

After Busyness: Working with the Rhythms of Global Capitalism

Benjamin Harrison Snyder  
Springfield, Missouri

BA, Haverford College, 2003  
MA, University of Virginia, 2007

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Department of Sociology

University of Virginia  
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The lesser the experience, the greater the expectation: this is a formula for the temporal structure of the modern.

– Reinhart Koselleck (1985:288)

## Introduction: The Problem of Time

It was about this time I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at *moral perfection*; I wished to live without committing any fault at any time... As I knew, or thought I knew what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not *always* do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined.

-- Benjamin Franklin (1818:88)

The American works harder than does any other man or woman on earth. His business is always with him, he has no rest, no cessation, no relief from the strain. Were he to reduce the effort, his competitors would pass him at once. [...] He has been aptly likened to a steam engine running constantly under a forced draught. He must have a stimulus even in his recreations.

-- Dr. Cyrus Edson (1892:282)

Like many of his Puritan ancestors, Benjamin Franklin was enamored with the clock. Time was an important tool in his quest to achieve moral perfection. In his early adulthood, he constructed a weekly schedule centered on the practice of thirteen essential virtues: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility. Franklin created a “little book,” as he called it, which he carried with him for much of his adult life. Each page was dedicated to one of these virtues [see figure 1]. For some period of time he might focus on, for example, practicing temperance. At the end of each day he would reflect on his successes or failures at keeping this virtue. If he had broken this virtue, he would place a black dot in the box under that day. Franklin notes that the virtue of Order, for example, which he defines as “Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time,” was particularly difficult to achieve (Franklin 1818:129).



# TEMPERANCE.

Eat not to dulness : drink not to elevation.

	Sun.	M.	T.	W.	Th.	F.	S.
Tem.							
Sil.	*	*		*		*	
Ord.	*	*			*	*	*
Res.		*				*	
Fru.		*				*	
Ind.			*				
Sinc.							
Jus.							
Mod.							
Clea.							
Tran.							
Chas.							
Hum.							

	Hours.	
<b>MORNING.</b>	5	Rise, wash, and address
The <i>Question</i> . What good	6	<i>Powerful Goodness!</i> con-
shall I do this day?	7	trive day's business, and take
		the resolution of the day ;
		prosecute the present study,
		and breakfast.
	8	
	9	
	10	Work.
	11	
<b>NOON.</b>	12	Read or look over my
	1	accounts and dine.
	2	
<b>AFTERNOON.</b>	3	Work.
	4	
	5	
<b>EVENING.</b>	6	Put things in their places.
The <i>Question</i> . What	7	Supper. Music or diver-
good have I done to-	8	sion, or conversation. Ex-
day?	9	amination of the day.
	10	
	11	
	12	
<b>NIGHT.</b>	1	Sleep.
	2	
	3	
	4	

Figure 1: Benjamin Franklin's Weekly and Daily Schedules for Moral Living. Source: Benjamin Franklin, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: H. Colburn, 1818), 91, 93.

“I made so little progress in amendment, and had such frequent relapses,” Franklin (1818:137) recalls, “I was almost ready to give up the attempt, and content myself with a faulty character in that respect.”

Rather than give up, however, Franklin redoubled his efforts to achieve Order by creating a daily, rather than just weekly, schedule based on the temporal unit of the hour. This schedule allowed him not only to take account of his virtuous and non-virtuous actions on a daily basis but also to order his life by the hour, giving a precise time for sleep, work, and leisure. In this way, daily Order allowed him to practice another of his thirteen virtues: “Industry—Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions” (Franklin 1818:129). Thus, by using the temporal units of days and hours to systematically fix his attention “on *one* [virtue] at a time,” Franklin could “be master of that [virtue], then to proceed to another; and so on till I should have gone through the thirteen.” In this way, Franklin (1818:130) aimed to “acquire the *habitude* of all these virtues” slowly and methodically over many years. Through vigilant attention in every minute, he could string together hours, days, weeks, and years into an entire life that was filled with moral living and nothing else.

Over one hundred years later, in an essay entitled “Do We Live too Fast?” Cyrus Edson, Chief Inspector of the New York Board of Health, addressed the readership of the *North American Review*, a literary magazine, with views about time that are wholly different from Franklin’s. For Edson, time is not a tool for moral living, but a symptom of the potentially corrosive habits of living that characterize modern Americans. He remarks, “In the main...the American strives for wealth as the great reward in life. But the free competition and the social environment that make it possible have between them driven the pace up to a fearful speed”

(Edson 1892:282). Edson fears that the pace of American life, while primarily responsible for the nation's incredible material wealth, is unsustainable—particularly when it comes to workers' bodies. "To supply his rapidly exhausted system," Edson (1892:282) notes, "[the worker] is compelled to consume large quantities of rich food and to stimulate himself with alcoholic beverages." The result, he laments, is that the worker's "system does not receive its proper nourishment and he soon literally burns out". So profound is this condition, that Edson invokes what was then a new word—neurasthenia—to "describe the condition into which this overworked, overstimulated man gets" (Edson 1892:283). Perhaps paradoxically, then, Edson sees the intense and unyielding relationship to time, which Franklin held up as the model of moral living, as a *barrier* to the good life. For Edson, despite its promise to deliver comfort, convenience, and leisure, modernity has actually created the opposite conditions. Time has become a problem. Its dizzying pace brings great material rewards but at too high a cost for the mind and body.

Fast-forward another 120 years. I am riding high above traffic in the passenger seat of Kevin's tractor-trailer. Over the last few hours, Kevin and I have been traveling down Interstate 44 just south of St. Louis, Missouri talking about long-haul truck driving in ways that are remarkably similar to Franklin and Edson's views on time and work. Kevin is a twenty-seven year old former manager of a Subway restaurant. He has been a driver for almost two years now and is in love with his job. His favorite thing, he tells me, is when his dispatcher lands him a big, high-paying load that takes him non-stop for 1300 miles across the country. During these truly long-haul runs, Kevin muses, "You have more time to shape your time the way you want it. You can decide when and where to stop, how fast to run." He pauses, and then qualifies, "But then

again you also have no time to slow down. It is totally constant. You are just going all the time until your hours run out. On breaks, even, you feel rushed.” Pausing again, he again tacks back, “But, you know what? I kinda like that—running my ass off. You feel like you’re getting stuff done.” I ask him if he would feel that way even if the load did not pay well—if he had to run 1300 miles at that kind of pace but without a big reward at the end. He thinks about my question for a second. “If I were offered to run this truck for the same money but half the miles, it would be great financially, but I’d get bored out of my mind. Because you feel like you’re not accomplishing anything. It’s not satisfying. I take pride in running this truck hard.”

I believe what Kevin has told me because the evidence is in his body. Though he has only been working consistently for two years, he tells me that he has already gained a lot of weight due to the sedentary lifestyle and the tendency to eat heavy meals—typically the only kind of meal that is conveniently available out here on the road. I see some worrying health signs that speak to the many physical risks of working as a truck driver. He is drinking a lot of water and complains of an intense thirst that he cannot seem to slake—a classic sign of diabetes. At his last visit to the doctor, he got some flack over high blood pressure and was encouraged to start taking medication. Kevin is resistant. “I’d rather do it the natural way,” he says, “through diet and exercise.” But during the weeks I have spent on the road, traveling across the eastern, southern, and central United States, I have seen precisely one truck driver exercising. The vast majority has been just like Kevin—too pressed for time.

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Though the voices of Benjamin Franklin, Cyrus Edson, and Kevin come from different centuries, each speaks to (and, in Kevin’s case, embodies) the tense relationship between work,

time, and the good life that is characteristic of modern societies like the United States. This relationship can be summed up in one word: busy. From one perspective, to be busy is to demonstrate one's moral worth through work—to “spend” one's time “wisely” in productive activity. In this sense, as Benjamin Franklin so fervently believed, busyness can be and has long been a rich source of meaning, identity, and even moral living for Americans. Intense work offers individuals the chance to cultivate “temporal virtues,” such as vigilance, diligence, focus, speed, progress, loyalty, and seniority. It provides clear moral boundaries that demarcate “temporal vices,” such as carelessness, laziness, distraction, sluggishness, stagnation, infidelity, and immaturity. Busyness is thus often seen as an important quality of the virtuous human being in America and many other Western cultures. It lies at the core of that old industrial logic of discipline and professionalism, which Max Weber (2011) famously called “worldly asceticism.” Work intensely and constantly in paid activity, the logic goes, and you will be rewarded in the end with existential security.

Just as busyness has been held in such high regard, however, it has also been the subject of, often in the same breathe, a great deal of concern and uneasiness. As Cyrus Edson worried, intense work can become an insidious taskmaster, creating an experience of time that presses in on us, tethering us to schedules and deadlines that distract us from our families and friends and strain our minds and bodies in unhealthy ways. This temporal environment has, moreover, been used to further alienate those on the margins of society. Its dark side can be seen, for example, every time a factory foreman uses the clock to inhumanely ratchet up productivity, when it is suggested that poverty is a result of laziness, or that career seniority is only for the likes of men.

Indeed, busyness is the culture of a rigid, stodgy, domineering bureaucratic structure that has long inspired popular jeremiads against conformity like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*.

In spite of (perhaps because of) this tension within the culture of busyness, for the last six centuries it has provided an imperfect but relatively stable framework for organizing and understanding the relationship between work, time, and the good life in the West. Whether or not we see the culture of busyness as a blessing or blight, it contains a rich temporal language in which to debate perennial existential questions, such as, “How ought I to spend my time on this earth in order to live a good life?” “What does good work look like?” “How do I know if I’m making progress in my life?”

For all that Franklin, Edson, and Kevin share in their talk about busyness, however, the social contexts in which they deploy this culture have very little in common. Where Franklin stood at the dawn of the American Industrial Age and Edson in the prime of that era, Kevin speaks about work in a context that is decidedly different: the era of global post-industrial capitalism. This form of capitalism has its roots in the decades immediately following World War II, but begins to show itself most dramatically in the 1980s and 90s (Hutton and Giddens 2000). It has fundamentally changed some of the most basic aspects of work. A simple example: As companies continue to squeeze ever more productivity out of each hour of the day—what some scholars have called “time-compression” (Harvey 1991)—managers have come to rely on more irregular forms of scheduling to organize their workers. Harriet Presser and Brian Ward (2011) have shown that, by middle age, almost 90 percent of American workers will have been employed in a job with a “nonstandard schedule” at some point in their lives—a job that requires working nights, weekends, or irregular shifts. The regularized, nine-to-five work rhythm, long

associated with the factory-model of time management, and taken for granted by someone like Cyrus Edson, is increasingly accompanied by more erratic rhythms emanating from new types of capitalist production (Beers 2000).

For other workers, post-industrial capitalism has more to do with technological innovations that give even the most basic daily tasks of work a more fluid texture and global scope. As organizations have become more geographically distributed in their operations and have sought to streamline work processes by “going digital,” more and more Americans spend their working days in front of a screen (Autor, Katz, and Krueger 1998). Communication happens in “real time” via digital representations, which may symbolize things taking place in the same room or, just as easily, on the other side of the planet. The objects of work—emails, spreadsheets, codes, reports, etc.—flow through a slick, non-physical medium of digital time-space (Tomlinson 2007). This work is highly portable and “task” or “project” oriented, which has allowed the boundaries between work and non-work to become increasingly blurred (Adam, Whipp, and Sabelis 2002; Blair-Loy 2009; Dubinskas 1988; Lee and Liebenau 2002).

Post-industrial capitalism also refers to changes that operate on larger timescales than the hourly shifts and work “flows” that occupy workers on the day-to-day level. On the level of the whole human life, many of the channels that once promised a payoff in the long term for loyalty and hard work—promotions, bonuses, pensions, and indeed the career model itself—are becoming harder to find as employers seek to cut costs through outsourcing, downsizing, temporary contracting, and other “precarious” work schemes (Kalleberg 2011; Moen and Roehling 2004; O’Rand 2011; Silva 2012). These changes affect a wide variety of workers, but

are particularly noticeable among white-collar professionals, who until recently have enjoyed the most stable forms of employment in America.

In short, workers like Kevin continue to think about the notion of good work through the old industrial culture of busyness, yet these same workers are confronted by a landscape of employment that looks radically different from that which confronted even their grandparents, let alone figures like Franklin and Edson. The relationship between the experience of the workplace and workers' (often implicit) understandings of what good work looks like is becoming destabilized under the new economic regime. How are we to understand this changing relationship between the experience of work and the meaning of work? Is it still possible to find a sense of excellence, dignity, and security through labor, as the culture of busyness promises, when so many of the economic foundations upon which that culture has been built are transforming or dissolving?

### **Moral Labor and Social Time**

Searching for answers to these questions leads to two investigations that, on surface inspection, may not seem obviously related: one concerning moral labor and the other concerning the social construction of time.

Moral labor has two senses. In the first sense, it refers to one's conception of "good" work. What does it mean to do a "good job," to become excellent at one's work, or to see one's working life as progressing and maturing? Moral labor in this sense is highly sought after by employers. They seek to cultivate good workers using both sticks—legal restrictions,



punishments, disciplinary measures, and fines—as well as carrots—salaries, promotions, pensions, awards, and the like.

In the second sense, moral labor refers to “laboring” on the self in order to become excellent and virtuous. How does one know one is leading a good life or, at the very least, doing well in the life one has been given? Different societies provide their members with different explanations and cultural strategies through which they can find answers to this question and discover links between the former sense of moral labor (good work) and the latter sense (working toward a good life). In his classic study of Balinese villagers, for example, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973:404) notes that people’s lives are shaped by an ancient cycle of traditions, rituals, and feasts that order the flow of phenomena into “a motionless present, a vectorless now.” He connects this cyclical form of time with conceptions of the good life as emotionally cool. Similar to the endless comings and goings of rituals and feasts—where one stops the other starts—Geertz notices that the Balinese try to avoid “climaxes” of emotion in their interpersonal lives. “Quarrels appear and disappear, on occasion they even persist, but they hardly ever come to a head” (Geertz 1973:403). An even, cyclical organization of community activities reinforces Balinese emotional culture. Contrast this to Michel Foucault’s observation that the “timetable”—an invention he traces back to European military and educational institutions—seeks to inculcate into citizens the notion of “maximizing” one’s “use” of time in order to engage in virtuous activity more efficiently. “It is a question of extracting, from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more useful forces” (Foucault 1995:154). Cultures that use the timetable aim to create a particular kind of “good” person who is productive, efficient, and a miser of every minute. The cultures of moral labor within a given

society, then, are deeply historical. They have been crafted over centuries by specific historical actors within the social institutions responsible for inculcating discipline and visions of the good life into their citizens, such as religious and educational institutions.

As these examples suggest, an important lens through which to view the contours of moral labor within a social group in both the senses I have described is how that group conceptualizes and practices time. By time here I mean “social time” (Elias 1994; Sorokin and Merton 1937). Social time is not the same as “natural time”—seasonal cycles, the phases of the celestial bodies, and the like—though these processes certainly affect social life in fundamental ways. Nor is social time synonymous with clock time—the standardized mathematical “language” of hours, minutes, and seconds—though clock time is certainly a product of modern social institutions and therefore a constitutive part of social time today, especially in the West. By social time I mean two separate but related aspects: the *rhythms of interaction* and the *horizons of expectation* created by social groups as they order their members’ lives in space.

### *Timescapes*

The rhythms of interaction within a social group are the unique synchronizations and desynchronizations, pauses and movements, harmonies and dissonances created when people come together in the same environment for a moment of sociality (Lefebvre 2004). They come together, interact (cooperatively or antagonistically), and then break apart, perhaps to come together again later. For example, if I promise my children I will read to them every morning before I go to work, this “beat” in the domestic rhythm of everyday life becomes a normal and expected part of my home’s temporal landscape that must now be coordinated with other

domestic rhythms, such as the micro-sequences of making breakfast or getting dressed, and other non-domestic rhythms, such as work schedules and deadlines.

As this example suggests, many of the rhythms of interaction that affect us on a daily basis in modern societies are a function of our working lives (Zerubavel 1979). For many of us, work determines when we are “free” or “occupied,” with whom we are able to interact at a given moment, and how much energy we have to “give” or “spend” on different activities. Workplaces give us schedules, deadlines, and sequences of tasks, as well as spaces and machines to which we tailor the rhythms of our bodies, cognitive processes, and even our emotional expressions. Workplaces set many of the major rhythms of everyday life and are therefore some of the most important spaces for our experience of the “texture” of social time—whether the day feels fast or slow, staccato or legato, empty and boring, or full and busy. Each of our workplaces, then, is like a small “timescape” (Adam 1998), which features the braiding of multiple patterns of movement that give the individual worker different experiences of pace, sequence, tempo, and articulation.

In describing workplaces as “timescapes” I invite us to look at workplaces musically—to see the “rhythmic structures” produced by different conditions of interaction in the workplace. Following philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre (2004:67–68), one of the only scholars to have deeply engaged with the concept of rhythm sociologically, I suggest we look at work timescapes in terms of four basic rhythmic structures [see table 1], which give them different “textures”: isorhythmia, eurythmia, arrhythmia, and irrhythmia.

