

The Life Value of the Experience of Time as Free

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Human life time is not simply the duration of our existence as physical organisms calculated in conventional units of temporal measurement, it is an ethically meaningful whole of experiences, activities, and relationships unifying the moments between a person's birth and death. Those experiences, activities, and relationships are not simply things that happen to people, they are life valuable or disvaluable according to the extent to which they enable and express or disable and impede the capacities for sentience, cognitive and imaginative thought, creative activity, and mutualistic relationship which form the substance of lives that are good.¹ Lives that are good are both *enjoyed* by the agent and *valued* by her or his consociates as present and future contributions to their own projects of life-capacity expression and enjoyment. Since human beings are mortal, life time is finite and unrepeatable, which means, I argue, that a certain

¹ This conception of the good is systematically developed and defended in Jeff Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life Value*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 2012. The idea of life value from which materialist ethics is developed is adopted (and adapted) from the life-value axiology of John McMurtry. For the most comprehensive and systematic explanation of life value onto-axiology see, John McMurtry, "Philosophy and World Problems Theme: What is Good? What is Bad? The Value of All Values through Time, Place and Theories," *Encyclopaedia of Life-Support Systems*, (Oxford: EOLSS Publishers), 2010. (www.eolss.net) The argument that an experience of time as free is itself a requirement of life as a free social self-conscious agent was first articulated in Jeff Noonan, "Free Time as a Condition of a Free Life," *Contemporary Political Theory*, 8(4), 2009, pp. 377-393. This paper elaborates upon that initial argument and its further development in *Materialist Ethics and Life Value*.

experience of time itself is a requirement of good human lives. It is the structure and content of a life valuable experience of time as free that I will explore in this paper.

My argument will proceed by establishing a contrast between the capitalist organization of work and leisure routines and the experience of time as free. The former, I will argue, are *closed and coercive* structures in which the agent's life-activity is determined by life-destructive but money-valuable ends. The latter, in contrast, is an experience of time as an *open matrix of possibilities for life-valuable* action governed by ends determined by the social self-conscious agent as enjoyable for self and valuable for others. As such, free time is not simply empty time, or time in which there is nothing to do; it is rather bound up with and inseparable from the forms of free life activity it makes possible.

My argument will be developed in three steps. In the first, I will offer three examples of people experiencing time as coercive, externally imposed routines. Clarity about the life-disvaluable form of time will enable the understanding the life valuable form of the experience of time as free. The problem of explaining what I mean by the experience of time as free is the task of the second part. I will take up the insights gleaned from the examples discussed in the first part to explain more systematically the coercive nature of the organization of work and leisure time in contemporary capitalist society, using this construction as a foil against which the structure of the experience of time as free will emerge. In the final section I will conclude by explaining the importance of the politicization of time and provide a general account of the social conditions the experience of time as free requires.

I: Three Exemplary Forms of Coercive Time-Structure

The concrete human experience of time is always socially mediated because it is always bound up with socially structured human activities. Nevertheless, the human body, from which all activity derives and in which all experience is registered, is not a wholly social artefact, but an integral natural-social whole. The natural moment is not subsumed completely under the social, and it connects us to natural rhythms and cycles that register in our bodies as different states and in our societies as moments of transition between environments that call for changes in the general forms of action. Wakefulness and fatigue, for example, are generally connected to cycles of dark and light, while cultural rituals have long been connected to the changing of seasons, preparing members for the different demands on their life-activity warmth and cold, dryness and moisture impose. Capitalist time has long been at war with the body's experience of time as a felt responsiveness to qualitative natural changes. In order to ensure the forms of productive labour it requires for its own reproduction are regularly accomplished, it must inure its members through its socialization processes to the abstract, purely quantitative structure of time it requires. In capitalism, the passage of time is determined by the demands of profitable production, not by the feelings engendered in one's body by qualitative changes of environmental state. In order to be successful, this socialization must begin very early.

