendency to regard time as universalised, external to human practices, and an individual concern. As discussed below, attempts to counteract this tendency often draw attention to time as subjective experience and flow. However, here we argue for a broader temporal form of design that would consider time, not as subjective or objective, but in terms of what anthropologists and sociologists have called social time. This allows a more specific focus on issues of ethics, equality, power, and social management and coordination. We therefore propose Temporal Design as a way to bring the cultural, social and economic aspects of time to the surface by investigating how they shape the social coordination of particular groups. By revealing this complexity, Temporal Design would open up space to discuss these relationships, allowing for more inclusive temporal organisations to emerge.

### *1 Coordination in design as time management and efficiency*

In this paper we argue for a shift in the way designers generally understand time, moving away from pace and direction towards its underexplored role in social coordination. However, given the attention dedicated to time management, scheduling, task tracking, and efficiency within design we want to first discuss this approach to coordination before going on to discuss our own. That is, one might argue that coordination has been explored by designers through systems that allow activities to be organised asynchronously or which were developed to keep track of schedules. After all, calendars can nowadays be synchronised across devices and across groups (with Google Calendar being highly popular) and clocks are designed with ever more sophisticated characteristics. For example, Quietto ([Lee, Goh, & Park, 2017](#)) allows people to keep track of their agenda and give an overview of appointments using a tactile and interactive interface. Holi.io's Bonjour, launched in 2016, provides an A.I. personal assistant to give advice on weather and traffic conditions. Services such as Doodle ([doodle.com](#)) and Meet-o-matic ([meeto-matic.com](#)) facilitate setting appointments by allowing participants in a poll to independently provide dates and times in which they are available. Further group activities are facilitated by systems that support buying gifts ([sharea-gift.com](#)), coordinating sales information to allow quicker and more effective responses to clients ([capsulecrm.com](#)), or tailoring communication to a particular group (e.g. [trello.com](#), [slack.com](#), etc).

These systems tend to facilitate individual activities in order to maximise efficiency and speed. In this way, they tend to follow dominant narratives of acceleration rather than support reflection on what kind of temporal organisation is most needed for groups involved in various activities. In some respects, people's interaction with these systems is carefully taken into account, but the way coordination is facilitated follows the mantra of time saving, which is often integrated within a cult of new technologies. Similar

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