Table 1. Rhythmic Structures

Isorhythmia – unification, merging	Irrhythmia – separation, halting
Eurhythmia – coordination, synchronization	Arrhythmia – dissonance, desynchronization

*Isorhythmia* characterizes timescapes of unification and merging. It describes that lovely experience, so rare unfortunately, when processes come together perfectly, mirroring one another in sublime coordination and essentially creating a single unified rhythm. The existential experience of isorhythmia is a perfect merging of one rhythmic entity with another, characteristic of awakenings, epiphanies, and love. In more mundane contexts, such as the workplace, isorhythmia might appear in those rare moments when everything seems to be going perfectly at work. The timing of multiple tasks on a big project all fall into precisely the same beat. A brief opportunity for profit presents itself and one is perfectly poised to capitalize. A group of individuals comes together in a cohesive “group mind” that generates a breakthrough idea in a vibrant collaborative exchange.

*Eurhythmia*, by contrast, describes multiple rhythms working together in functional synchrony but without perfect identification, much like the rhythms of a healthy body. In a well functioning workplace, eurhythmias occur all the time. They are nothing particularly remarkable. Schedules are made. People more or less keep to them. Projects are planned for and completed, not perfectly, but without major hiccups. Eurhythmia is the existential experience of normalcy. It can, in fact, be quite boring if it goes on too long.

*Arrhythmia* is the opposite of eurhythmia. It describes the clashing of rhythms, “a pathological situation...depending on the case” (Lefebvre 2004:67), thus invoking the rhythmic structure of an unhealthy body. Arrhythmic timescapes are quite common in workplaces. Oftentimes things simply do not function smoothly—a sequence of tasks is interrupted by some other sequence of tasks that demands attention, plans to deliver on a promise meet unexpected delays, the steps one usually takes to solve a problem no longer work because the nature of the

problem has suddenly changed. Goals are often met and projects completed in arrhythmic timescapes, but it is sometimes difficult to see exactly how it happened. Somehow, through creativity, quick thinking, or gut instinct, we muddle through them.

Finally, there is *irrhythmia*. The opposite of isorhythmia, *irrhythmia* describes the breaking apart and alienation of rhythms, or what Lefebvre (2004:68) calls “fatal desynchronization.” *Irrhythmia* is the halting, abrupt, staccato temporality of cataclysm, emergency, and sudden death. Sometimes everything falls apart and one is left with the sense that forward movement is no longer possible, at least not under the current design of things. At work, *irrhythmias* typically represent some deep failure of the entire system. The processes and procedures that brought workers to the present moment suddenly break down and are no longer capable of producing further meaningful activity. A new product is launched, for example, and immediately shows signs that it does not work, a whole sequence of processes goes awry resulting in the injury or death of employees, a sudden shock to the economic system makes it financially impossible to continue employing people. In these situations, unlike *arrhythmias*, employers and employees must come to terms with the fact that only a new way forward will suffice—new plans, new sequences of action, and perhaps even an entirely new vision for the future.

### *Time Maps*

A second aspect of social time, just as important as timescapes, is the horizon of expectation and remembrance created by the institutions that structure the trajectories of our lives from birth to death (Koselleck 2002; Olick 2007). When we look forward or backward in

time, what we see coming over the horizon of the future and what we remember as having already passed over the horizon into the past is shaped by shared narratives—the stories we tell and are told about what kinds of lives have been available to people like me in the past, how those trajectories will proceed into the future, and where they will have me end up when I die. These narratives function much like “time maps” (Zerubavel 2003)—stylized mental schemata for organizing the flow of events into different trajectories of change. Time maps, like the arcs of a plot line, can take many shapes—straight or winding, linear or circular, upward or downward, continuous or with sharp breaks and hops. The time map of a series of promotions, for example, takes the form of an upward, staccato trajectory, with slices of horizontal movement followed by sharp upward rises in status, followed again by a slice of smooth horizontal movement. This time map is ubiquitous in workplaces but can just as easily be found in many other social groups that feature well defined hierarchies of positions, for example, military organizations (Zerubavel 2003:35).

As is the case with the rhythms of interaction, workplaces are a major carrier of some of the most important time maps in contemporary societies. Careers, promotions, pensions, pay grades, hirings, firings and the like bend our temporal vision, shaping the way we see our lives moving through time on the grand scale of the life course. Workplace time maps, therefore, fundamentally structure whether we see our lives as progressing, regressing, or stagnating, moving “up” or “down” in power and status, and so on.

In sum, how societies construct and practice social time through the institution of the workplace provides a foundation for moral labor as “good work” and moral labor as “working on a good life.” In terms of the former, the timescapes we encounter in the workplace often dictate

to what degree we enjoy or dislike our jobs. A job that is chaotically arrhythmic, for example, may be invigorating for some but exhausting for others. In terms of the latter meaning of moral labor, the time maps we encounter in the workplace often dictate how we see our pasts and project ourselves into the future, allowing us to weave stories of our lives as proceeding in a good or bad direction. A job that promises a steady sequence of promotions, for example, might produce a satisfactory sense of forward movement for some or a feeling of boring predictability for others.

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With the transition to post-industrial forms of capitalism, many scholars are beginning to wonder if we are witnessing the dawn of a new regime of social time, which is producing new timescapes and new time maps that are radically transforming humans' experience of change, movement, periodicity, pastness, presentness, futurity, and perhaps even the relationship between time and space (Agger 2004; Hassan 2003a; Huyssen 1995; Virilio 1997). Today it is not uncommon for workers to monitor and become actively engaged with processes happening in "real time" all over the globe, typically through the portal of a computer terminal. It is not uncommon for a single company to design a new product in, say, Germany, have it manufactured in Malaysia, and then shipped to every Wal-Mart in the United States. It is not uncommon for a large retailer to use sophisticated computer software to predict the peaks and troughs of consumer traffic—right down to the specific hour, day, and month—and tailor employees' schedules to match this erratic rhythm from week to week. It is not uncommon for corporations to "do more with less" by cutting entire divisions of their workforces, automating those employees' processes with digital solutions, or outsourcing them to other countries. Are

developments such as these ushering in a new “post clock time era?” If so, what are the implications of these changes for moral labor? How is the (admittedly imperfect) stability provided by the culture of busyness, which is founded on the industrial regime of clock time, becoming strained, fragmented, and otherwise unsettled by these new temporal conditions? Is the system of virtues and vices that have long linked time, labor, and the good life under the old regime losing its hold on workers’ moral imaginations? What sort of new understandings of moral labor, if any, are developing? Should we see these transformations in terms of the loss of a stable, predictable temporal-moral order (Sennett 2000)? Or should we see them as a liberation from a conservative “mystique” that is out of step with the realities of working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy (Moen and Roehling 2004)?

### **Design of the Study**

The themes I investigate in this study require a rich understanding of both the historical roots and contemporary mechanisms driving social time in the American workplace. I have, therefore, combined archival research on the history of clock time culture with ethnographic research among contemporary American workers. The cases and sources of data have been carefully selected in order to provide fruitful comparisons among different kinds of workers who are exposed to the new temporalities of post-industrial capitalism in systematically different ways.

For the historical portion of my analysis, I gathered data from both secondary sources on the history of the clock and schedule as well as primary sources from individuals who observed the emergence of the culture of busyness first-hand or played a part in creating that culture. My



analysis begins in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when the earliest system of scheduling, which would later inspire the invention of the mechanical clock, was first practiced by Christian monks in the Egyptian desert. The analysis extends to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a high point for clock time culture within bureaucratic capitalism. By analyzing an expansive and eclectic compilation of texts, I reveal both continuities and changes in the culture of Western social time from its most ancient origins up to more recognizable forms within the institutions of bureaucratic, industrial capitalism.

With this historical backdrop in mind, I conducted three years of intensive field research with three groups of American workers: financial professionals, long-haul truck drivers, and unemployed job seekers. I chose these groups because their workplaces feature compelling examples of the different kinds of timescapes and time maps on offer to workers in the new capitalism. Financial professionals and truck drivers, for example, experience timescapes of great speed and intensity because the rhythms of interaction at their workplaces are structured by new global processes of production and exchange, such as financialization and flexibilization. Job seekers, by contrast, have fewer concerns with the immediate textures of time they experience on a day-to-day basis, but are exposed to some of the new time maps of the modern “precarious” workplace more clearly than workers in the other two cases.

The cases also exemplify different structural relationships to these new forms of social time because they occupy different class positions and their jobs carry different degrees of cultural prestige within wider society. Financial professionals, for example, have a greater degree of control over the labor process than truck drivers, and therefore encounter the intense rhythms of their work on different terms. Similar to financial professionals, job seekers have almost total

control over the timescapes of their daily lives, but for a very different reason: they are no longer wedded to the set schedules and deadlines of an employer. By the same token, and quite unlike both truck drivers and financial professionals, they have almost no institutionalized direction to the flow of their lives into the future. Truck drivers, then, occupy a kind of middle ground between the other two groups. They have only limited control over the timescapes of work because their days are structured by a federally mandated scheduling system and their movements tracked by surveillance technologies. But, more than the other groups in the study, they are employed in a relatively stable profession that rewards seniority. Indeed, truck driving appears (at least from the outside) to be one of the few remaining “traditional” blue-collar jobs, which can actually provide a sustainable living for Americans without college degrees.

In studying these workers, I made every attempt not just to talk to respondents about their jobs, but also to experience first hand the forms of social time they encounter in their workplaces. I conducted dozens of interviews with workers in each group. However, I also spent time in respondents’ actual workplaces. I observed bond traders in one of the worlds most powerful “buy side” asset management firms in New York City. Much like an intern, I shadowed traders as they interacted with the global debt markets through their computer screens. I also rode alongside long haul truck drivers who work for a large, corporately owned motor carrier firm headquartered in the American Midwest. Because long-haul tractor-trailers are equipped for two people, including bunk beds located behind the cab, I was able to ride with drivers for multiple consecutive days and mirror their sleep/wake rhythms so that I could experience the physical demands of delivering freight within the contemporary logistics system. To study unemployed job seekers, I became a regular participant in a job assistance support group located in a medium-

sized city in the American Mid-Atlantic. I sat with job seekers as they listened to impassioned speeches at workshops, engaged in inspiring conversations with each other about building a new life, and took advice from change management experts about navigating the job market after the 2008 Financial Collapse.

## Overview

Chapter 1 investigates the historical roots of social time in the West. Building on Max Weber's (2001, 2005) neglected writings on the history of Western time disciplines, primarily found in *The Protestant Ethic*, I excavate the culture of clock time down to its roots in the Christian monastic system known as the *horarium*—perhaps the first form of what we today call a “schedule” (Zerubavel 1980). I show that the *horarium* is an expression of the Benedictine “culture of vigilance”—the desire to purify the soul, transcend the body's passions, and construct a virtuous life by “filling” time with methodical prayer and study. Eventually, Benedictine monks developed the first mechanical clock in order to bring even greater precision and regularity to their days. From here, I trace transformations in the culture of clock time forward through the Reformation and Renaissance periods up to the industrial period. I show how versions of Benedictine time disciplines spread beyond the confines of the monastery. They were adopted and adapted, producing what I call a “culture of busyness.” This chapter thus provides a schematic of the rise and stabilization of several foundational timescapes and time maps, which most people in industrialized societies take for granted today.

It is uncommon for an ethnographic investigation to be combined with primary historical research. In writing a book so heavily influenced by a temporal perspective; however, I felt

remiss to present the reader with only a synchronic view of the main object of inquiry, as would be the inevitable result of a strictly ethnographic investigation, especially when that inquiry aims to assess whether and how a process of historical change in the conditions of social time and the culture of work is happening. While Chapter 1 is not absolutely essential to understanding further arguments in the book, then, it provides an empirical justification for, and thus a much richer understanding of, which aspects of social time in post-industrial workplaces are novel and which are derivative of earlier historical forms.

Against this historical backdrop, I then present the three ethnographic case studies. In Chapter 2, I discuss the world of financial professionals, which provides a window onto one of the most important epochal transformations in contemporary capitalism: the financialization of the economy. I consider financialization in two senses: first, in terms of a shift in the center of gravity of capitalism toward financial channels; second, in terms of the rise of two practices that are radically transforming both the temporal and spatial dimensions of the workplace, which I call, following Giddens (1986, 1991, 1995), disembedding and abstraction. I show how two broad types of workers in the financial services industry—“dealmakers” and “market workers”—manipulate their minds and bodies to become entrained with the intense and erratic rhythms of the financial economy.

Chapter 3 examines the truck driving industry through the lens of a set of changes to capitalist production markets commonly referred to as “flexibilization.” I discuss flexibilization, which can have many meanings, in terms of the rise of a new form of competition between firms over speed. This epoch of production requires a new kind of workforce that can continually adjust its movements according to sudden shifts in market demand. Truck drivers exemplify this

new “flexibilized” worker. They are faced with, on the one hand, the demand to deliver products “just-in-time” to consumers and, on the other hand, a rigid shift work schedule designed by the federal government, which is based, surprisingly, on a clock-time based factory model of production. They must find ways to “transmute” two antagonistic temporal systems—clock time and freight time—in order to deliver goods both quickly and safely.

In Chapter 4, I shift registers of analysis, from the level of daily tasks and workflows to the level of the life course. I examine the lives of unemployed job seekers from a variety of backgrounds as they attempt to move from one construction of their life’s future to another following the cataclysmic experience of job loss. Because I carried out my fieldwork with these workers during 2010 and 2011, their stories provide a glimpse of the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse and the dramatic measures of cost reduction taken by American corporations in response to this event. I show how job seekers become aware of and then constructed a response to the implosion of the career model for the life course—one of the foundational time maps of the culture of busyness.

I turn to the question of the implications of the transformed and transforming temporal landscapes analyzed in previous chapters for the question of moral labor in Chapter 5. What possible selves, what visions of the good life, and what conceptions of good work do the new temporalities of global post-industrial capitalism invite workers to create? Examining how respondents construct working lives that feel meaningful and dignified, I find that they all use their minds, bodies, and imaginations creatively. They create new strategies, cultivate new habits, perfect new skills, and envision new future trajectories that allow them to make meaning of the new textures and maps of time they encounter. They do not, however, create these

responses entirely from new cloth. At many points along the way, they rely on the culture of clock time, shoehorning age-old tropes about vigilance and busyness, and ancient techniques like scheduling and planning, into work contexts that, even a few decades ago, were unimaginable. I also find, however, vast and troubling inequalities in the affect of post-industrial temporalities on workers' moral imaginations. Because workers are differently situated in relationship to the economy, they face starkly different challenges in their attempts to create sustainable visions of good work and the good life.

In the conclusion, I step back and attempt to address the many perplexing questions that arise from the analysis. Are we, in fact, entering a “post clock time” era? If so, what is different about this new regime of social time? If not, how are we to understand the forms of social time inherited from the past and the forms we see today? What are the implications of the transforming relationship to social time for the policies we use to make working life better? What are the implications for the future of moral labor more generally in America and other industrialized societies? Are these implications good or bad?

Throughout this study, I have gathered detailed evidence of the actual physical, mental, and emotional activities that take place in the spaces people work in today. Too often, studies of post-industrial work neglect to consider what people actually do at work (Barley and Kunda 2001). Social scientists have a rather meticulous understanding of the changing shape of labor markets, the changing economic structures surrounding workers, and even detailed narrative accounts of how workers understand their jobs. For most people, though, the new capitalism is not a labor market or a social structure, or even their own talk about work, it is a *workplace*—a social space with flows and textures created by readily observable exchanges of emotion, mental

concentration, and physical exertion. Many of these things are so mundane that they do not even warrant comment unless someone is there to ask about them. Given that so much of mundane, work-a-day life has changed in the last few decades—indeed so much changed even during the course of my research for this project—the time is ripe for a fresh look at the new economy “from the ground up.”

## **1 From Vigilance to Busyness: A Brief History of the Culture of Clock Time**

“The history of time and the time of history should include a history of rhythms, which is missing.”

-- Henri Lefebvre (2004:51)

For most of us, it is almost absurd to consider time to be anything other than what is represented by the hands or digits of a clock or watch. Like all technologies, however, the clock is the product of historical circumstances. It had to be imagined and invented. The clock is, at least in part, a material expression of the cultural institutions that first conceived of time as “clock time”—time as a regular, mechanical “beat.” The first uses and meanings of clock time have conditioned future uses and meanings right down to the contemporary era. This investigation leads us in some unexpected directions—deep into the daily lives of medieval Christian monastics, for example—which may seem quite far afield from the social environments of post-industrial capitalism. It is important to keep in mind, then, that in order to deeply understand the historical significance of the forms of social time emerging under conditions of post-industrial capitalism, we must first have some account of the origins and features of clock time culture, which has long been the dominant temporal regime in the West. As Philip Abrams (1982:8) puts it, “the past is not just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed.” Whether they know it or not, all who practice social time using schedules and mechanical clocks are, in some distant sense, legatees of medieval monks.

### **Weber is Our Guide**

Though he never developed a rigorous social history of Western conceptions of time, Max Weber outlined some key foundations that can guide our exploration of clock time culture.



Unlike most observers, Weber saw that the true cultural foundation of clock time is found in religious sources. Though we often associate clock time with industrial culture—particularly with factory life—Weber saw that Protestant religious communities had long had an almost obsessive relationship to time long before there were such things as punch clocks and piece rates. By emphasizing what Weber calls “this-worldly asceticism”—a disciplined life that remains engaged with outer society, and by sacralizing the idea of working in a “this-worldly calling”—a meaningful vocation in economically productive labor—Protestants encouraged an even, predictable order to one’s life (Weber 1946:291). Quoting Richard Baxter, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan religious leader, Weber (2011:162–163) writes, “Outside of a firm calling, the workplace achievements of a person are only irregular and temporary. This person spends more time being lazy than actually working.” Weber concludes, “The systematic-methodical character required by this-worldly asceticism is simply lacking in the life ‘without a calling.’”