Hence, my first example to illustrate the coercive structure of capitalist work and leisure time is a toy, "Time Tracker," which wealthy American parents recently began buying for their children. The toy anchors itself in the child's desire to play, but uses this desire as a hinge upon which the child is swung towards an experience of time that is opposed to the open-endedness of play activity, an experience of time as a fixed period between a starting and a stopping point in which some externally imposed task must be accomplished. In the particular case of "Time

Tracker,” the task is the successful completion of standardized academic tests.² The games are for toddlers because the most competitive private schools now impose standardized tests on very young children. Hence, almost from the first emergence of articulate consciousness, the open horizons of children’s experience of temporality are closed off. Instead of experiencing play time as an open horizon in which the game lasts as long as the child’s interest in it holds attention, the child is taught that play is serious, and serious play requires defined temporal frames. This imposed time structure changes the child’s sense of the value of time and the value of his or her own activity. What she or he learns is that time must be used efficiently in the service of a defined, externally imposed, and quantifiable or measurable end. The authorities who impose the time frames that bind activity can thus tell whether time has been used efficiently or not, and the child learns that his or her lifetime is not his or her own to dispose of as he or she feels and the activities developed within it valued for the contribution they make to his or her and others lives, but according to the money-value reward and sanctions structure the authorities command. Submission to authoritative command is inseparable from submission of activity and goals to the structure of time the authorities command.

The second example demonstrates just how powerfully these lessons can be learned, and how powerfully life-destructive they can be. In August *The Toronto Star* reported on the death of 21 year old German man who was serving as a summer intern at the London offices of Merrill Lynch.³ According to the report, the man died after working for 72 straight hours. Here we see the authoritative command of time retain its power over human activity, while relinquishing any connection to the limits of the physical capacities of the human being to endure. As with the first

² The existence and function of this toy came to my attention when reading Michale J. Sandel’s *The Case Against Perfection*. Michale J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2007, p. 58.

³ “Intern Death Leads to Bank Review,” *The Toronto Star*, Aug. 24th, 2013, p. A2.

example, time is here experienced as an externally imposed structure to which one's activities must conform. Unlike the first example, the experience of fixed duration, of ending, has been abolished. The time-structure of capitalist industry in the age of networked communication remains coercive, but now functions without respite, forcing those who hope to ascend to the top of its reward structure to push themselves beyond the organic limits of physical endurance. As Jonathan Crary demonstrates in his recent book, *24/7*, the non-stop pace of contemporary capitalism "has the semblance of a social world, but it is actually a non-social model of machinic performance and a suspension of living" at odds with even the most basic life-requirements.⁴ Nevertheless, so powerful is its psychic and material hold over its citizens, so attractive has the lifestyle of the superrich been made to appear, that people will work themselves to death in the hope of attaining it.

My third example comes from the opposite end of the income scale, not the infantile demand-feeding of the superrich but the desperate demand to just find something to eat of the newly superpoor of Greece. In September the Greek mental-health advocacy group Klimaka reported that the suicide rate in Greece had increased four times since the onset of economic crisis in 2008.⁵ If the German intern unintentionally killed himself through overwork, Greeks, especially older and retired, are killing themselves intentionally for lack of work or other means of dignified survival. There is a deep temporal dimension to this catastrophe. Human life is

⁴ Jonathan Crary, *24/7*, (London: Verso), 2013, p. 9.

⁵ Derek Gatopolous, "Financial Crisis Drives Up Greek Suicide Rate," *Time*, Sept. 10th, 2013. (<http://world.time.com/2013/09/10/financial-crisis-drives-up-greek-suicide-rate-2/#ixzz2grYnsRx9>). (accessed, October 1, 2013).

unrepeatable, and thus to bring one's lifetime to a close prior to any natural, health-related reason for doing so, is the most momentous decision a person can make, because of all decisions, it is absolutely irrevocable. From the standpoint of the capitalist structure of time, life is valuable only as an instrument of the production and accumulation of money-value. Hence, for the money-value system, the only crisis in Greece is a crisis of ensuring money-value continues to flow back to major European banks. The moral inversion definitive of the capitalist world-- life-value is reduced to a mere means for the growth of money-value-- is here posed in the starkest temporal terms: lack of money-value makes dignified life impossible, forcing people to choose to bring their lifetime to a premature close as the only apparent means of escape from the suffering and humiliation. While a longer life is not always or necessarily a better life, other things being equal more lifetime means more opportunities for life valuable experience, activity, creation, and relationship. What stronger evidence could there be of the coercive and life-destructive nature of the experience of time under capitalism than that people are ending their lives because without money dignified life activity appears impossible, thus making their remaining lifetime appear unbearable? Yet, despite the clarity with which these examples *illustrate* the coercive structure of capitalist time, they do not fully explain its causes, nor tell us anything specific about what the experience of time as free might look like other than that it would not be coercive. I will thus turn now to the task of explaining the coercive structure of time these examples evoke and the contrasting experience of time as free that good lives require.

II: Coercive Work Time, Empty Leisure Time, and the Experience of Time as Free

I noted above that time under capitalism is mostly experienced in abstraction from qualitative differences of environmental context and activity. Abstract time is an internally undifferentiated quantity that that can be divided and re-divided according to different purposes

with different durations and in which activities can be portioned out over different intervals. Moishe Postone has shown that abstract time becomes coercive when it is taken up by capitalist social dynamics, which are impelled by competitive pressures to increase the rate of relative surplus value.⁶ In such conditions, Postone argues, “Time expenditure is transformed from a result *of* activity to a normative measure *for* activity.... This process, whereby a concrete, dependent variable of human activity becomes an abstract independent variable governing the activity is real and not illusory.... It is intrinsic to the process of alienated social constitution effected by labour.”⁷ Competition forces each enterprise to reduce the average amount of time it takes to make a given quantity of product. If wages are held relatively constant while more product is produced in the same time, profits can increase. A portion of those profits can be re-invested in technology which speeds production up even further, forcing competitors to keep pace. Socially average necessary labour time goes down (the amount of time it takes for a society to produce for the satisfaction of the basic life-requirements of its citizens is reduced), creating the *potential* for surplus time that each individual could appropriate for her or himself. However, so long as the money-value interests of the appropriating class continue to rule, surplus time is converted to surplus value for the capitalist’s exclusive use.⁸ The portion of labour that remains employed works more intensely at the same time as some labour becomes surplus and remains unemployed, even though work is an instrumental necessity in a capitalist economy.

⁶ For systematic political economic analysis of this process see Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1986, pp. 296-305, 372-402.

⁷ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1993, pp. 214-15.

⁸ Marx again pioneered the analysis of the processes by which capitalist competition creates surplus labour, and thus the potential for its appropriation as free time. See Karl Marx, *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy* in , *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works Volume 28*, (New York: International Publishers), 1986, pp. 25-251.

Thus, *capitalist* abstract time is triply coercive. It is directly coercive as work time, and this in two senses. The classic form of capitalist time-coercion resulted from the analysis, fragmentation, and mechanical division of complex human tasks into their elements which can be serially recombined to ensure maximum output in minimum time per unit.⁹ This analysis and fragmentation of human activity into meaningless elements was pioneered on the early twentieth century assembly line, but it would be wrong to think that its effects are confined to stereotypical factory-based wage labour. This form of capitalist time-pressure has become ubiquitous across capitalist work-spaces. Thus, there emerged in the middle to late twentieth centuries new modalities of capitalist time-coercion in service industries and white collar work. Service workers are taught techniques to speed the processing of customers, all manner of white collar work is subject to artificial deadline pressures that require paces of work not amenable to high quality results, academics and teachers face pressure to educate more students in the same amount of time, and so on, examples could be multiplied many times. Across all these different forms, worktime is experienced as an abstract yet real structure that encloses work life, determines the elements and sequence of work activity, and in which pressure constantly builds as more work is forced into the same amount of time and often subdivided between fewer workers.