In addition to celebrating a methodical life, Weber shows that this-worldly asceticism denigrates inactivity and valorizes the active life. “What is actually morally reprehensible” Weber (2011:159–160) says of Puritan religious leaders, is “the *resting* upon one’s possessions.” “*Only activity*, not idleness and enjoyment, serves to increase His glory.” Because of this attitude toward filling time with constant activity, “of all the sins, *the wasting of time* constitutes the first and, in principle, the most serious.” “The loss of time through sociability, ‘idle talk,’ sumptuousness, and even through more sleep than is necessary for good health (six to eight hours at most) is absolutely morally reprehensible.”

For Baxter, Weber shows, clock time is not just a tool for precise measurement; it also carries symbolic meanings. We use clocks and schedules, in part, to say something about who we

are, what we value, and where our lives are headed. Thus, Weber saw clock time as a traditional cultural practice imbued with the moral significance of asceticism that guides action through a system of deeply internalized disciplines. Before industrialists and bureaucrats used clocks and schedules to order individuals' lives, Weber shows that religious leaders developed an ideology of temporal conduct that is reflected symbolically in the constant beat of the mechanical clock and the methodical routine of the schedule (Weber 2011:130–132).

Though Weber never systematically develops these themes, his claim seems to be that clock time is a moral institution. Clocks and schedules are meaningful practices used to cultivate disciplined conduct. When these “time disciplines” become deeply internalized, they shape moral action (Thompson 1967). Bad/good distinctions between idle/active, irregular/methodical, and asleep/alert describe a system of prescriptions and proscriptions, skills and practices for shaping one's temporal existence. Because clock time is so closely linked to a robust, pre-industrial moral order, Weber's insights suggest, it has powerfully shaped everyday life in modernity (Segre 2000). For Weber, then, clock time is a cultural practice that spans the pre-modern/modern “divide” and enables social actors to construct paths through time-space within (or against) the boundaries of the moral order.

Weber's analysis is merely a sketch, but it points to a number of fascinating questions about social time. How, for instance, can a conception of time have a moral function? How does clock time, in particular, “discipline” moral action? Why did Protestant religious adepts find clock time to be an obvious and natural method for constructing a vision of the good life? Where did they get their ideas from in the first place?

To investigate these questions, I will focus on the histories of two specific types of time discipline that are important in Weber's discussion: regularity and density. Regularity is "the degree to which people's time-space paths involve repetitive routine" (Glennie and Thrift 1996:285). Societies teach individuals to move through the day with varying degrees of predictability. Some social groups teach individuals to keep a set sequence of activities that vary little from minute to minute or day to day. Factories emphasize this type of discipline, but, as Foucault (1995:152) shows, educational and military institutions are other primary sites because of their emphasis on repetition and routine as the foundations of learning. Other environments, however, require that more flexibility and spontaneity be given to the process of work in order to better handle unpredictability and allow for quick decision making—for example, an emergency room (Zerubavel 1979).

Density is the degree to which people's time-space paths are disciplined to be full of activity. To quote Baxter: "See that you have a calling which will find you employment *for all the time* which God's immediate service spareth" (Weber 2011:374 note 23 emphasis added). Here Weber (2011:160) highlights Baxter's obsession with "filling" time, which is connected to the norm that "*only activity*, not idleness and enjoyment, serves to increase His glory." Protestants' objections to relaxation, idleness, distraction, or getting more sleep than the bare minimum necessary for health, reflects an image of the good life as focused, driven, energized, and constantly engaged in enriching activity. Because one's time should be full, it should thus never be wasted. For Weber, density provides the motivation, so central to modern labor, to increase "the 'productivity' of human work by increasing its intensity" (Weber 2011:85).

## The Culture of Vigilance

A major root of the Western emphasis on regularity and density can be found in what I will refer to as the “culture of vigilance,” which originated in Christian monastic culture. The word vigilance comes from the Latin *vigilia*, meaning to watch, watchfulness, or wakefulness. It can also mean sleeplessness, especially in the context of staying awake to guard against a threat. Roman soldiers kept nightly *vigiliae* to guard the walls of a city or encampments (Lewis and Short 2002). The word was adopted by the first Christian communities to describe their unique practice of holding prayer sessions at night to await the second coming of Christ (Landes 1983:60). These nighttime “prayer vigils” were designed to meet the Apostle Paul’s challenge to engage in “constant prayer” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17) and were thus a primary site in which to demonstrate faith through patience watchfulness and perseverant wakefulness.<sup>1</sup> Vigilance, especially in regard to nighttime prayer, is thus an important cultural source for the development of uniquely Christian attitudes toward time, which, as I describe in detail below, are exemplified by *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547).

Before examining *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, however, it is important to note that Benedict was part of a tradition of monastic rule makers beginning with the monks of the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> centuries who practiced in the Egyptian desert.<sup>2</sup> Saint Pachomius (292-348), who helped found the tradition of *cenobitic* monasticism, recorded a set of rules that, among other such collections, inspired Benedict. Alongside other types of time discipline, Pachomius emphasizes the importance of temporal regularity and density. The weak, sleepy body is a frequent target in this regard. “[A]t night when the signal is given, you shall not stand at the fire usually lighted to warm bodies and drive off cold” (Veilleux 1981:146). “If someone falls asleep

while sitting during the instruction of the housemaster or of the superior of the monastery, he shall be forced to get up at once, and he shall stand until ordered to sit” (Veilleux 1981:148). In these passages, spiritual discipline manifests as the will to push the body against its natural weaknesses—discomfort, distraction, relaxation, and sleepiness—according to communal time signals. Using routine to push the body in this way enables the monk to remain constant in his spiritual labor.

Pachomius continues by describing how the monks should conduct themselves during the prayer offices by engaging in productive work—the weaving of floor mats from rushes.

Do not stay sitting without doing anything during the [prayer gathering], but prepare with a watching hand the rushes that will serve to weave the strings of the dorm mats. Nevertheless, avoid being tired, he who has a weak body will be given permission to interrupt his duty from time to time. (Jennings 2003)

Here, the monks are again admonished for being tired and are encouraged to keep active with a “watchful hand” to overcome a “weak body.” Pachomius assures them that exhaustion, though inevitable, will be managed through regularly scheduled breaks. Other historical sources indicate that these early monasteries used special seats at night by which the monks “kept a vigil propped up...since the end of the previous evening’s prayer.” These seats “had a reclining back designed to make lengthy sleep unlikely” (Rousseau 1985:78–79 n. 4). Even during sleep, the monks looked for ways to remain vigilant, ready to spring to action for the next morning’s prayer.

In *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, written two centuries after Pachomius, temporal regularity and density are more clearly discussed in the context of Christian virtues. Benedict’s Rule, which would eventually become the standard system for organizing monastic life in Western Christendom, consisted of a system of eight “divine offices”—discrete spans of time with precise sequences of prayer to be carried out each day. The prayer offices were given names and were

signaled to the community of monks using bells. Seven offices occurred during the day:

Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. One office occurred at night: Vigils (Cohen 2009:24).<sup>3</sup> All other activities—chores, meditation, reading, sleeping, and eating—were to be arranged with regularity in the “time remaining” around these offices (Zerubavel 1981:33–34). The system was called the *horarium*, the hours themselves “canonical hours,” and the performance of the system “reciting the hours” (Landes 1983:61). The goal of the Rule was to chant all one hundred and fifty Psalms at least once within the span of the seven-day week (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996:35). Scholars have long argued, then, that Benedictine monks were the first officially scheduled people (Bendix 1962; Le Goff 1980; Innis 1951; Knowles 1949; Mumford 1963; Thrift 1988).

Compared to the other offices, Vigils—the night office—was particularly challenging in terms of keeping “on schedule.” Vigils was seen as the main daily “pivot point” that triggered the other liturgical activities beginning at dawn. Yet dawn would have shifted considerably over the course of the seasons (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996:38–39). How were the monks, fast asleep in their beds, to be made sensitive to this slowly shifting hour in such a way that the office could be performed at “the proper time” each night? Partly because of their struggle to perform Vigils perfectly, the Benedictines became innovators in abstract timing technology (Glennie and Thrift 2009:37; Landes 1983:63).<sup>4</sup> Prior to inventing the mechanical clock, Benedictines had limited ways of reckoning time at night. Most widely used was the passage of stars in relation to an architectural feature, such as a window or tower. On cloudy nights, one monk might have to remain awake, using the chanting of psalms as a way to track time (McCluskey 1990). An early technology was the water clock, called the *clepsydra* (Needham, Ling, and Price 1960), however,

it was difficult to calibrate and subject to the whims of freezing temperatures and shifting air pressure. It was thus often checked by the passage of stars (McCluskey 1990).

Given the Benedictines' centuries of experimentation with time at night, it is not surprising that they developed the first mechanical clock. These early clocks were driven by the gravitational pull of a weight attached to a drive train with a cord. The weight was stopped and released in such a manner that it created an even rhythmic motion, used as a proxy for discrete "pulses" of time. To these automated machines was attached a hammer and bell that activated after the weight had fallen a certain distance (Cohen 2009; Mayr 1986). Thus, these early clocks were closer to what we today call a "timer." They were set to run for an arbitrary duration and trip an alarm that would alert the *sacristan* to rise from sleep. This watchful brother would alert the other monks that the time for Vigils had arrived—a duty immortalized in the song "Frère Jacques" (Landes 1983:67). We see, then, that the clock answered a practical question. Only able to "see" their way through the nighttime with great difficulty, it allowed the monks to answer the question, "How long must we wait before Vigils starts?"—a question of patience.

The clock, however, was more than just a practical tool. It also assisted in achieving a central spiritual goal of the *horarium*: to prevent sinful distractions from God's work, known as *acedia* or "sinful sloth" (Wenzel 1967). Echoing Pachomius, the body represents for Benedict, and indeed for all of Augustinian Christianity, the fragile wellspring of restlessness from which sinful distraction originates (Summers-Bremner 2008:38). It is not surprising, then, that the body is the central target for regularity and density in the Benedictine system.

As for the desires of the body, we must believe that God is always with us [...]. We must then be on guard against any base desire, because death is stationed near the gateway of pleasure. [...] [I]f at all times the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see whether any understand and seek God, and if every day the angels assigned to us report

our deeds to the Lord day and night, then, brothers, we must be vigilant in every hour.” (Fry et al. 1981:195)

As it was for Pachomius, bodily vigilance is especially important to Benedictine spirituality because standing guard against the sinful will of the flesh presents humans with a rare opportunity to ascend to heaven. Benedict writes, “And if we would escape the pains of hell and reach eternal life, then must we—while there is still time, while we are in this body... —hasten to do now what may profit us for eternity” (McCann 1952:13). Our time on this earth is short because we have bodies, Benedict warns. Therefore, let us not waste time in sinful distraction.

For Benedict, the great promise of the *horarium* is not only its ability to better synchronize and standardize activity in time, though these certainly must have been important. More centrally, the *horarium* is a technique to tether the body to a regular rhythm that protects the soul from distraction by the weaknesses of the body and by proxy from the fleshly temptations that drag the faithful to Hell. By focusing the monk’s restless energy, his day is filled with the pursuit of God and nothing more. As Benedict says of the monk who cultivates vigilance through the *horarium*, “In this obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: Anyone who perseveres to the end will be saved” (Fry et al. 1981:197). Put in more theoretical terms, the surest road to salvation, according to the Benedictine system, is a regular routine consisting of a high volume of action—constant prayer and study—and low variety of action—spiritual work and nothing more.

*The flourishing of the culture of vigilance*



From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onward, the *horarium* disseminated widely into western and central Europe from its point of origin in Subiaco near Rome and Monte Cassino in southern Italy. It became especially influential in France, mainly through the monastic reform movements of the 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (King 1999; Lekai 1977). Several accounts of monastic life in the 10<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> centuries have survived, allowing us to see the kinds of attitudes and practices regarding time held by some monks at the height of Benedictine influence. Particularly telling are anecdotes about the Devil coming to monks at night to tempt them with sleep and relaxation. For example, Rodulfus Glaber (980-1046), who lived in several French monasteries, reports that a “certain monk” was visited “at the hour when the bell rang for [Vigils]” by “a loathsome being” (1989:217). This being spoke to the monk, saying:

Why do you monks so labour, enduring vigils, fasts, mortifications, the chanting of psalms and many other humiliations far beyond the common practice of men? [...] I wonder why it is that as soon as the bell rings you rush so zealously from your bed, ending the sweet rest of sleep, when you could lie on until the third signal. (Glaber 1989:217).

This is born out again by Glaber in a story about his own vision of the same evil apparition. He recalls:

One night when the bell sounded for [Vigils] I did not get up immediately as I ought to have done, because I felt wearied by my labours. There were others with me seduced by this evil habit, but all the rest hastened to the church. This same devil emerged...after the last brethren had gone. Leaning against the wall with his hands behind his back, he repeated two or three times: “I am he, I am he who stays with those who hang behind.” (Glaber 1989:221)

These stories suggest a deeply internalized set of time disciplines. Having heard the first bell for the night office, the monks had the choice to either come on time—arrive before the striking of the third signal—or come early—hasten to prayer as soon as they had awakened. In both stories, the Devil tempts the monks to do the bare minimum: be punctual. While punctuality is a basic

display of discipline, vigilance—patiently listening for the first signal and then rushing with energy—is the true mark of faith.

The historian Joan Evans (1968) notes that once monks had arrived to perform the night office they employed specific techniques to keep each other alert. A common technique was to assign one brother the task of walking along the rows of chanting monks with a lantern. If he saw someone sleeping, he held the lantern under the offending monk's eyes to waken him. If, however, the monk was not asleep but intensely meditating "he bowed deeply to him in apology" (Evans 1968:81). If a monk was found to have fallen asleep three times, the lantern was placed at his feet and "the sleeper had then to rouse himself and continue the rounds" (Evans 1968:81). This small practice, while aimed to expose those who lacked vigilance, also concretely tethered the body to the *horarium* and by association the discipline of temporal density. Particularly suggestive is the fact that an apology was in order if a monk was mistakenly identified as asleep.

Further evidence shows a connection between a monk's reputation among his peers and his capacity for temporal regularity and density. For example, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny during the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, recounts his favorable impression of the intellectual Abelard (1079-1142), who in his later years was a dedicated Benedictine. The ways Peter praises Abelard's character are revealing:

I do not remember to have known a man whose appearance and bearing manifested such humility. He maintained the same simplicity...in every need of his body; and by word and deed condemned in himself and all men, I do not say only superfluities, but everything not absolutely necessary. He was continually reading, frequently at his prayers, and almost always silent..." (quoted in Evans 1968:63)

Abelard is notable because of his ability to keep constantly at spiritual work through masterful feats of attention that filtered out any non-religious, and therefore potentially distracting, activity.

Peter continues by describing Abelard's last days, which were spent in continual physical suffering from illness:

As much as his infirmities permitted, returning to his former studies, he was ever bent over his books, nor...did he ever allow a moment to pass in which he was not either praying or reading, or writing or dictating. In the midst of such labours, Death, the bearer of good tidings, found him: not, like so many, asleep, but awake.” (quoted in Evans 1968:64)

Abelard signals his spiritual attainment through the display of vigilance—the conviction not to waste time but to engage constantly with the work of God, filling each waking moment with focused energy. Most significant to Peter is that Abelard died awake, pushing away the temptation of sleep to the very end.

### **From Vigilance to Busyness**

Not surprisingly, there is a strong connection to the Benedictine culture of vigilance among the Protestant church leaders that Weber closely analyses, such as Luther and Baxter, as well as those he does not analyze as closely, such as John Calvin (1509-1564) (Engammare 2011). Though these men had never been affiliated with Benedictine monasticism, their lives were nevertheless tuned to the regular rhythm of church bells that, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were taken-for-granted, not just by monks, but by townspeople all over Europe. These bells functioned as a central form of time reckoning (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996; Glennie and Thrift 2009). As Weber (2011:372) acknowledges, Protestant asceticism follows an “old tried and proven pathway.”

In his focus on religious leaders, however, Weber neglects to look at time disciplines among lay practitioners (save of course Benjamin Franklin). Yet, it is here that we see the

clearest examples of precisely how the turn from the cloister to the world shaped time disciplines. For example, in the almanacs, diaries, and letters of advice from the early modern period left by Protestant lay elites, writers frequently reflect on the “schedules for moral living” that they have constructed for themselves around regular hourly prayer (Glennie and Thrift 2009:205–207). Margaret Hoby (1571-1633), who like many elite Englishwomen kept a detailed diary, describes a typical day in 1609:

In the morning, after privat praier, I Reed of the bible, and then wrought tell 8 o clock, and then eate my breakfast: after which done, I walked in to the feeldes tell 10 a clock, then I praied, and, not long after I went to dinner: and about one a clock I geathered Apples tell 4, then I Cam home, and wrought tell almost 6, and then I went to privat Praier and examination, in which it pleased the lord to blesse me...tell supper time...and, sonne after supper I went to praiers, after which I wrett to Mr Hoby, and so to bed.  
(Glennie and Thrift 2009:206)

Hoby’s diary is filled with accounts of temporal regularity constructed around prayer and study at specific clock times and reflections on how well or poorly she has done in keeping to this routine.