These two forms of time pressure, the first generated in classic assembly line work and the second in analogously fragmented service and white collar work is perversely mirrored in the time consciousness of the structurally unemployed. They too experience time as an abstract closed structure, but since they are unemployed, the pressure it exerts is not over what they do

⁹ Harry Braverman's examination of the consequences of the division of labour, including especially the division of worktime it involves, remains unsurpassed. See Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 25th Anniversary edition (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1998, pp. 117-175.

moment to moment, but over the whole of their waking life. When one is unemployed but in need of money as the means of exchange for that which one's life requires, the emptiness of capitalist abstract time expresses itself psychologically as the emptiness of life. Socialized to think that work is a moral as well as an economic necessity, the empty abstract time of unemployment is rarely experienced as a liberation from the coercive routines of work life, but as experienced as anomie, as a sign of failure, as a source of psychic trauma and, in extreme instances, as the case of Greece demonstrates, a cause of suicide.

That which all three forms of abstract capitalist time have in common is that the routines they impose negate the life-value of both work and rest. Work in capitalist industries is life-negating not only because it often involves toxic substances and dangerous demands; even when the work itself is perfectly safe the division of labour to which it is subject drains the fragmented activities of meaning for the worker. But even in those cases where work-activity itself remains whole and meaningful, the pressure to produce more in the same time, (or more in more time, or the same with fewer co-workers) generates tremendous stresses which empirical medical research is discovering to cause higher rates of morbidity and death.¹⁰ The body under constant stress is damaged right down to the cellular level, where lack of respite from work pressure causes cumulative damage which the body has no time to repair.¹¹ I maintain that stress can be

¹⁰ J Siegrist, and Michael Marmot, "Health Inequalities and the Psychosocial Environment- Two Scientific Challenges," *Social Science and Medicine*, 58, 2004, pp. 1463-1473; C. Mustard, J.N. Lavis, and A. Ostry, "Work and Health: New Evidence and Enhanced Understandings," in J. Heymann, C. Hertzman, M.L. Barer, & R. Evans (eds.), *Healthier societies: From analysis to Action*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2006, pp. 173-201.

¹¹ P. Sterling and J. Eyer, "Allostasis: A New Paradigm to Explain Arousal Pathology," In S. Fisher & J. Reason (eds), *Handbook of Life Stress, Cognition and Health*, (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons), p. 641.

caused by the experience of time itself as a closed structure of work routine, and since this experience crosses all forms of capitalist work-activity, it and its life-destructive consequences are almost impossible to escape.

Escape from these damaging stresses thus requires a changed experience of time as the counterpart to changed forms of activity. Typically today, people look to leisure routines as the “pause that refreshes.” However, I will argue that capitalist leisure routines do not really offer an experience of time as free. Although there is some evidence that the long term trend toward lower average numbers of hours worked has stalled and been reversed to some extent in the capitalist world (especially the United States), there is still some time outside of work which, from the standpoint of the workers, is empty leisure time.¹² Empty leisure time is time in which the person is legitimately not at work and in which there are no other necessary demands on his or her time. Empty leisure time is what is colloquially known as “free time,” but this term is a misnomer.

It is a misnomer for two reasons. First, the person that “enjoys” leisure time is a self that has been socialised to think of time as abstract capitalist time. In other words, the person thinks of time as a closed structure of externally imposed demands. Cut off from the demands of the boss or the business, the person feels out of sorts, and looks around for something to do to fill or kill time. In other words, the person socialised to think of time as a structure of routines that serves externally imposed money-valuable ends finds that he or she has no ends of his or her own to pursue when momentarily released from the coercive rigours of work. Boredom, as

¹² Joe Weisenthal, “Check Out How Much the Average American Works each Year Compared to The French, The Germans, and The Koreans,” *Business Insider*, August 13th, 2013, (<http://www.businessinsider.com/average-annual-hours-worked-for-americans-vs-the-rest-of-the-world-2013-8>) (accessed, October 1st, 2013).