Elizabeth Richardson (1576-1651), another elite Protestant Englishwoman, gives a similar picture of temporal regularity in a collection of spiritual advice written for her children. In keeping with the Benedictine model, she advises them to “praise the Lord seven times a day” in order to honor the fact that they “hourly receive so many favors and benefits from God” and so that their “whole spirits, souls and bodies, may be kept blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Among her litany of reasons for regular prayer, the nighttime takes a special place: “[W]ho dares adventure to pass the dreadful night...and yield themselves to sleep, the image of death, before they are at peace with God, by begging his pardon for their sins?” (Otten 1992:305). Richardson’s advice reveals that, among Protestant laywomen, a regular schedule of

hourly prayer continued to be connected to an acute mindfulness of time. “If I was once to give way to idleness,” writes the Protestant laywoman Ann Lister in 1817, “I should be wretched” (quoted in Glennie and Thrift 2009:206).

The examples above show a clear line of continuity between medieval and early modern time discipline *specifically related to regularity*. However, when we examine time discipline related to *density* in the context of this-worldly activity, we see interesting new variations. For example, Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), an English naval administrator, records in his diary a typical Monday in 1666.

Up, and to the office, where busy getting beforehand with my business as fast as I can. At noon home to dinner, and presently afterward at my office again. [...] Busy till night, pleasing myself mightily to see what a deal of business goes off of a man’s hands when he stays by it, and then, at night, before it was late (yet much business done) home to supper, discourse with my wife, and to bed. (Pepys 2013)

Like Benedictine monastics, Pepys endeavors to fill the day with a high *volume* of work, performed through focused concentration. Unlike Benedictine monastics, however, he also demonstrates high temporal *variety*—completing *many different types of tasks* within a short amount of time. In another entry from 1663, he writes:

Up and to my office, where all the morning busy...and then to my *vial* [a renaissance stringed instrument] a little, and then down into the cellar and up and down with Mr. Turner [Pepys’ neighbor] to see where his vault may be made bigger... And so to my office, where very busy all day setting things in order my contract books and preparing things against the next sitting. (Pepys 2013)

Beginning with a frequently repeated phrase “all the morning busy,” Pepys describes a day filled with a number of different mundane activities, each of which grabs for his attention.

If we look outside a Protestant context, which Weber focuses on less, we find other compelling examples of this new combination of high volume and high variety in this-worldly

activity. As Weber (2011:292–296 note 12) was well aware, some of the principal late medieval and early modern proponents of clock time discipline were Italian Renaissance Humanists such as Pietro Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444), Vittorino de Feltre (1370-1446), Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), Erasmus (1466-1536), and Giovanni Della Casa (1503-1556).<sup>5</sup> For example, in his widely read work of Humanist moral education *I libri della famiglia*, Alberti gives an intriguing description of his morning routine:

In the morning when I get up, the first thing I do is think as though to myself: what am I going to do today? So many things: I count them, think about them, and to each I assign its time... I'd rather lose sleep than time, in the sense of the proper time for doing what has to be done. [The important thing is] to watch the time, and assign things by time, to devote oneself to business and never lose an hour of time..." (quoted in Landes 1983:91–92)

Watchfulness of time, sleeplessness, and constancy are still important virtues for Alberti, but not because they cultivate a singular focus that guards against sinful distraction. Alberti writes, "He who knows how not to waste time can do just about anything; and he who knows how to make use of time, he will be lord of whatever he wants" (quoted in Landes 1983:91–92). Time disciplines are important because they organize and direct one's scattered attention, thus enhancing one's ambition and drive for worldly success. Each time Alberti wakes, he is compelled to ask a question that did not beset the Benedictine monk, "What am I going to do today? So many things..." Where religious adepts used routine to focus their attention strictly on spiritual work, laymen like Pepys and Alberti appear to use routine to organize the myriad types of activity that make up their complex, worldly lives. Routine is used to manage a "busy life" that is both high volume—lots of activity—and high variety—many different types of activity.

With their emphasis on a high volume and variety of worldly activity, it is not surprising that, among early modern clock time users, words like busy and busyness come into their

modern usage. Older uses of the word busy connote something closer to Benedictine vigilance, “concentrating on a particular activity.” But, beginning in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the meaning of busy shifts to the modern meaning: “constantly occupied with many things” (OED 2012a). Della Casa (2001), for example, dedicates numerous pages of his manners book *Galateo* to the etiquette of interacting with “busy men,” such as judges and merchants. “With busy men we must completely eliminate formalities,” he writes (Della Casa 2001:59), “or at least cut them short. [F]ormalities are a great obstacle to business and are very boring.” Like Alberti, Della Casa is aware of the problem of busyness among ambitious men. So scattered by the fullness and variety of activity in their lives, they are misers of each minute.

Working within the now well-established Benedictine framework of clocks and schedules, early modern attitudes toward time discipline reflect a “culture of busyness,” which innovatively organized action in time-space such that one’s life is not only routinized and full, as in the culture of vigilance, but also complex and wide-ranging. In contrast to the medieval quest for humility and purity through the routinization of simplicity, early modern time disciplines are oriented to personal success through the routinization of complexity. Because this-worldly activity entails the opportunity for many more domains of interest that can pull one’s mind in many directions, it calls upon a different set of skills related to temporal density—the ability to manage a scattered attention.

### *The Paradox of the Body*

As we have seen, proponents of the schedule and mechanical clock have long recommended them primarily to train and manipulate bodily energies in order to more

effectively direct the mind toward meaningful ends. The clock and schedule hold the promise of transcending physical limitations, turning the body into an inexhaustible source of energy. Yet throughout the history of temporal regularity and density there are frequent references to the inherent limits of this intense and unwavering type of action for the body.

John Calvin, for example, was known to work so intensely and constantly that he suffered from health problems related to overwork. Theodore Beza's 1564 biography of Calvin states that he "had a body so feeble by nature, so weakened by late nights and an excess of sobriety...that everyone who saw him thought he did not have long to live." Such feebleness only spurred Calvin to greater diligence precisely because he thought his life might be cut short by poor health. "Nevertheless," writes Beza, "he never ceased to labor day and night on the work of the Lord" (quoted in Engammare 2011:67–68).

Some three hundred years later, observations of Frederick Winslow Taylor's work habits are remarkably similar. While it is common to think of Taylor as the originator of high temporal density in the organization of human labor (Braverman 1974), his attitudes toward time are an extension of the culture busyness. One of Taylor's colleagues remembers, "I never found Mr. Taylor in any period of relaxation. Even when we were sitting still there was always something to study, consider, or plan" (Kanigel 1997:7). In an essay entitled, 'Why the Race is Not Always to the Swift: Stories showing how plain, persevering men often go further than brilliant ones,' Taylor (1918:100) writes this advice to aspiring businessmen:

Of all the habits and principles which make for success in a young man, the most useful is the determination to do, and to do right, all those things which come his way each day, whether they are agreeable or disagreeable; and the ability to do this is best acquired through long practice in doggedly doing, along with that which is agreeable, a lot of things which are tiresome and monotonous, going out of your way, if necessary, to find them.



Here Taylor celebrates busyness in its purest form: to remain constantly active with many things, even if one must search for and create things to engage one's attention and energy. Busyness is an end in itself.

Taylor's advice came from experience. Even as a boy, he kept a rigid routine that involved upwards of five hours of homework lasting late into the night (Kanigel 1997:83). Yet busyness did not come without costs to Taylor's health. In a series of letters written during Taylor's time at Exeter—an upper crust Protestant boarding school—his parents expressed concern that he was pushing himself too hard. “Take a few minutes to exercise,” they advised, “just long enough to relieve the strain on your mind.” Though they were proud, for example, that he had been given a longer translation requirement in his Latin class than the other boys, “I should much rather you should have [a lesser requirement] than make yourself sick by study” (quoted in Kanigel 1997:83). Taylor did not follow their advice. Though he finished at Exeter and was admitted to Harvard, he never attended, having to drop out, in part, due to migraine headaches and severe insomnia (Kanigel 1997).

Like Calvin, Taylor experienced a paradoxical relationship to the body that is perhaps characteristic of clock time discipline. Though bodily energy is the substance of clock time discipline, the substrate that gives momentum to the rhythm of a scheduled life, it is a self-limiting resource that can just as easily halt that rhythm short (Rabinbach 1990). Observers of vigilance and busyness have thus long been aware that, where schedules and clocks give direction and purpose to action, they also threaten to overextend the mind and body.

## **The Career**

The aspects of the culture of clock time analyzed thus far have revealed a great deal of continuity, save some important variations, with surprisingly ancient sources of temporal practice. New innovations in the culture of clock time have occurred, however. The bureaucratic career is the most important of these innovations.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the early 1800s, the word career barely resembled its modern meaning. Arriving in to English from the 16<sup>th</sup> century French *carriere*, meaning racecourse, which is itself derived from the late Latin *carraria*, meaning carriage-road, the earliest usages of the word career are equestrian in nature. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of career comes closer to the contemporary notion—“A person’s course or progress through life”—but emphasizes a person whose course through life is filled with remarkable incidents—e.g. “a great statesmen’s public career.” It is only by the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the word career comes to be associated with the bureaucratic structure of an organization and with the idea of social advancement—that is, employment in a hierarchical, ladder-like system of positions, “which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world” (OED 2012b). The career can thus be seen as an innovation of bureaucratic capitalism, its primary institutional carrier being the corporation. As Richard Sennett (2006:22–23) notes, “Over a hundred year stretch, from the 1860s to the 1970s, corporations learned the art of stability,” by learning to practice “long-term and incremental and above all predictable time.”

Early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century American organizational sociologists and psychologists played an important leading role in the social construction of the modern career concept, particularly following the Great Depression and World War II. While they were, in part, “objective” analysts of the career as a social phenomenon, through their analysis they also helped to construct the career as a normative “time map” for modern workers. By the 1950s, American

social scientists had produced hundreds of articles and books on the relationship between bureaucratic careers and the “life course” (for example Becker and Strauss 1956; Holland 1959; Mannheim 1940; Miller and Form 1951; Wilensky 1961).<sup>7</sup> In some of these publications, for example, the authors attempt to derive from empirical observation a standard typology of “patterned sequences of passage” through bureaucratic structures that characterize an individuals’ career “development” (Becker and Strauss 1956:253) or “lifework pattern” (Miller and Form 1951:535). In their exhaustive 1951 textbook *Industrial Sociology*, for example, Delbert Miller and William Form present an archetypal model of the career narrative. They outline five distinct periods of the “lifework pattern”—Preparatory, Initial, Trial, Stable, and Retirement—to which they dedicate some 40 to 60 pages each of description. The middle three periods make up what Miller and Form (1951:535) call the “active work life.” During these phases, workers transition from an attitude of “job impermanence” to an attitude of “job persistence” in their attempt to realize the goal of stability and security through permanent employment, a goal which, it is assumed, the worker “nourished in imagination and hope” during the preparatory and initial phases (Miller and Form 1951:749). Workers typically pursue a career trajectory, Miller and Form (1951:749–750) note, to cultivate a key temporal virtue: seniority. “As a worker acquires seniority,” Miller and Form write, “he stores up advantages over his fellow workers. [...] The prestige of experience displays itself in promotions, assignments to better machines or offices, and other special privileges of many different kinds. Seniority becomes a kind of *insurance* against the risks of economic fluctuations...” With seniority, “routines often build habits which incapacitate him for further occupational movement” and “he

becomes stamped in the habits of his work and finds technical and emotional adaptability lessened. ‘He just wouldn’t be happy doing anything else.’”

As Miller and Form’s typology suggests, though mid-twentieth century academic explorations of the bureaucratic career are couched in the language of empiricism, many take on the tone of an advice manual. In a seminal essay on the bureaucratic career in the *American Journal of Sociology*, for example, Howard Becker and Anselm Strauss (1956:258) declare, “When career lines are fairly regularly laid out, positions lead definitely somewhere and at a regulated pace.” Given the regularity of career “lines,” then, Becker and Strauss stress the increased importance of more senior employees mentoring lower-level employees as they move up. “One of the less obvious functions of the sponsor [i.e. mentor],” they assert, “is to alert his favorites to the sequence [of seniority] and its timing, rendering them more ready to accept undesirable assignments and to refrain from champing at the bit when it might be awkward for the organization.” Becker and Strauss toe the line between “is” and “ought” here. Assumedly based on evidence, they characterize the bureaucratic career line as “regular,” “sequential,” and having a “regulated pace.” But then, they insert the assumption that bureaucratic workers will, inevitably it seems, desire to move up—i.e. they are “champing at the bit”—a desire that facilitates the unceasing movement of individuals through the system. “Even when paths in a career are regular and smooth,” Becker and Strauss (1956:259) continue, “there always arise problems of pacing and timing.” An empirical statement turns quickly into a recommendation. “While, ideally, successors and predecessors should move in and out of offices at equal speeds, they do not and cannot. Those asked to move on or along or upward may be willing but must make actual and symbolic preparations; meanwhile, the successor waits impatiently.” The

description of a clockwork-like movement of individuals, each traveling at the same even pace within a massive pre-made sequence of roles, leads to an assumption about the ideal character to fill that system. An individual who is always “willing” to move when the system needs to move and “patient” when the system needs to stop.

As Becker and Strauss hint, the bureaucratic career trajectory is characterized by 20<sup>th</sup> century social scientists as both an empirical reality and a cultural ideal—the foundational time map for a particular kind of desired character. By the early 1960s, the link between a bureaucratic trajectory and a particularly desirable form of ordered personality was almost taken for granted in social science literature. In 1961, for example, Harold Wilensky (1961:523) could offer this seemingly obvious statement in a classic paper from the *American Sociological Review*: “By holding out the prospect of continuous, predictable rewards, careers foster a willingness to train and achieve, to adopt a long time perspective and defer immediate gratification for the later pay-off.”

In the very course of both documenting and sacralizing the career time map, however, authors also curiously note how rarely this patterned is achieved in practice. Wilensky (1961:523), for example, notes that “Most men, however, never experience the joys of a life plan because most work situations do not afford the necessary stable progression over the worklife. There is a good deal of chaos in modern labor markets.” Similarly, Miller and Form (1951:664) reflect on the fact that the career is a middle class American “stereotype.” “The career stereotype is so pervasive in the legendary literature of America and so well entrenched in middle-class society that it is often difficult to grasp the fact that many young people have been born and now live in social groups that define work life in widely different terms.” As the contemporary

sociologist Phyllis Moen notes, the bureaucratic career has always been, to some extent, a myth. “Climbing the ladder of occupational success was never possible for all workers, even in the 1950s” Moen (2005:192) writes. “Hard work paid off only for a select group of mostly white, mostly middle-class men.” However, this myth has been highly influential in American culture. As Moen (2005:191) puts it, “Americans embrace a shared cultural model of ‘career,’ *whether or not it depicts their own experiences.*”

In sum, though the modern meaning of career is a rather new (and somewhat mythical) time map, it reflects the cultural logic of clock time. It is an extension or elevation of the ideals of temporal regularity and density from the level of the hour and day, as we saw with the *horarium*, to the level of the whole human life. Within the career time map, clock time is now seen as synonymous with life time—systematic, predictable patterns of movement through an organization that allow one’s skills and talents to be used exhaustively by stringing together a sequence of roles that point to ever greater seniority, security, and prestige. Rather than marking time by hours or days, then, time is marked by titles, promotions, pay-grades, and other badges of seniority that signify one’s rising prestige in life. The career narrative thus provides, as Nicholas Dames (2003:254) puts it, “a *tactical time*,”—“an aesthetics of slow accumulation...the dilated, elongated temporality of careful choice, where each new piece of information slightly adjusts our sense of the previous choices made.”

### *The Paradox of Security*

While social scientists were busy both documenting and sacralizing the “myth” of the bureaucratic career time map, other observers were building an enduring critique of that very

plan of life. This critique goes by one word: conformity. Instead of security, predictability, and prestige, many 20<sup>th</sup> century writers saw the career as a threat to individuality, autonomy, and authenticity because of its clockwork motion. The most enduring examples of this critique are in literary novels about working life written between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Anthony Trollope's *Palliser* series (written in the late 1800s), which chronicles the career of a British parliamentarian, or Sloan Wilson's 1955 *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, which narrates the difficult transition of a WWII veteran to the conformity of corporate business.

The critique is also found, paradoxically perhaps, within the social scientific literature itself (Lasch 1979; Riesman 1967; Whyte 1965). In his widely read 1956 critique of social conformity, *The Organization Man*, the sociologist William Whyte presents perhaps the clearest and most wide-ranging version of this critique as it relates to working life. For Whyte, the problem of the bureaucratic career is that it is *too stable* and *too predictable* to nourish the kind of rugged individuality that is the hallmark of the American character.<sup>8</sup> He writes:

When he is on the lower rungs of The Organization the young man feels himself wafted upward so pleasantly that he does not think high-pressure competition really necessary, and even the comparatively ambitious tend to cherish the idea of settling in some comfortable little Eden somewhere short of the summit. As the potential executive starts going ahead of his contemporaries, however, the possibility of a top position becomes increasingly provocative. [...] He will never be the same... He knows that he has committed himself to a long and perhaps bitter battle. Psychologically he can never go back or stand still, and he senses well that the climb from here on is going to involve him in increasing tensions. (Whyte 1965:149)

It is in the very orderliness of the successful, executive-bound career trajectory that Whyte sees the deepest existential dilemmas for the careerist. At the lower levels, the Organization Man feels easily “wafted” up the status hierarchy. As he continues, things become more complicated. He

begins to see more clearly the type of commitment he has entered into, perhaps unknowingly.