Adorno astutely observes, “is the complement of alienated labour ... free time remains the reflex action to a production rhythm imposed heteronomously on the subject compulsively maintained even in the weary pauses.”¹³ While no external authority *forces* people to do one thing rather than another, empty leisure time is mostly spent by exchanging money in shopping, trying to amuse oneself with the purchased objects (until boredom inevitably returns) or paying for canned experiences and preplanned adventures. I would argue here that one’s time is *empty*, in that one is not coerced into doing one thing rather than another, but not experienced as *free*. One still feels the pressure, born of socialization to productive routines, to *do something whose content is pre-determined by some external power*. Having had no time to form intrinsically valuable goals, people released from work routines turn to commodified leisure routines to fill and kill their empty time.

Secondly, potential leisure time, alongside potential work time, in the on-line networked world has expanded to fill the entire 24 hour day. There is no moment in which would could either not be working or not be playing, trading stocks in Hong Kong or playing video games with a Korean teenager, monitoring the progress of a shipment of needed goods as it makes its flight across the Atlantic, or watching a video of a cat overdubbed to sound like a jaded hero in a *film noire* movie. Endless work can kill, as the German intern proved, but so can endless play, as teenagers who have died playing video games for days on end also prove.¹⁴ Together these examples are vivid (or morbid) proofs of Jonathan Crary’s argument that the time structure of contemporary capitalism has become completely detached from rhythms and cycles of life.

“Since no moment, situation, or place” he argues “now exists in which one can *not* shop,

¹³ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, (London: Continuum), 2002, p. 175.

¹⁴ “Taiwan Teenager Dies After Playing Video game for 40 Hours,” *The Telegraph*, July 19th, 2012, (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/taiwan/9411062/Taiwan-teenager-died-after-playing-computer-game-non-stop-for-40-hours.html>) (accessed September 9th, 2013).

consume, or exploit networked resources, there is a relentless incursion of the non-time of 24/7 into every aspect of social or personal life.”¹⁵ Capitalist leisure routines no less- perhaps, for some, more so—than work routines forcibly inscribe the human body with the *machinic time-structure of unceasing money-value circulation*. This is an environmental challenge to which human beings cannot adapt, since they cannot function 24/7. Since money-value circuits are blind to the requirements of life, and there are always new people to take the place of those who cannot “keep pace,” the machine can run on, no matter how many bodies it runs over in the process.

Thus, having empty leisure time at one’s disposal is not itself identical to the experience of time as free. It is the *social condition* of possibility of the experience of time as free, because if every moment were determined by externally imposed authoritative commands/demands every moment of life would be in fact a moment of domination. What, then, distinguishes the experience of time as free from the experience of time as empty? That which distinguishes the two, I claim, is the ends the subject of experience decides to serve as that which gives substantive reality to time as an enabling condition of action. Unfree time, we have seen, is time experienced as a closed structure of externally imposed, life-negating routines determined in its content by the demands of capitalist money-value cycles. Empty leisure time is not closed in its structure (one is not forced to do one thing rather than another); rather, the bored self *closes the structure* him or herself by fleeing to the substitute satisfactions of commodified culture. The experience of time is thus, like the experience of empty leisure time, open, but is kept open in a way that empty leisure time is not. In order to better explain what I mean, I will provide a complex definition of the experience of time and comment on each element of the definition.

¹⁵Crary, *24/7*, p. 30.

I define the experience of time as free as the experience of *the present moment as an open matrix of possibilities for life-valuable experience, activity, and relationship engendering new possibilities for more life-valuable activity, experience, and relationship in the future.*

Whereas the unfree experiences of time are made unfree because their structure is determined, directly or indirectly, by the rule of capitalist money-value over human life-activity, the experience of time as free is structured by the goal of creating more life-value. Life-value is found in *experiences* which are intrinsically valuable for the subject of experience as fulfilling realizations of our sensory and cognitive capacities, *actions* which are intrinsically valuable forms of self-realization which are at the same time instrumentally valuable as satisfying or helping to satisfy the life-requirements of others who are the object of those actions, and *relationships* which are mutually rewarding and enjoyable for the subjects so inter-related. While there can be overlap between that which is life-valuable and that which is money-valuable in a capitalist society (teaching, for example, is a form of life-valuable action and relationship for which one can also be paid), life-value is always the explicit end and aim of action that follows from an experience of time as free, because when one acts from within this temporal context, one is consciously striving to free oneself from the life-negating demands of the money-value system. A more careful unpacking of the elements of the definition is needed, however, if these claims are to be convincing.

The first element of the definition claims that the experience of time as free is the experience of time as *open*. “Open” in this context is best understood in contrast to the way in which capitalist work time is closed. Work time occurs over a fixed duration (determined not necessarily by set hours, but by tasks set by an external authority) and unfolds through series of activities determined not only by the intrinsic demands of the job but by the owner of capital’s

interest in maximising the money-value of the product or service. The openness of the experience of time as free means that no consideration is given to fixed duration or sequences determined by factors or authorities external to the experience itself. One is conscious of being able to do that which one decides to do for as long as it would take and one maintains an interest in doing it.

The second element of the definition is that the experience of time is a matrix. I use matrix in its original and not its mathematical sense to mean “womb.” A womb shelters, nurtures, enables growth, and changes shape to accommodate the development of that which it shelters and nurtures. Hence, as an open *matrix* of possibilities, the experience of time as free changes shape as the experience, activity, or relationship it enables and nurtures grows, without ever ceasing to enable and nurture it. Unlike capitalist abstract time, which is mechanically determined by the extrinsic goal of maximizing money-value and is indifferent to the qualitative nuances and contours of creative human activity, the experience of time as free is an experience of time adapting itself to the requirements of the activity. If a vista is beautiful, time elongates to accommodate longer and deeper viewing, if the essay runs into conceptual difficulties, time accommodates the need for stepping away and reflecting until the problem resolves itself. Experiences, activities, and relationships come to an end, but on their own time, so to speak, and not because they reach an artificial deadline imposed by an external authority interested only in maximizing money-value.

The third element of the definition asserts that the experience of free time is an experience of present possibilities for life-valuable action. Although it is true that that which *ultimately* matters in a good life is *realized* possibilities, it is essential, to understand the experience of time as free, to insist upon it as an experience of present and as yet *unrealized*

possibilities. Domination in its purest form would be subjection to a power which totally subordinates the life-activity of the one subjected to its commands. Such a life would be devoid of real possibility for self-initiated action. Hence freedom, to the extent that it can be understood in contrast to domination, must involve the experience of oneself as existing in a field of possibilities between which one has the power to choose. To live in a field of possibilities is to be free, in that moment, *from* externally imposed demands to perform some routine on cue, and so to be free *to* decide on which possibility to realize. Moreover, it is to understand that the life value of experience or action or relationship lies not only in the consummated outcome, but in the moment of calm reflection before the decision is made and during the unfolding of the experience, activity, or relationship itself in which the unexpected and unanticipated can happen. Machines and mechanical processes do not really have possibilities—they can operate at different levels of efficiency or be programmed to execute different routines, but that which they do is predictable, and the speed at which they do it determinable by the operator or the programmer. To be a free social self-conscious agent involves being capable of making decisions which are not predictable in advance, even by the agent who does the deciding, because they are taken in the moment. Hence, consciousness of possibility is consciousness of the intrinsic life-value of the present as a moment of deliberation prior to decision in which the self *decides* for itself what experiences, actions, and relationships to pursue and of the processes through which the unexpected emerges in the processes through which goals are pursued.