He begins to be able to see his future *too clearly*. Whyte (1965:149) continues:

There seems to be a time in a man's life—sometimes 30, sometimes as late as 45—when he feels that he has made the irrevocable self-commitment. If he has had the toughness of mind to get this far he knows very well that there are going to be constant clashes between him and his environment... His home life will be shorter and his wife less and less interested in the struggle.

Increasingly intoxicated with moving up the ladder, the Organization Man becomes ever more aware of what lies in store, and, therefore, becomes ever more committed to the career track itself. This increasingly alienates him from home. As Nicholas Dames (2003:256) observes in his analysis of Anthony Trollope's *Palliser* novels, "The career not only domesticates ambition—by placing it in a harness, as it were—but in fact replaces it altogether with a version that desires the career as an end, not a means." So totalizing is the career trajectory, these critics argue, that the careerist begins to lose his authenticity in its structure. Whyte notes, "The figures of speech younger executives use to describe the situation they now find themselves in are illuminating. The kind of words they use are 'treadmill,' 'merry-go-round,' 'rat race'..." The problem of the career trajectory is that it is exhaustingly secure. "It is not the evils of organization life that puzzle [the Organization Man]," Whyte (1965:16) concludes, "*but its very beneficence*. He is imprisoned in brotherhood." By providing this relentless security, bureaucratic order allows workers to experience an overly structured future. This produces an experience of dread—the negative emotional evaluation of a predetermined temporality.

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Clock time is a moral institution. It is composed of a highly portable system of skills and practices, which individuals can use creatively to construct paths through time-space. These



skills and practices are bounded by an emotionally compelling system of prescriptions and proscriptions on temporal conduct that reflect a vision of the good life as routinized, methodical, and full of busy energy. As Weber so keenly intuited, clock time has provided a rich temporal language in which to debate longstanding existential questions concerning moral labor, such as, “How ought I to organize my time on this earth in order to live a good life?” “What does good work look like?” “How do I know if I’m making progress in my life?” The culture of busyness—the moral heart of the clock time regime—has a simple (if stuffy) set of answers to these questions: Employ yourself in a predictable routine that will fill your life with productive activity and nothing else. Delay gratification now for what you will receive later as a reward for your vigilance.

The culture of busyness has never sat easily upon the shoulders of those who practice it, however. It is rife with tensions, such as the paradox of the body and the paradox of security, which have long been a concern for both its advocates and detractors. These tensions serve as an important reminder: clock time culture is nothing to be romanticized. Since its inception, it has been characterized by perplexing contradictions that pull clock time practitioners in opposite directions—unrelenting productivity that threatens to produce exhaustion, unrelenting security that produces the conditions for dread. These contradictions create difficult existential and moral dilemmas that clock time users must continually negotiate.

As this brief history of the culture of busyness demonstrates, the dominant institutional carrier of the culture of clock time in the modern era has been a particular kind of capitalism—industrial and bureaucratic capitalism—which cultivates the disciplines of regularity and density in the service of economic production within large, relatively stable, and hierarchical

organizations. Today, that version of capitalism is waning. As I explore in the next several chapters, massive economic transformations are afoot that are challenging the institutional basis upon which the regime of clock time rests. What are the implications of these changes for the deeply rooted moral order uncovered here?

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<sup>1</sup> Watchfulness is a recurring theme in the Bible. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your lord will come. [...] So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 23:42, 44).

<sup>2</sup> These include Anthony the Great, Saint Pachomius, Saint Basil of Caesarea, and Saint John Cassian (Morison 1912). Some early rules were passed down in the anonymous texts *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and *The Rule of the Master*. The latter is quoted word-for-word in sections of *The Rule of St. Benedict*.

<sup>3</sup> There is considerable variation in the number, timing, and naming of the prayer offices over monastic history and across geography. Offices have been merged, new offices have been invented, and others have fallen into disuse (De Vogue 1983). Nevertheless, the system of eight offices, with Vigils occurring in the middle of the night, is considered the standard form to which all variations are contrasted (Lekai 1977).

<sup>4</sup> A second influence was the concern to systematize the dating of Easter and other feast days (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996:40; Landes 1983:64).

<sup>5</sup> In a footnote to the revised 1920s edition of the *Protestant Ethic*, Weber (2011, pp. 292-296 note 12) responded to claims, especially by Werner Sombart, that Protestant industriousness (as typified by Benjamin Franklin) was a continuation of utilitarian thinking that can be found among Humanists like Alberti and traced to the Stoics (Sombart 1967:108–109, 224–225). Weber rejected this claim. According to Stephen Kalberg, Weber thought Alberti’s instrumental rationality was different from Franklin’s value-rationality and could not have inspired “the systematic intensity [of behavior] requisite for a shattering of the traditional economic ethic” (Weber 2011, p. 53). I therefore want to emphasize that I am showing how Humanists and Protestants practice similar forms of this-worldly time discipline, not, as with Sombart, that they are motivated by the same set of ultimate ends. Indeed, Weber (2011, p. 295) himself notes an “inner affinity between the two (Alberti and Franklin)” specifically on the issue of “*industria* [diligent activity]” despite the fact that they share little in terms of ultimate ends.

<sup>6</sup> As Weber (2011) showed, though the notion of a life “course” of employment already appears embedded in the Reformation ideal of the *Beruf* or “vocational calling,” *Beruf* still does not capture the kind of predictable, pre-fabricated “trajectory” within the bounds of an organization, which is the hallmark of the modern meaning of the career.

<sup>7</sup> The term “life course” did not come into common use among social scientists until the 1960s, however, the roots of this perspective can be seen in the 1910s in such landmark works as Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Elder, Kirkpatrick, and Crosnoe 2003).

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<sup>8</sup> What is most striking about Whyte's evaluation of the bureaucratic career is that he sees it as a turn away from the Protestant Ethic, rather than, as I argue here, a kind of consummation of that ethic on the grand scale of the life course. This seems to stem from Whyte's understanding of the Protestant Ethic as synonymous with rugged individualism, whereas I see it as laying the foundation for precisely the rigid, synchronized, systematized cultural logic that Whyte calls the "Social Ethic."

## 2 The Financialization of Time-Space

Brent, a 31-year-old senior analyst at a mid-sized investment bank, works so many hours per week, with such irregularity, that he cannot give me a precise number. After failing to come up with a concrete estimate, he finally abandons my line of questioning about clock hours and resorts to a curious set of images to communicate his temporal experience. “There’s this line in [the movie] *Fight Club*,” he muses, “where Brad Pitt says, ‘When you have insomnia, you’re never really asleep and you’re never really awake.’ And I think about that a lot. In this job, you’re never really working and you’re never really not working. It’s hard to say what’s working and what’s not. I mean, I’m not a coal miner.” Brent’s working life feels like a state of insomnia—that frustratingly liminal space and seemingly endless time between sleep and alertness. To contrast his experience with something else, Brent’s imagination alights on an image of work that, in his mind, has a more traditional temporal structure—coal mining. Knowledge work versus hard manual labor. Insomniac hours versus shift work. The modern versus the traditional. These distinctions in Brent’s imagination capture a kind of implicit, half-conscious awareness that I repeatedly observed among financial professionals from many different areas of the industry when asked about their jobs: however you want to characterize their temporal existence—a difficult task—it is not “normal.”

Financial professionals are paradigmatic of the many dramatic changes to the timescapes of work that characterize the contemporary moment. One of the key mechanisms of transformation, which the financial services industry exemplifies better than most professions, is the heightened connectivity of the world’s economies, accomplished largely through the

“financialization” of the global economic system. The epoch of financialization means many things. In its most specific sense, it means a shift in the center of gravity of capitalism from more traditional channels of economic growth, such as trade and commodity production, to financial channels—the use of financial instruments and a vastly expanded financial services industry to generate profit (Calhoun 2013; Krippner 2005). This transformation is one of the core features of the “new capitalism” (Hutton and Giddens 2000; Sennett 2006). Consumers are now “confronted on a daily basis with new financial products and financial ‘literacy’ is touted as a core competency” (Krippner 2005:173–174). As a result, financial knowledge has risen from a culturally illegitimate form of knowledge, used primarily for “speculation,” to one of the most professionalized and highly valued forms of knowledge in contemporary societies (Preda 2009). The advisory services in large commercial banks, the main peddlers of financial knowledge to the business world, have, in particular, gained greater influence because of this shift. They have grown in number due in large part to massive deregulation in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, which allowed banks to engage in previously restricted activities, such as underwriting securities (Calhoun 2013). A concrete micro-level effect of this growth has been an increase in the prestige of financial professionals’ time. Not only is their time highly rewarded economically, but also it is culturally marked as important and powerful.

While I will analyze financialization in this specific economic sense, I will also consider it in a more general cultural sense. We can think of the epoch of financialization in terms of the rise of social practices with a unique cultural logic that may or may not apply specifically to economic activity. As I discuss more below, financialization in this more general sense can best be characterized by two words: disembedding and abstraction. These two cultural practices

infuse the places in which financial professionals work and live—sometimes infusing even their social relationships, emotions, and cognitive capacities—and primarily affect them by reconfiguring and unsettling their experience of social time-space.

In this chapter, I explore how different types of financial professionals experience the epoch of financialization within their particular temporal ecology. This task turns out to be rather difficult, because financial professionals' work environments can differ considerably among organizational types, such as between an investment bank and a private equity firm. They can also differ within an organization, such as between the Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) arm and a trading desk of a large investment bank. But they can even vary a great deal within a particular division of an organization, such as between senior and junior personnel in an M&A group, or between a trader and a managing director in a trading group. In short, depending on where an individual worker is located in the complex network of positions that make up the myriad operations of the financial services industry, he or she could be subject to a dramatically different set of spatio-temporal conditions.

How can we make sense of this complexity? Among the financial professionals I talked to, the most significant differences in workplace experience occur between those whose work involves “deals” and those whose work involves the “public markets.” This distinction captures a basic difference in the type of activities carried out within finance. Those who work on deals are involved in managing a large financial object or process, like a huge issuance of stock in an initial public offering (IPO), or the acquisition of one company by another (M&A). Deals are typically worked by those in “indirect finance,” such as the M&A division of an investment bank. Those who work in the public markets, by contrast, buy or sell publicly traded securities

(stocks, bonds, derivatives, futures, etc.). The public markets are covered by those in “direct finance,” such as financial research firms, sales and trading divisions within investment banks, other asset management firms, and even independent individual traders.

## **Deal Time**

Deal-oriented financial professionals are essentially knowledge salespeople. Perhaps more accurately put, they sell their attention to powerful corporate (and occasionally very wealthy individual) investors who need knowledgeable advice and business connections to become a publicly traded company, merge with or acquire a competitor, raise capital for a new venture, or make some other major financial move with the help of an intermediary who can lower transaction costs and diffuse risk. These financial advisors’ specialized attention is often seen by clients to be irreplaceable. Their time, therefore, is treated as highly prestigious. For example, it is common knowledge among investment bankers that, if they become involved in an M&A transaction, they cannot pass their tasks off to another worker mid-deal, even if he or she is equally qualified, because getting this new worker “up to speed” on a complex transaction of this kind would not only slow down the transaction, but potentially spook would-be investors. Once a dealmaker is in a deal, then, she becomes an irreplaceable part of that transaction, even if other parts of her life, like children, her spouse, or her health, need some of that attention.

A common experience for the dealmakers I spoke to, then, is a feeling of being always “on.” Because of their temporal prestige both economically and culturally, deal makers actually experience very little structural temporal prestige—i.e. it is their job to cue their movements to clients’ requests, rather than setting their own pace, sequence, etc. to the day. Above all else, the

combination of high economic and cultural temporal prestige with low structural temporal prestige results in chronic desynchronization from the normative clock and calendar rhythms of nine to five, Monday to Friday. Deal-oriented finance professionals, therefore, work on “deal time.” Their actions, attention, and energy are marshaled according to the tempo, sequence, articulation, and duration of the stages of making a deal. Deals tend to have similar stages—for example, in the case of investment banking, creating marketing materials, doing financial modeling, pitching to buyers, and negotiating the terms of a final agreement—so workers are keyed to the actions necessary to complete each phase of a deal.

Kathleen, a 52-year-old senior manager at a small “boutique” advising firm, says of her job, “I’m basically in the kind of job where you’re pretty much on call and available most of the time if there’s something going on.” As Kathleen indicates, because they live in a state of constant availability, many respondents could not give a straightforward answer about how many hours a week they work. All deal-oriented respondents reported large fluctuations in the start and end times of their days. When asked about her weekly hours, Kathleen, responded:

It has really varied a lot over the years. I mean, in the past, it’s been over 100 hours a week at times. Well, I think it’s a little—I think right now, it’s a little bit harder to say because my schedule is varying a lot, but I tend to work—I don’t work like 9 to 5. I don’t have the kind of job where you have a time you have to be there and a time you have to leave, so I typically work anywhere from eight to ten hours a day, or so.

Kathleen has difficulty describing her week in terms of the duration of clock hours. All she knows, is that she does not have any guarantees about when work will end, and she does not work a “9 to 5,” signaling what she considers a more traditional temporal form of employment.

Unpredictable long hours that are desynchronized from the clock and weekly cycle particularly affect junior-level workers, such as analysts in an investment banking group, because



they are on the bottom of the chain of command within a deal group, and therefore have the least structural temporal prestige. They are given the least amount of access to the decision-making that sets a particular deadline and must therefore react to others' movements. As one former junior analyst in an investment bank noted, "My friends would ask, 'What do you do everyday?' I'd say I come to work and I wait for stuff to happen and it always does."

Casey, a 25-year-old MBA student, recalled that there were certainly times when her schedule felt manageable working as an analyst in an M&A group, "but the hard part about that is, it was just hard to predict, so you never really know when your night or your weekend is gonna get blown up. I definitely had weeks, or days at a time where I could leave by dinnertime or so...and then it would go back to the 2 a.m. nights and stuff, and it was just kind of unpredictable in that way." Casey describes a particularly extreme example of this kind of unpredictability. Working three final transactions, or "live deals," at the same time as she was helping senior personnel with "pitching" new business to potential clients, she remembers:

I guess we were working on three live deals at once [...] and we were finishing up around like 10 or 11 — I'm sorry, maybe it was more like end of the day, end of the main workday, so it might've been like 6. I'm with my boss. We were doing kind of a final turn at the document and he has lots and lots of changes to make, so we're thinking, "Oh, gosh, this is gonna take a while," and then so I started to make the changes.

[...] So, the associate and I, the person above me, ended up being there until—he probably left at like 2 in the morning. I left at 4 in the morning, and some point between like 6 p.m. and this time I realized that I actually had to travel the next day. [...] So, I finish up around 4 in the morning, and you have to print the books, bind them, do all that stuff.

I went home and showered and then went straight to the airport. So, I hadn't slept at this point [*laughter*]. So, I'm at the airport, nervous, this is one of the first times I've traveled with my bosses and everything. We spent the whole day either in airports traveling to the perspective client's site, going to the meeting, and so then probably got back around 5, 6 the next day. So, I still hadn't slept at this point and then had more work to do when I got back. So that would probably be like the extreme worst-case scenario.

The way Casey uses clock time to narrate her story is telling. In a curious turn of phrase, for example, she obliquely refers to the normative 9 to 5 work cycle as “the end of the main work day, so it might’ve been like 6,” before she goes on to describe the rest of the deal, which then extended into another full “day” of work. Clock hours are not used as a precise measure of duration—as a way to communicate to me how many hours she worked during this deal. Rather, they are essentially used as a convenient language for placing the different “beats” of the rhythm of deal making.

### *New Temporal Languages*

Dealmakers frequently resorted to using creative temporal language to describe the long duration and unpredictability of their work when the “language” of clock hours became inadequate. Kathleen, for example, described her work using the word “flow.”

I think you have to be able to handle a lot of things coming at you at once [in this job], or you really couldn’t function. [...] That isn’t necessarily the amount of time you’re working, its’ just more the workflow itself.

*That’s interesting...it sounds like you’re more concerned about, or tuned into the kind of intensity or flow of the work. Is that right?*

Yeah, and I think you just—hours is completely independent of that.

Kathleen differentiates “workflow” from “hours,” noting that the way work tasks move is salient to her emotional experience independently of how many clock hours have passed. I then volunteer the term “intensity,” which Kathleen agrees is an accurate representation of the flow of her work. I pressed Kathleen further:

*How would you characterize that intense flow? What is it that makes it intense?*

The volume, and the—yeah, the volume, and then the urgency, and also the importance of a lot of what you're doing. I compare it to when you go to a hospital. They don't work with any level of urgency that we would work with. It's the importance of the patients getting the right medicine, or the doctor following up on this, that, or the other. That is nowhere near the level of urgency and attention that people put on big business deals.

*Wow. See, that's almost shocking to me. You would think it would be the other way around, right? [Doctors] have people's lives on their hands.*

You'd be fired if you [worked like] most of the doctors and nurses in a hospital.

When pressed to describe “flow,” Kathleen first notes that the “volume” of work is important—how many tasks she has to complete within a particular span of time. “I could have four people standing outside my office waiting to come in, one at a time,” she notes later. “At the same time, you've got two conference calls on the phone... It's like triage.” Beyond volume, however, she discusses the central importance of the “urgency” of work tasks by invoking the metaphor of a hospital. Kathleen adamantly insists that the degree of importance that is placed on the types of decisions she is expected to make feels higher than the life-or-death decisions made by doctors and nurses. I pressed Kathleen further to discuss the issue of urgency.

It's basically when you're dealing with lots of money, people that pay lots of money, people that have lots of money at stake, that's what drives the expectations.

*Yeah.*

Remember, you're dealing with highly educated people. These are well-paid jobs and the expectations, or the standards are very, very high. But it is because you're dealing with money. That's important [laughs].

*Yeah. Right.*

[Laughs] We, as a society—money is still valued. It's clearly valued more than people.

Urgency is the primary feeling produced by dealmakers heightened prestige. Many financial intermediary firms make their revenue on just a few major deals per year, so, as Kathleen notes, the money riding on a single deal drives expectations to remarkable heights, especially during the closing moments, when months of negotiation are coming to a head.

Tom, a very successful head of a private equity group in a large investment bank, corroborated Kathleen's insights about the relationship between prestige, money, and urgency, but made it more clear how this urgency shapes temporality.

When you're in live deal mode...a well-identified transaction time is of the essence. Every day is valuable. You're literally doing work to go back to the client and refresh their thinking and your advice to them. [...]

*I want to see if you can take me inside that more. What's the mood or what is the feeling like during those particularly fast-paced, intense moments when you're working that many hours? Is there something that triggers your memory there?*

I think during those times there has to be a deep sense that this is normal or at least that you're not the only one doing this, first of all. I think that's pretty important that you sense that this is something that's quite normal. [...] The only thing that comes close to this would be something like a military operation. There's a mission. Every minute is valuable. And so sleep gets pushed to the side. You need to get something done. Sometimes it has sort of militaristic elements to it. It can be a hostile takeover, for example. One company is launching some sort of hostile takeover of another company, or your client is sort of defending himself from a hostile takeover to evaluate different options. It has very much that project or even mission-like feel to it.

*The pressure there is partly because of what's on the line?*

[...] Billions of dollars on the line. That's why you get rich people, even senior investment bankers, corporate lawyers, to make themselves uncomfortable. Because you literally got many, many millions of dollars on the line in fees that motivate them to do things that would otherwise be unnatural acts. Like staying until ungodly hours doing this work. The economic incentives are there.

[...] Not having been in the military, it's what you imagine the military to be like. It's well supported with a very well defined mission that you need to execute through thick or thin. It's interesting that you've got, say, a little bit of a head cold, but if you don't work through this...

Tom trails off mid-sentence, realizing that his war metaphor is getting stretched thin. Having “a little bit of head cold” is not exactly comparable to the bodily strain of combat. He continues:

At some point you have to draw the line [on this analogy].

*You're not falling down dead or something.*

Exactly, the analogy breaks down. But, what I'm saying is, it's mission critical, you've got a high level of stress, and you've got a key role to play that cannot be really filled by anybody else once you're in that seat, or it cannot be filled as well by anybody once you're in that seat. It's intense.

Tom attempts to take me inside the experience of high temporal prestige work, and finds that he can only do so by invoking a (somewhat strained) metaphor that is similar to Kathleen's—the military operation. Like soldiers (or at least how an investment banker imagines soldiers to be), deal-making groups feel the urgency of a transaction as a kind of mission that they will do anything to complete (short of giving their lives). He notes that money is the central motivator during live deals, and that the weight of money creates intensity in the form of a heightened attention and a feeling of urgency. Money can provoke, in Tom's words, even “rich people” to make themselves “uncomfortable” and do “unnatural” things. Consequently, traditional temporal patterns, such as sleeping at night and working during the day, or working in predictable shifts, get, as Tom puts it, “pushed to the side.” It is important, then, that one summon the conviction that, “this is normal.” If one entertains the thought that working in this way is somehow unusual or abnormal, one becomes less and less capable of continuing through the night.

## **Market Time**

For most mid-level employees, such as analysts and traders, working in the public markets does not involve selling one's attention to time-hungry clients.<sup>1</sup> Rather, market workers are engendered to expertly interact with the complex and often mystifying movements of "the market." More accurately put, they are required to interact with other market-oriented workers' actions (which they typically cannot see directly) who are also (it is assumed) interacting with and against (it is again assume) the same representation of the "market."

Unlike "deal time," then, what I will call "market time" is the temporal order created by the cycles of a particular market. This temporal order is composed of micro rhythms nested within macro rhythms. On the level of the year, markets tend to fluctuate into more and less active months. As Don, a bond trader in his forties, mentioned, "Over the years I've learned that the market gives you time, and you have to take it when it is given. You can't fight the market. It's a bear, and it will bite you if you try to go against it." I asked him to clarify what he means by the market "giving you time." He replied,

There are certain times of the year when—if you try to take a vacation or something, it is practically impossible. If you try to get away in May or September, the market will keep drawing you back in because there is just so much going on. So, you gotta take vacations when the market gives you time, like in August or January.

Nested within this yearly cycle, is a daily cycle that is constituted by the specific time window of the exchange in which one is trading. Most trading in the United States, for example, occurs between 9:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. Clock and calendar times thus have somewhat more relevance to those working in the public markets because, with some exceptions, once the exchange in which one is trading has closed, there are relatively few "live" tasks left to complete.<sup>2</sup> On an even smaller scale, market time is also colored by the rhythms of different

types of securities. For example, traders working in over-the-counter derivatives might only book one or two trades per day, while currency traders might execute hundreds.

That the experience of market time is different from deal time became readily apparent to me when I asked market workers how many hours a week they work. They could not only answer with ease, but virtually all respondents gave the same answer, give or take a few hours. Most reported coming to work “about 7” in the morning and leaving “about 6 or 7” in the evening. Traders, in particular, are also expected to engage in some sort of networking activities outside of market hours a few times a week—typically going to dinner with business colleagues. Aside from business dinners, then, most I talked to reported sending a few emails at night and perhaps reading a few business-related reports or pieces of news, but nothing near the extent of weekend and night work reported by dealmakers.

Still, an 11 or 12-hour workday, plus, for traders, a few hours at a business dinner, is certainly a long day by many Americans’ standards. However, much to my surprise, the duration of work was the least of market workers’ complaints. In fact, many I interviewed reported that a predictable 11 or 12-hour day seemed like a blessing. This makes sense when we understand the frame of reference for their assessment of what is and is not a “good schedule.” Most market-oriented professionals have either worked in a more deal-oriented position or have colleagues and friends who work in those types of positions. Many also have friends or spouses who work in other time-hungry professions, like corporate law or medicine. Compared to the unpredictable, marathon workdays they see among these workers, market-oriented workers see their schedules as relatively easy.

For example, Nick, a 47-year-old middle manager of a trading group in a large investment bank, notes that his 55 to 60 hour workweek, “doesn’t really feel like a lot. [...] Because I have kids, I sort of benchmark it by that—if I’m seeing my kids in the morning, I’m seeing them at night pretty regularly through the week, then 11 or 12 hours at the office does not feel like a stretch for me.” He continues, “Now if somebody says, ‘Gosh, that’s a lot of hours,’ I’m like, really? [...] For me it feels like—I really have the luxury of having my cake and eating it too.” Nick means that, for a job with the kind of extraordinary prestige that his provides, he is lucky to be able to see his kids at all, let alone twice a day. “So you sort of say, ‘Well, like if I can actually get this kind of comp, and still get to see my kids a lot during the week...it’s pretty hard to argue with that combination.’”

Though market-oriented financial professionals did not report feeling a great deal of difficulty surrounding the duration of work, other dimensions of time in their work environment certainly did feel stretched, compressed, or distorted in some way. Elizabeth, a 32-year-old MBA student, worked as a sales analyst on a trading floor in a large New York-based investment bank for three years in her late twenties. When I talked to her, she was completing her MBA after a short detour trying to start her own clothing label. She recalls the schedule she kept while working on the trading floor with mixed emotions.

The hours were fine. [...] That being said, I think that the—whatever it is, 10 and a half to 11 hours a day, understates a little bit what the day actually felt like sometimes. [...] In terms of actual time commitment, I don’t think it was necessarily excessive, but from an energy commitment, that was certainly a lot more.

As I heard from many other market-oriented respondents, the number of hours one works, for example, in a trading floor situation is a poor way to describe the phenomenological experience of committing energy to the job. Elizabeth continues:



I mean you basically, from the moment that you get there at 7 in the morning...you are really expected from the second that you walk in the door—I mean, there were definitely days I would walk around the corner to be walking to my desk, just from the door [of the elevator], and you'd already have people screaming at you to call certain clients and do certain things and—especially when there was news. I lived through some relatively insane markets too, so the emotional swings throughout the day—you really have to be on all the time.

Elizabeth describes the energy commitment of the job in terms of feeling constantly “on.” But she seems to mean something different from what dealmakers mean by “on.” She notes that, even though she could predictably leave work at a reasonable hour, unlike many of her colleagues in investment banking, this relief was nearly outweighed by the stress brought on by the density of work tasks. She notes, “You can’t leave for lunch. You can go get food quickly, but you’re pretty much chained to your desk for that particular time. You have to be able to keep up with the traders. You have to be able to disseminate information quickly—sort of be ready for anything.” Elizabeth invokes a common theme among market-oriented respondents I talked to: working in the public markets requires remarkable skills of concentration because of the sheer volume of tasks required during market hours. Maintaining this penetrating focus for 11 or 12 hours is exhausting.

Bill, a 62 year-old veteran asset manager working for a wealthy Louisiana family, corroborated Elizabeth’s assessment of the job’s intensity. When I asked him, “How many hours a week do you think you work?” Bill sidestepped the question entirely, replying, “That’s an interesting question, because here’s the thing: It’s like being a fireman. You don’t go to too many fires, but you have to be ready for any fires at all times.” While being “on” for dealmakers referred to the intense duration, irregularity, and urgency of time, as Elizabeth and Bill illustrate,

being “on” for market workers seems to refer to the intense *density* of time, triggered particularly by “fires”—i.e. emergency situations—breaking out in the market.

### **The Social Production of Market Time**

While these descriptions of and metaphors for market time are suggestive, in order to fully understand how the temporal experiences discussed by Elizabeth and Bill are produced, we must directly examine the physical and cognitive tasks required to work in the public markets. Examining the social production of market time requires us to consider the notion of financialization in a more general sense, as a set of cultural practices that have grown up around the exchange of financial instruments in the contemporary digital trading floor. I will refer to these practices as “disembedding” and “abstraction.”

#### *Disembedding*

Disembedding is a term coined by Anthony Giddens (1990) to capture the ways in which modern social relations and social action are increasingly oriented to extra-local networks of interaction. In modernity, Giddens claims, individuals’ daily activities are increasingly subject to influences that are stretched over large distances and long times. Market workers’ workplaces are a prime example of this. Though they physically exist in a local context—such as lower Manhattan—the activities going on there are oriented primarily to processes happening across the globe. During the epoch of financialization, financial markets have taken on a more and more global scope (French, Leyshon, and Wainwright 2011; Knorr Cetina 2007; Leyshon and Thrift 1997; Sassen 2001). As Karin Knorr-Cetina (2007:7) notes, “The financial system can arguably

be considered a structure of the world rather than of national societies.” Financial markets are concentrated in “global centers,” such as New York, London, and Tokyo, “that are interconnected across time zones and continents.” Since the global debt crisis that swept the world’s major economies after 2008, the debt and equity markets have only become more global, requiring traders and analysts to keep track of many more processes that are stretched over larger tracts of time-space. When market actors make decisions to buy or sell a security in the contemporary financial economy, then, they typically do so with an image in mind (and on screen) of other actors spread around the globe.

The older and more experienced traders I spoke to seemed to have the most awareness of this shift toward the global within their particular market sector. Chuck, for example, a high-yield bonds trader in his mid forties, made explicit mention of the word globalization without prompting from me. When I asked him how things have changed since he first started trading bonds in the late 1990s, he reflected, “Because of globalization, I think, we pay more attention to so many more different things. The world of high yield bonds used to be mostly high yield bonds market driven. But now, we are looking at, for example, Spanish debt, or the German Ten-Year Bond.” Even within Chuck’s fifteen years as a bond trader, he has noticed a distinct shift toward a more global perspective. He also notes, however, that the source of this shift is difficult to pinpoint. “It’s funny though. I mean, it has kind of become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Traders look at all of this stuff [global financial data] because it matters, but it matters because traders look at it.”

Bill, a 64-year-old asset manager who specializes in the bond market, had an even greater awareness of an increasingly disembedded workplace, given his nearly 30 years of experience. He tied this transformation more to technology.

*How much does distance or space matter to you in your work?*

Is that metaphoric?

*I think I mean literal distance and space.*

None.

*None? Okay. Why? [He holds up his phone]. Because of that—your phone?*

The tech stuff, all of it: iPads, phones, computers. You can be anywhere. [...] You can be on a boat, on a mountaintop, anywhere.

Bill's initial response to my question about space—"Is that metaphoric?"—is telling. His implicit understanding is that space could mean either an actual physical distance or something more abstract. In terms of the former meaning, according to Bill, space matters little, because he can observe the market from anywhere with an internet connection. However, I then asked Bill about the latter meaning of space as "metaphoric." By metaphoric, Bill says he means "cultural distance."

*Cultural distance is important?*

That's a very important investment.

*Yeah? So, when you interact with, like, Japanese markets, you have—*

Oh, my goodness, yeah. Because you think a certain way, and particularly in a non-Western culture, you better be trying to get into the mindset of those investors. Because at the end of the day, with any investment product, you might say, you're looking for somebody else to pay you more for it. Somebody else is going to bid it up knowing what your price is, and what would make them do that is part of the analysis.

“Metaphorical,” cultural distance seems to have more salience for Bill than actual physical distance. As a trader who takes positions in several different exchanges, such as the Tokyo Stock Exchange, Bill may not be aware of the physical distance between his office in Louisiana and Tokyo, but he is highly aware of the many local factors that might influence Japanese investors, and thus Bill’s positions in Japanese debt securities.

Let me give you a glimpse, then, into the types of “disembedded thoughts” that go on in Bill’s mind as he contemplates buying or selling Japanese debt. A few months before I talked to him, the coast of Japan had been struck by a tsunami that triggered one of the worst nuclear disasters in history. I asked Bill what that day was like for him, sitting in his office in Louisiana.

A typical day is that I might start looking at the markets at 7:00 in the morning and just see what happened over in Europe, in Asia, so on and so forth. You kind of check that off—nothing happened. Well, one morning: boom, there’s a tsunami in Japan. How bad is it? The news usually unfolds in that case kind of slowly because no one is really sure.

Then comes this nuclear reactor stuff. At first, oh, so what? Some houses got knocked down; tsunamis happen. But the nuclear thing and the power outage and the lack of power production, that goes on for a long time. In that case it was really just seeing what are the effects of this, and so your wheels start to turn. How does this run down the line, effect the things [trades] we have on, and what even might be ways to take advantage of it?

At this point, Bill begins to inundate me with facts and figures about Japan. I have a hard time keeping up, and begin to feel like Charlie Brown listening to his teachers’ disembodied voice.

“Japan already has one of the worst fiscal situations in the world... debt exceeds GDB by more than... that does not count unfunded liabilities like pensions and social security... low birth rate, only like 1.1 child per... Japan is also very, very sectarian... almost xenophobic in their investment culture... their five year JGBs yield about 50 basis points... yen is really at fairly high levels...” After several minutes of analysis, Bill continues:

That's the backdrop for: Along comes a wall of water. How it runs down the line in my thinking is that they're going to have to do a major rebuilding project here, and where are they going to get the funds? You're just about at the equilibrium level now where the big pension funds are starting to sell. They're not savers anymore; they're spenders because of the baby boomers retiring. That's when we put on some trades that would take advantage of Japan's negative fiscal situation.

In one sense, Bill has cultivated extensive knowledge of how his financial actions are embedded in a local context—Japan's demographics, economics, history, and even some cultural proclivities. In another sense, his knowledge of this embeddedness is expressed almost entirely in disembodied abstractions—rates, ratios, averages, and other statistics, as well as a blunt understanding of Japanese investors as “xenophobic.” Through the abstract language of numbers, Bill's disembodied cognitions of the flow of debt around the Japanese economy can become re-embedded from a distance, allowing him to “look in” on Japan while keeping it at arm's length.

### *Abstraction*

As Bill's shows us, abstraction goes hand-in-hand with a disembodied workplace. An abstraction is something that does not have a physical existence. It is a knowledge object that can be considered apart from the world of concrete entities. Abstractions are the primary drivers of disembodiment, because, in order to conduct oneself in a delocalized action environment, one must learn to interact with and have deep trust in the reality of things that are occurring in another room or on the other side of the planet (there is little difference) and therefore cannot be directly apprehended by the senses (Giddens 1990). Abstractions, therefore, are the foundation upon which market time is built.