Since life terminates necessarily in death, there will come a moment in which all further possibilities are foreclosed. Until that moment arrives, however, the goodness of life involves having an open future, in acting such that goals are achieved which open up new goals; the good life involves branching as well as consummation. Hence the final element of the definition is

that the experience of free time terminates in decisions to pursue experiences, activities, and relationships that produce life-value in the future. Life depends upon resources from the natural field of life-support and human life requires interaction within the institutional spaces of social fields of life-development. The experience of time as free presupposes that more fundamental natural and social requirements of life are regularly met; social life is oppressive, exploitative, alienating, and unfree to the extent that it is a structure of deprivation imposed on subaltern classes by ruling groups. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that those natural and social requirements are met at a certain moment of social history. People would be free, their time would be their own, *only to the extent that their present activity at least repaid the life-value their being alive as social self-conscious agents consumed*. Consumption without contribution would soon run down the natural and social stores of life-requirements, society would deteriorate, and with that deterioration, freedom and the experience of time as free would disappear, as people would be forced more and more to spend their time merely surviving. Present possibilities must be realized in life-valuable ways, first, so that the material conditions of free time are maintained, but more, so that the future is kept an open horizon of possibilities. Acting in life-valuable ways means that there will be more possibilities for more life-valuable action in the future, which means that individual life can retain its excitement, its openness, its vigour, until its natural end arrives.

As should now be evident, the experience of time as free is not just one element amongst others in a good life, on its presence or absence depends the whole possibility of good lives. Lives well fed and cared for might be comfortable, but they are not complete human lives, and not fully good, because equivalent to that of a house pet. The goodness of human life means constantly going out beyond where we were before, which requires freedom from coercive life-

negating routines, which is also, in propitious material circumstances, freedom to posit and pursue goals unique to ourselves but life-valuable to others, now and into the future. To conclude, I want to sketch very briefly the concrete political implications of this conception of the experience of time as free.

III: Reclaiming Life Space for the Sake of Increasing Free Life Time

Capitalist society aims for total control over human life time- the conditions of work and work activity, the modes of play and entertainment, tastes and goals are all subject to commodification, and thus control by labour and consumer markets steered by the overriding aim of money-value production. “as this ‘market’ model is made the one and only right way on earth,” McMurtry argues, “*human and ecological needs at every level—that without which life-capacities are reduced or destroyed—are a priori linkered out.*”¹⁶ From the standpoint of life-valuable experience of time as free, capitalist domination appears as the complete foreclosure of possibilities for non-commodified forms of experience, activity, and relationship. If my arguments in section two are correct, therefore, there is an antithesis between capitalism and human freedom because capitalist abstract time negates the experience of time as free.

It does not negate the experience of time as free by negating the possibility of choice. Consumer society is nothing but a society of choices, but a society of choices between commodities whose apparent differences all resolve into the same underlying mono-value of realizing money for the owners of capital. While all the gadgetry and gear that fills the shops and malls of capitalist cities are products of human intelligence and creativity, they are all products of human intelligence and creativity harnessed to the task of profitable sale. Should the

¹⁶ John McMurtry, *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism, Second edition*, (London: Pluto Press), 2013, p. 11.

product fail to sell, the creativity and talent will be made redundant, laid off, left to find another avenue for its realization, or failing that, to wallow in disuse. So although human capacities are expressed and may in some cases be enjoyed in capitalist work routines, they are not expressed freely, or for their own sake, or for the sake of realizing and sharing their life value. Whether any product or process or service is life valuable or not does not enter into the equations determining whether it will be produced; those equations concern exclusively the potential profitability of the idea. From the standpoint of persons with ideas, the need to convince financiers of their marketability acts as a form of prior constraint- people always already think of their ideas as potential commodities, not as life valuable contributions to the natural and social conditions of life-support and life-development. The present moment is thus not experienced as an open matrix of possibilities for life-valuable action, but, even if outside of a particular work routine, a closed structure determined by the system-demand that all ideas to be marketable as commodities as a condition for their realization. People thus come to think of themselves as vectors of money value growth, the present moment valueless in itself but an investment in a future rich in money-value returns.