Financial instruments—stocks, bonds, loans, futures, options, spots, swaps, and the like, as well as other types of financial data, such as a research report on a company's capital

structure—are abstract in at least two ways. First, unlike traditional production markets, the objects of financial markets are and are increasingly decoupled from concrete economic objects in the world—for example, a company. As Alex Preda (2009:53) notes, “Financial markets are a second order construction, based on the observation of producer markets. Yet, since financial actors primarily observe each other, they monitor only internally generated (or second order) representations of producer markets.” Financial data (including financial instruments) are representations of other financial actors’ representations of the real objects and activities that make up production markets (i.e. the entities producing things in the economy). The “objects” of the financial economy, then, are related to the world of concrete entities only obliquely. Consequently, financial professionals refer to this world of second-order constructions as “the financial economy” and contrast it to what they call the “real economy.”

Primary representations of objects in the “real economy” are typically produced by intermediary groups, such as securities analysts, whose job it is to tell those working in the public markets “what’s going on out there.” They do this primarily by publishing research reports on particular sectors of production markets, which are then (at least in theory) read by investors (Preda 2009:54). Analysts are often found working right alongside traders and managers in trading groups, but there are also entire firms solely dedicated to producing real-time and in-depth financial data for other firms and individuals to use in making their investment decisions.

Financial data are also abstract in the sense that, *as objects*, they have an insubstantial material manifestation. As Knorr-Cetina (2007:6) notes, financial instruments “may not even be pieces of paper, but merely an entry in the books of relevant parties.” If there is a sense in which

financial instruments have a material manifestation, then, it would be “pixels.” Since roughly the 1980s, when the epoch of financialization began to accelerate, the market is interacted with predominantly through computer screens. Prior to computer trading, most financial instruments were exchanged face-to-face. In the case of exchange trading, for example, traders physically assembled in so called “open-outcry” trading “pits” and shouted bid and ask prices to one another (Zaloom 2006).<sup>3</sup> Today, open outcry pits are used in only a handful of exchange-traded markets. The vast majority of markets are now conducted in office buildings in large “deal rooms” or “trading desks” within high-rises in the major global financial centers. Rather than shout and gesture to a co-present person, traders today now use phones, chat applications, and specialized proprietary trading software to “see,” “hear,” and “feel” what other actors are doing in the market.

In order to take a closer look at this abstracted work environment, I observed the trading floor of one of the world’s largest global asset management companies. I primarily observed two groups of “buy side” debt traders—a “high yield” group (focused on debt securities with a low credit rating—often called “junk bonds”) and a “distressed debt” group (focused on debt securities from entities that have filed or are about to file for bankruptcy). These are high risk/high reward financial instruments that are popular in leveraged finance portfolios.<sup>4</sup> These traders operate in an over-the-counter (OTC) style of trading. That is, they do not trade directly on one of the major financial exchanges, a style known as “exchange trading,” but trade “internally” among a network of dealers and brokers who are located in multiple geographic locations, mainly in the United States, and connected by a digital trading system.



The deal room in which these traders work occupies an entire floor, approximately 50 yards by 20 yards, in a modern New York City high rise. It is filled with workstations. There are no cubicles and only a few short dividers separating major blocks of traders. Each row on the trading floor is composed of a desk, approximately 20 to 30 feet long, which features about 6 workstations. The stations butt up next to each other, giving each trader roughly four feet of personal workspace. Teams of traders typically sit together in these rows.

What is most arresting about seeing a deal room for the first time, then, is precisely how normal it looks. Aside from the fact that there are more computer screens per-capita than most offices, the deal room essentially looks like any other white collar professional workplace.

Traders work in relatively intimate, face-to-face conditions, which facilitate verbal communication among members of the trading group. As Don put it:

That's why this trading floor is so open-air. That way when Steve or Chuck is getting killed, I'll know about it. I don't need to remember or be prompted to go over and ask them, because I can just hear it in their voices. So, hearing that tells me that I should be paying attention to certain things in my area [of the bond market] that might be affecting them in their area.

As Don indicates, the underlying logic of the workspace is to facilitate a kind of group mind, which allows greater sharing of information and the tighter coordination of decisions.

Each trader's workstation features a telephone, a bank of three computer screens that surround the trader in a wide arc, and a keyboard.<sup>5</sup> Traders organized their computer desktops slightly differently, but the content of the desktops is much the same from trader to trader. This firm operates on the Bloomberg Professional Service, a state-of-the-art software and hardware system, which many of the leading financial firms lease from the Bloomberg Corporation for a little over a thousand dollars a month per terminal. "The Bloomberg," as traders sometimes refer

to it, provides streams of real-time financial data on any financial instrument from any company in any country in the world. It also gathers financial news from hundreds of information sources—newspapers, television broadcasts, the myriad stock and bond indices of various exchanges, etc.—and allows users to search



*A trader at the Bloomberg terminal*

this stream of information using keywords. Users can also assemble a list of securities that they are either currently trading or are interested in trading, thus allowing them to compose a targeted picture of the market activities of particular interest to them. The system also allows traders to communicate through instant message with any other Bloomberg user anywhere in the world.

These services are integrated with many other applications that one would find on a common personal computer, such as Excel, email, and a calendar application, but also with a set of specialized software applications designed “in-house” by the firms’ information technology department, which occupies a floor of a high rise next door to the firm’s main building. Rather than get tools from someone else’s workshop to do some of the core functions of trading, then,

this firm has designed its own tools that can be tweaked and refined as the business and the market change.

Traders run all of these trading and communications applications simultaneously, distributing them across the three screens in front of them as they see fit. At the same time, they place and receive calls on a multi-line telephone, which allows them to communicate verbally with brokers on the “sell side” of the market and other traders and analysts outside the firm. On top of all this highly customized text and audio information, the trading floor is also equipped with televisions tuned to various financial news broadcasts, which allow traders to see important news developments, such as speeches by the President or the Federal Reserve chairman. Lastly, traders are provided with hundreds of pages of research and analysis by the army of securities analysts—most of whom are recent graduates from prestigious universities—assigned to each trading desk. Most traders I saw had several piles of paper documents on their desks, on a chair next to them, at their feet below the desk, or wherever space would allow.

In short, among those I observed, it was not uncommon in a single day for one trader to receive several hundred emails, hundreds of digital pages of financial news, hundreds of digital pages of instant messages from colleagues outside the firm, hundreds of paper pages of research analysis, all while conducting dozens of phone calls, listening to and talking face-to-face with their fellow team members about trades, keeping an eye on their existing trading positions, and, of course, booking actual trades. When traders leave their desks to use the restroom, get food, or go to a meeting, these streams of information continue on without them. Therefore, traders must be careful about when they take breaks. They often eat breakfast and lunch at their desks, so as not to miss important developments in the market.

Traders are clearly inundated on a second-by-second basis with thousands of abstract representations, which, when added together, constitute their vision and feel of “the market.” It would be physically impossible to engage in any substantive way with all of this information. As an outside observer, one feels compelled to ask: What’s the point? Why so much information from so many sources at such a high speed? It was difficult for traders to communicate what they do with all of this information and precisely how they use it to assemble a picture of the market, but they all agreed that they could not do their jobs as effectively without it. Many had to resort to metaphors, similis, and other forms of creative speech to communicate their experience to me.

Steve, a 33 year-old high yield trader, worked his way up into this position from being an analyst and junior trader. He describes trading as a “constant circle of information flowing.” “I am constantly looking for the pieces of information that are important for different companies that I’m tracking, different trends in the market that I think might be important.” Tracing a narrowing spiral shape in the air with his finger, he describes his main task as trying to “slow that circle down so that I can get at the information I need exactly when I want it.” I asked Steve:

*What kinds of things do you do to “slow down the circle?”*

I don’t know what it is that enables me to do that. I just do it.

*Maybe you can you give me an example?*

Well, basically what happens is, I have a bunch of things that I’m interested in keeping track of that I’ll notice when I get a sense of the market in the morning. As the day progresses, I’ll see another piece of information that triggers my memory about one of those things. I make the connection. If it’s the right piece of information, it might mean that I take action and make a trade. But, usually I’ve been thinking about doing that trade earlier in the day.

*So most of what triggers your memory is something you read?*

Yeah, usually something on the newsfeed, or I'll get a message from a colleague—that kind of thing. Basically, you have a lot of trends, names of companies, stuff like that, working in the back of your mind all the time. Then along comes something on your screen that triggers your memory of that trend or company, which kind of brings it back to your mind. Then you can assess whether or not to take action from there.

Steve compared this process to the popular children's game *Memory*, where players try to find pairs of matching cards that have been turned face down using only their memory of where each card lies.

With these metaphors, Steve reveals an important insight about the underlying logic of the digital trading system. It takes for granted that a single individual would never be able to use, or be interested in using, all of the information the system provides. Rather, the system inundates thousands of users across the globe in a swirl of information. When everyone views this data simultaneously and in real-time, the chances that important pieces of information will be lost are slim because of the sheer number of perspectives. Also, because Bloomberg users are connected by instant communication technologies, the system enables them to discuss information of potential importance with colleagues interested in the same market trends in real time.

Rick, a 45 year-old veteran trader in the distressed debt group, corroborated these insights. After telling me that he gets “probably a thousand or so pages of messages from different people over the course of a day” just through the Instant Message application alone, I asked Rick if he would rather there be less information for him to feel responsible for.

We are information junkies. I would much rather have too much information than too little. I mean, I can always use the search function on any of these feeds, if I want to make sure I haven't missed something on a company. Really, when it comes down to it, this is a relationship business. So, if something important comes up and I miss it, I have enough confidence in my contacts to know that someone will probably catch it for me and let me know.

*So, it's a collective effort?*

Exactly. It's a collective effort. By having so much information out there all at once, you won't miss what's important, because there are so many other people out there watching.

As Steve and Rick point out, working in the public markets involves engaging with a globally distributed, short-term or “working” collective memory. Like on the individual level, working memory on the collective level assists in reasoning and decision-making concerning tasks that are immediately at hand. Unlike individual working memory, collective working memory is distributed among thousands of group members who share a common focus of attention. In order for traders to construct an individual working memory that produces good decision-making, they must become immersed in the collective working memory that is streamed to them via the digital trading system. Becoming immersed in the collective working memory of the financial markets allows them to extend their individual capacity for working memory beyond their physical bodies.<sup>6</sup> When a potentially important piece of information needs to be attended to, then, it is often the collective working memory that catches it first. Traders have a great deal of trust that, via the real time temporality of the Bloomberg system, this piece of information will be streamed to them exactly when they need it.

### *Liquidity*

Market workers are immersed in a screen world—a collective working memory of the global economic system, shoehorned into three or more 24-inch monitors. A common experience of time that traders described to me is what I will refer to as “liquid.” By the liquidity of time, I mean the “frictionless-ness” of the interactions that make up one's lived experience of duration, pace, sequence, tempo, articulation, and so on. Through disembedding and abstraction, virtually

anything that has been represented as an “object” for interaction can be moved or exchanged without having to manipulate the physical proprieties of the actual object that is being represented, such as its weight, height, color, or texture. As a result, there are very few limits on the number, speed, size, and distance of the objects that one can interact with at a given moment.

Financial instruments are a prime example of objects that create a liquid experience of time, so much so that “liquidity” has taken on its own special meaning within finance.<sup>7</sup> I am using the term liquid here in a more general, non-economic sense (Bauman 2000). Financial instruments create liquidity in the sense that they “move” in the relatively frictionless procedure of a digital exchange. Therefore, unlike more concrete objects, they are not affected by terrain or weather conditions, are not so heavy they cannot be lifted by hand, or so fragile they could be crushed.

Moreover, compared to the flow of less liquid objects—for example, freight on the trailer of a semi truck—the flow of financial instruments through a trader’s action environment—i.e., the digital trading terminal—is almost infinitely customizable. This was especially the case at the asset management firm I observed, whose proprietary trading software is designed in-house. For example, one day I overheard Cynthia and Rick, both in the distressed debt group, complaining about the usability of their custom-built trade booking application, which is used widely by many different trading groups throughout the company. “Why don’t you just make my job as difficult and inefficient as fucking possible,” Cynthia sarcastically exclaimed to her computer screen as she attempted to book a trade. Rick turned to Cynthia to see what was wrong. They comment on how one of the tabs they use in one screen of this application disappears when they change to another screen. This “disappearing tab” slows down their workflow by a few seconds. After

commenting on it several times throughout the day, Rick called the IT department and, within a few hours, was engaged in a long face-to-face conversation with a programmer from the building across the street about reconfiguring the screen to fit his needs. The programmer showed Rick another way to do this task, but Rick insisted that he wanted to do it his way. The programmer agreed to make the changes over the next few days. In this small way, Rick was able to customize the pacing and sequencing of his workspace, making the trading terminal (and its temporality) fit him like a pair of old shoes. Once their screens are customized to their liking, then, the number and speed of the objects traders interact with is limited, not by the physical properties of the objects themselves, but almost entirely by traders' own capacity for attention and concentration. It is a relatively frictionless action environment.

One concrete result of the liquidity of time on the trading floor, then, is a kind of "absorption" effect among traders.<sup>8</sup> This was demonstrated to me most clearly by Steve from the high yield group. When I asked Steve about his experience of working all day in front of the screens, he said:

When I'm in here [pointing to the screens and phones in a sweeping motion with both arms] I'm in a circle and it's taking up all of my attention. I sometimes go the entire day without talking to my wife and kids. It's not that I forget about them, it's just that I'm so involved with this stuff [pointing again to the screens], conversations with all these guys [pointing around him to his colleagues], before I know it, it's 5 o'clock." [...] I was driving home last night, and it suddenly dawned on me that I hadn't spoken to my wife all day.

As Steve is explaining this to me, he is suddenly interrupted by Regina, the leveraged finance group secretary, through the intercom telling him he has a phone call. He yells across the room that he will take the call, and, within seconds, he is deeply engaged in a phone conversation about a trade with a broker. Chuck, who sits next to Steve, turns to me and says, "There you go."



I watch Steve as he gets spun off into a sequence of actions. The initial call from the broker triggers a conversation with Chuck and another trader about their positioning. This spins Steve into a series of activities on the computer, then more talking to colleagues in the office, then more actions on the computer. After about half an hour, he has reached a stopping point with this spiral of activity and notices that I am still there watching him. We lock eyes and he gives me a half smile, realizing what had just happened. “Yeah, so there you go,” he says.

During particularly active periods of market activity, which require long periods of staring at the screen, traders’ minds are running at hyper speed, but their bodies, perhaps ironically, remain relatively still, becoming like an extra appendage one must keep running in order to support the mind. Chuck, for example, notes that when the markets are at peak volatility, he typically notices strain “more in my body than in my mind. Mostly my neck and back.” He continues, “When things are really intense, I notice that I’ll wrap my legs around the legs of my chair like this.” He demonstrates by kicking off his shoes and curling the tops of his feet around the back legs of the chair, which fixes him extra tight to the seat and positions his body in a forward lean, his head now closer to the screens. “When I get home at the end of the day, I’ll notice that my back hurts. When I stand up, my entire neck is tense all the way down.” He traces a line with his hand from the bottom of his neck all the way down his spine. Chuck notes that taking a vacation is the only thing that really helps relieve this strain. “Before we had kids, my wife and I would take trips to the Caribbean for a few days or a week every few months. She would be all excited to get out and do stuff, but I would end up just sleeping. I would sleep like 12 or 14 hours, because I just felt so drained.” As Rick puts it, “Every day, by the end of the day, I’m wiped. I need to work out or do something physical just to get my mind clear. I’ve got to do

something to get my head away from this world for a second. That's why at night I try to read something light—like a mystery novel or something. Just something to get my mind to calm down before I hit the pillow.” Cynthia had similar thoughts. “You have to find a way to decompress when you get home every night. If I don't get a workout in every day, I go crazy. I like routine.” She also notes that she feels blessed because, “I am an incredible sleeper [laughs]. When I hit the pillow, I am out like a light. I know other people in the office who have more trouble with that, and that can be hard.”

These respondents all point to a common experience: the liquidity of time produced by engaging with the collective working memory of the financial markets requires traders to entrain their cognitive rhythms with the rhythms of objects that have very few physical limitations on the speed and volume of their movement. This requires a great deal of mental concentration. Merging with the rhythms of the market leaves an echo in one's mind at the end of the day, which one must then attempt to dampen, tame, or block out in order to get refreshed for the next day of work. The most common way that traders report being able to achieve this dampening is by engaging directly with the body at the end of the day through some sort of physical activity.<sup>9</sup>

### *Phantasmagoria*

The disembedded and abstracted nature of the trading floor not only shapes the temporality of traders' work environments. It also creates a peculiar experience of place, which I will refer to, following Giddens (1990), as “phantasmagoric.” A phantasmagoric place is one in which the visible form of that place conceals more than it reveals. As Giddens (1990:19) puts it, within highly disembedded and abstracted action environments, “what structures the locale is not

simply that which is present on the scene; the ‘visible form’ of the locale conceals the distanciated relations which determine its nature.” In the case of the deal room, the physical experience of it as a place—an air-conditioned office populated with computers and people—conceals more than it reveals what is really going on there—the exchange of billions of dollars among the world’s most powerful economic players. The reality that matters on the trading floor is not given in the physical experience of the trading floor as a concrete place. Thus, one must learn to see the disembedded abstractions that structure action there—such as the German Ten Year Bond, or a line of text on a screen reporting widespread rioting in Greece because of austerity measures, or an almost unimaginable sum of money, like 3 billion dollars—as “really real,” even though one cannot directly apprehend these objects with the senses. Learning to see and engage with this concealed reality as “really real” is a fundamental part of becoming an experienced market worker.