The struggle against the total capitalist enclosure of the conditions of life-activity is thus a struggle against the total domination of lifetime by capitalist money value. This struggle can take two interrelated forms, the first a direct struggle for freedom from coercive work and leisure routines, the second a wider ranging struggle against the forms of dependence that keep us tied down to those routines. The direct struggle takes two distinct forms, the first, less interesting from my perspective, is a form of middle-class rebellion against the intense pace of life under capitalism. This rebellion takes the form of renewed interest in the different experience of time in Eastern philosophies (the deliberate slowing of the body in Yoga, the learning to be in the

moment of Buddhism), to retreats that purport to put us back in touch with the healthier rhythms of nature, often led by indigenous people whose cultures have not become completely alienated from the natural world, or more diffuse lifestyle strategies like the slow food movement. I think there is nothing wrong with doing Yoga or studying Buddhism or taking an hour for dinner or listening to indigenous elders, but as political strategies of mostly middle and upper class white people, they fail utterly to address the structural causes of capitalist time-pressure and the coercions it exerts over life, especially the lives of the poor and not-white. They are temporary, individual (and typically themselves commodified) attempts at withdrawal from the pace of capitalism, pauses that refresh subjects who are otherwise thoroughly and enthusiastically enmeshed in capitalism.

A second and far more politically important strategy is the direct attempt to expand the ratio of empty time to work time made possible by the extraordinary productivity gains technology has made possible over the past half century. There are socialist and ecological economic forms of this strategy, but both are rooted in Marx's insight in the Grundrisse, noted above, that competitive dynamics of capitalism reduce the amount of time it takes to produce life-necessities, and thus the time a society absolutely must devote to reproductive labour. In other words, these movements seek to realise the surplus time currently captured by capitalists and used to create surplus value, making it available instead for individual subjects as empty time. The goal of these strategies is thus to re-divide labour time, moving from an average of eight to an average of six hours a day as a start. Those who work too much would be able to work less, those who cannot find work would be able to find it, and our sense of self would slowly be released from the capitalist performance principle which, as we have seen, causes us to

think that every moment not utilised producing or spending money is wasted.¹⁷ This strategy, like my argument, is rooted in a comprehensive critique of the structural causes of time-coercion and its psychic effects, but needs to explicitly address the values that govern the use of the time freed from work routines. If that time is simply spent as passive consumers, then people will not have broken free psychically from the capitalist production principle, and society will not have broken the hold of capitalist work and leisure routines over its time structure.

Hence, the struggle for free time must become an explicit part of a wider set of struggles *indirectly* focussed on the structure of time but *directly* focussed on the deep structures of dependency that keep life-value subordinated to money-value. Control over the food supply, over health care, over the educational systems in which the next generation is socialized, over government institutions in which the laws governing collective life are passed, over the arts is that which enables the appropriating class to dominate and determine the lifetimes of everybody else. Capitalism dominates lifetime—and therefore life-activity—because it controls the natural and social spaces in which life-reproduces and develops. Only an open-ended, democratic set of movements capable of successfully re-conquering life-space and putting it to life-valuable uses—feeding, healing, education, governing in the common life-interest and beautifying because people need to be fed and healed, etc. and not because money can be made off of these life-

¹⁷ For a general discussion of the centrality of reducing labour time to a new socialist project see David Schweickart, *After Capitalism*, second edition, (Lanham: MA: Rowman and Littlefield), 2011, pp. 106-111. For a more empirically nuanced account of how labour time could be reduced without catastrophic decline of material living standards, see Peter A. Victor, *Managing Without Growth: Slower by Design, not Disaster*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), 2008. Victor writes from the perspective of ecological economics and not, explicitly, socialism, but it is hard to see imagine a defensible socialism in the twenty-first century that does not in some way incorporate the best insights of ecological economics.

necessities—can establish the conditions in which the full experience of time as free, and thus ourselves as free subjects of our own goals—is possible.¹⁸

¹⁸ I have explored at greater length and systematically the underlying ethical-political unity that links various struggles across different sectors of social life and which makes them implicitly if not always explicitly struggles for socialism in Jeff Noonan, “Socialism as a Life-Coherent Society,” *Alternate Routes*, 35, 2011, pp. 195-216, 2011.