I found some of the younger and less experienced members of the trading groups, then, still in the process of learning to see and experience the reality of their workplace as “really real.” Trevor, a white male in his late thirties, joined the distressed debt team as a trader from a consulting firm in the Midwest during my fieldwork. He was initially assigned to derivatives and portfolio trading, which involves booking trades that apply to an entire portfolio, rather than a single bond holding. This is a slower paced type of trading—he typically books one, perhaps two trades a day—but is more abstract. In a typical day, Trevor uses complex algorithms to seek out particular bonds or loans that fit the type of across-the-board derivative trade he wants to put on. As he attempted to explain to me the type of trading he does, I remarked to him how difficult it is for me to understand:

*The information on these screens doesn't seem real to me. But I imagine you see a lot more concreteness behind these numbers.*

Well, actually, there's not a whole lot of difference between doing a 100,000-dollar trade and a 3 million dollar trade. The amount and type of work is almost exactly the same for me. Sometimes you can get too into the numbers and forget what you're dealing with—which is actual money. [...] I mean, I deal with a *lot* of money. Like, millions of dollars. But, you know, it doesn't feel like it sometimes. And it's not my money either so...

He trails off and pauses for a second. He adds, reflectively, “You have to be careful and step back and remember how much money this is and how much responsibility that entails.”

I discussed this experience of the unreality of money with some of the junior-level securities analysts, many of whom have come to the firm with a limited finance background. I talked to Melinda, for example, in her first month of being hired as an analyst straight from an Ivy League university. She recalls that, several weeks before I talked to her, she had been doing research on a particular company and saw that, “the company had gone up like six percent in a single day. And, for some reason, I decided to actually look it up to see what that meant, you know like in terms of actual money. It was like *twenty million dollars*.” As Trevor and Melinda indicate, working in the financial markets is ostensibly about the exchange of money. But there is scant physical manifestation of money anywhere in the office environment. Especially if things are going well, one could easily forget exactly what is going on underneath the physical locale of the office itself.

Older and more experienced traders, then, seemed to have a less phantasmagoric experience of the office. This was, I learned, because they had longer to learn how to apprehend the screen world as “really real.” For example, traders often used highly evocative textural language to describe, in more tangible terms, the otherwise intangible abstractions found on their screens. For example: “Look how frothy high yield is right now,” or “That's pretty tight pricing,”

or “Equities volume looks pretty chunky.” Not only had more experienced traders developed a language for “feeling” the market in more concrete terms, but all of them had gone through the painful experience of losing a lot of money on a trade that did not go their way. When I asked Chuck, for example, in very generic terms, “What it is like to be a trader?” He mused:

It’s like—and this is a really bad metaphor but pretty accurate—it’s like, have you ever seen films where they show kids in a war zone playing soccer or something? The place is like all bombed out, but, since there aren’t any planes overhead, they think, ‘Hey, I’m not hearing any bombs right this second, so why don’t we go out and play some soccer.’ It’s kind of like that. After awhile, you just become so used to hearing bombs dropping that it doesn’t bother you anymore.

A few months later, I asked Chuck again about this fantastical imagery in the hopes that he could help me understand what he means by getting used to “bombs dropping.” Turning to his screen, he pulls up a chart of the equity value of a company called Cengage, which owns Thompson-Reuters, a leading academic textbook publishing company. Chuck explains to me that the firm, mostly under his direction, invested heavily in these bonds with the expectation that their price would increase over time (i.e. they bet long). He and the other high yield traders had the theory that, even though a lot of higher education is “going electronic,” professors are unlikely, in the short run, to completely re-arrange a curriculum around a new book (electronic or otherwise), because this requires a lot of work. “Why would a professor do that when he could just stick with the same book he’s been using for years?” Chuck reasoned. Then, he pointed to the chart of the company’s equity value: a precipitous drop. Over the last three days, against Chuck’s prediction, there has been a huge sell off, causing the price of Cengage’s AAA debt to drop. The losses, Chuck tells me, have been on the order of 25 million dollars, practically overnight. Pointing to the screen, he notes, “Yeah. I couldn’t sleep after I saw that one.” Fortunately, Chuck notes, “No one has given me much shit about it. We’ve all been there. We’ve all taken big losses when

things didn't go our way." He pauses, and then reflects, "But still, you can't help but feel bad after something blows up on you."

As we are talking, Steve and Daniel, high yield traders who sit on either side of Chuck and have been eavesdropping our conversation, turn their chairs toward us.

Steve: What do you mean when something blows up on you, Chuck? Are we talking about Cengage right now? That was not a blow up, buddy. You need to bring it down.

Daniel: Cengage was not a blow up, man.

Chuck: [looking a little hurt] It was like 25 million.

Daniel: But that was over three days, man. It's not that bad.

*Interviewer: [To Steve] I'm sure this kind of thing has happened to you before too. How do you deal with it? Does it still affect you when you go home at night?*

Steve: No. You totally downshift. You downshift. You gotta downshift.

Chuck: [Looking more hurt now, turns to Steve] But could you do that like five or six years ago when you first started? Can you honestly tell me you can downshift when something blows up on you? Can you just lay your head on the pillow, no problem?

Steve, looking a little uncomfortable with answering, sidesteps these questions by needling Chuck again about how, "Cengage was not a blow up, man." This spins them into a discussion about the academic textbook market and how they should be positioning themselves now. Steve, finally returning to my question, says coolly, "I find it easy to switch off from this world when I leave work. There is really no need for me to check the market after hours, except to maybe send a few emails in the early evening." Chuck just shakes his head, and says to me, "I guess stress is all relative. It's all about what you're used to. For my wife, for example, she gets stressed out by our daughter yelling at our son. [...] I'm like, 'Whoa, take a step back. It's not that big a deal.' Because to me, real stress is losing 25 million in three days."

This exchange is about whether or not losing a lot of money in a short time is a “big deal,” and whether or not that loss should register emotionally—seemingly easy questions to answer. The answers, however, are anything but clear. On one hand, despite his earlier claim that, “You just become so used to hearing bombs dropping that it doesn’t bother you anymore,” the loss of 25 million dollars in three days feels perfectly real for Chuck—like warplanes dropping bombs. He feels like he has performed poorly at his job, and the reality of the loss manifests itself materially in Chuck’s body as insomnia. On the other hand, Chuck’s colleagues seem to easily dismiss the loss as “not that big a deal,” and seem to indicate, in subtle ways, that Chuck should be able to easily shrug it off, like switching off a light—“you just downshift.” So, was the loss big or not? How should one feel about such an event? Within the phantasm of the deal room, the answers are not perfectly clear, because the objects of interaction in the work environment—namely, millions of dollars—are artifacts of trust in the reality of abstract representations. This is not to say that traders do not experience money as “really real.” As Chuck demonstrates, they certainly do. However, it takes trust and the use of one’s imagination to conjure this reality into being.

Many experienced traders I talked to, then, noted that one must learn to treat money—or, more accurately put, the risk of losing it—neither too lightly, nor too seriously. Bill, the most experienced trader I talked to, was the most poetic about the importance of toeing this line. He notes:

A pro racecar driver probably knows many people that have been maimed or killed, but he doesn’t think it’s going to happen to him. He might even know that it could, but he really just doesn’t. At the least, it doesn’t bother him. It doesn’t impair his ability. Because you cannot be afraid if you’re a racecar driver, or you’ll have your foot just a little bit off the gas, and then the other guy is going by you, and you lose. [...] I think for

what I do, it's the same kind of thing. I just don't really ever think it's going to happen to me.

*Yeah, what is "it?"*

"It" means blow up; go out of business and hurt a lot of people.

*Yeah, just completely lose it all.*

Other people will say, "I just can't believe the kind of risk that you can take." And I don't feel it, though. I don't feel the pressure at that level. Other people would just—"How do you sleep? You've got how much risk going on?" I don't like it as much as I used to, but when I was younger, I remember I would do this for nothing. I loved the thrill of it.

Over-lightness leads to recklessness, which can have potentially cataclysmic consequences for the firm, or in some instances, the economy at large. Over-seriousness leads to a paralyzing fear that prevents one from capitalizing on high-reward opportunities. In the case of the "Cengage blowup," then, Steve and Daniel evaluated Chuck's emotional response as over-serious. Perhaps ironically, Chuck had become *too convinced* of the reality of the screen world, and he was potentially "letting off the gas," as Bill would put it. Talking to Daniel later in the day about the stress Chuck was feeling, he mused, "You gotta try to keep in mind that this isn't reality. We traders are less than one percent of the population, and we don't live in the real world. Our problems aren't real problems. So, if you get too into this job, you can forget that."

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Dealmakers reveal how the epoch of financialization—in the specific sense of a shift in gravity toward financial services—has reshaped social time-space through heightened temporal prestige. These transformations are felt mostly in terms of the duration, irregularity, and urgency of "deal time." As knowledge service workers, dealmakers' attention is their most valuable asset. Within the contemporary financial economy, their attention has become so highly valued, that



clients demand its constant availability, regardless of what time it says on the clock. There is more than a little irony here. As historians and sociologists have long lamented the “triumph” of clock time over what E.P. Thompson (1967) called a “task oriented” relationship to time, dealmakers are less wedded to clock time, more task oriented, and have been less capable of drawing a meaningful boundary between work and non-work spheres. On this temporal level, “deal time” has greater similarity to farming or animal husbandry than more stereotypically “modern” forms of labor, such as shift work. Like farmers and their crops, dealmakers entrain their attention and energy to the rhythms of sowing, cultivating, and harvesting business deals.

Market workers’ experience of social time has been reconfigured by the disembedding and abstracting mechanisms that characterize financialization as a cultural practice. Merging their minds with the collective working memory of the financial markets, they experience a liquid sense of time and a phantasmagoric sense of place. Transformations in the temporal regime of clock time are felt more in terms of the density of time and the disembedding/abstraction of space. Nevertheless, we see that clock time still has a relatively high degree of salience. Market workers pay attention to clock time and experience fluctuations in market activity surrounding certain calendar times. If market workers were to keep a time diary, for example, they would appear to keep relatively “normal” schedules. Indeed, they often remark on how fortunate they are to have it so easy compared to their dealmaker counterparts. Within the windows of clock and calendar time given to them by the market, however, they have qualitative experiences of time, space, and place that, even a few decades ago, would have been difficult to imagine. These timescapes are facilitated by the new digital trading technologies that have swept direct finance since the 1970s.

Though financial professionals work in what seems like a special and unique workplace, then, it actually exemplifies, perhaps in a more dramatic fashion than most workplaces, the timescapes that many knowledge workers face today. Corporate lawyers, IT professionals, researchers, analysts, and other “data junkies” are all similarly required to interact with (typically) digital representations of things out there in the world. They tend to work long hours and have difficulty drawing lines between work and non-work time. They struggle to balance work and family life. What financial professionals demonstrate better than most, however, is how the timescapes of intense knowledge work can twist, compress, expand, distort, and otherwise reshape the traditional experiences of duration, tempo, sequence, and articulation, as well as space and place, associated with the regime of clock time. The major effect of these timescapes, these workers’ lives suggest, is that they challenge workers’ cognitive capacities, especially their capacity for attention. As financial professionals frequently joked to me, “being a little ADD” is a good thing in this profession, because it means you may already feel at home within the hectic temporalities of finance. For knowledge workers, then, training one’s attention has become a surprisingly difficult thing to do, requiring special forms of cognitive and emotional discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions to this. Sales desks within “sell side” trading operations have a lot of client contact. Also, managers on the “buy side” have a lot of client contact when they are pitching portfolios to existing clients or convincing new clients to let them manage their money.

<sup>2</sup> This is changing as I write. Exchanges are increasingly opening up to “Extended Hours Trading” (EHT)—trading that occurs outside the time window of the major exchanges. As of this writing, EHT is seen as a somewhat riskier timeframe for trading. Nevertheless, the rise of EHT points to the possibility that clock hours are becoming increasingly irrelevant to market workers, who could, in theory, trade in any of the major exchanges at any time of day.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of OTC trading, networks of traders and brokers talked to one another on the phone. Traders worked alongside traders’ assistants, who ran calculations on paper and shouted bid and ask prices over a microphone.

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<sup>4</sup> Large institutional investors, like pensions and mutual funds, invest in these portfolios and ask firms like the one I observed to manage that process. In order to make money for these investors, then, the traders I observed are primarily responsible, not for interacting with investors, but for managing the risk-return ratios of the firm's portfolios.

<sup>5</sup> Analysts, by contrast, tended to have two screens rather than three, reflecting the comparatively smaller number of applications needed at any one time to conduct their work. The number of screens at one's workstation is also seen as a kind of status symbol. A stereotype in the trading world is the hotshot trader surrounded needlessly by ten screens just to convey how big his—ahem—account is.

<sup>6</sup> What I am calling collective working memory is similar to what cognitive social psychologists have called “distributed social cognition.” Technology plays an important role in extending the already social foundation of collective cognition (see for example Dror and Harnad 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The liquidity of an asset refers to the degree to which there are many willing buyers and sellers of that asset at a given point in time, which means that asset has a higher or lower degree of freedom to move.

<sup>8</sup> This absorption effect was noticeably absent among the securities analysts I interviewed. Because their work primarily involves researching the recent past—i.e. companies' business performance—their tasks are less “live” and time-sensitive, and therefore require a less absorbing style of attention. That said, analysts' jobs can be performed the same way outside of market hours as during market hours. Consequently, they typically stayed a few hours longer at the office than traders. Clock time is thus less salient to their jobs, compared to traders.

<sup>9</sup> I occasionally noticed this during the workday as well. When the markets were less active, for example, traders would pick up a small toy football and toss it around the trading floor. When the markets were more active, requiring extended engagement with the screens, traders would often, most likely unconsciously, begin to fidget their legs and hands more, allowing them to remain engaged with the screen, even though their bodies clearly wanted to get up and move.

### 3 The Flexibilization of Time-Space

Alvaro and I follow Interstate 40 east as it carves a wedge-shaped channel through the Smokey Mountains. He has just spent the last five hundred miles of our trip telling me how stressful long haul truck driving can be. Tight deadlines, an erratic sleep pattern, short-tempered shippers, traffic, weather—his work involves navigating myriad contingencies in order to do one thing: be on time. After several hours of talking about stress, I ask, “what brings you back to the job?” “I like the rush,” he replies. “Like when you’ve been driving all night, and pushing and pushing, and you get there, and your body and your hands are shaking, and your vision is just like....” He can’t find the words to describe his feelings, so he gestures forward with both hands to make the image of a narrowing passage: “I love that feeling.” Like many truck drivers I met, Alvaro has a unique knowledge of the limits of his body. Having worked in the trucking industry off and on for nearly a decade, the temporal order of the contemporary logistics system has tested the limits of his attention and alertness many times, giving him frequent glimpses of the fragile balance between fatigue, speed, and efficiency that fuels the modern day production economy.

Though it may not be obvious at first glance, truck drivers have a lot in common with financial professionals. Both fill a core function of contemporary capitalism by facilitating the exchange of economic objects among those who have them and those who want them. In the case of financial professionals, as we have seen, that exchange applies to the electronic representations-of-representations of production markets that make up the financial economy. In the case of truck drivers, that exchange applies to the concrete physical objects that make up the “real” production economy. Thus, trucking and finance are linked. The fluidity of physical

objects that the trucking industry creates, sustains the very same businesses that finance their futures using the services provided by financial professionals. Through many layers of disembedding and abstraction, truck drivers and financial professionals rely on each other to exist.

Like financial professionals, truck drivers also work in an economic context that is radically changing, primarily because of the increased connectivity of the world's economies. Rather than financialization, however, the trucking industry exemplifies a set of changes to production markets called "flexibilization." Like financialization, the epoch of flexibilization means many things. In its most common usage, it refers to the rise of new managerial practices that aim to create fluid and pliable employment relations, such as employers' increased capacity to easily change wages (typically lower them) and hire and fire with greater frequency (Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000; Kalleberg 2009). Another facet of flexibilization, which I will focus on in this chapter, is the rise of a new form of competition between firms in production markets based on "the ability to use speed as a source of competitive advantage" (Harvey 1991; Pache 2007; Stalk and Hout 1990). Given the increasingly global scope of the chains that connect manufacturers and retailers—for example, a German manufacturer develops a new product in Germany, has it manufactured in China, and distributes it to every Wal-Mart in the United States—the most nimble firm is usually the winning firm, because it has reduced the costs of exchange across vast expanses of time-space to near zero. For firms in the contemporary production market, just as much if not more importance is placed on how products move as is placed on the products themselves. The trucking industry, being one of the primary ways

products are moved in the United States, occupies an important position in this epoch of competition over speed. It is, therefore, an ideal site in which to examine these transformations.

While I will discuss flexibilization in this specific economic sense, as with financialization, I would like to push the meaning of flexibilization to include more mundane, micro-level, and cultural phenomena that may or may not apply specifically to the processes referred to above. As I discuss more below, the epoch of flexibilization in this more general sense refers to the repertoires, strategies, and skills that workers must cultivate in order for the human mind and body to become “entrained” with the new timescapes created by the flexibilized workplace.

In this chapter, I examine the epoch of flexibilization by looking at the temporal ecologies of American solo long haul drivers. Often referred to as Over-The-Road drivers, they are primarily responsible for moving heavy, large volume freight (upwards of 80 tons in a 53 foot trailer) over long distances, often driving for weeks or even months before returning home. Because they work alone, they cannot keep their trucks constantly moving, as with teams of drivers, so they must stop between “shifts” of driving to sleep—typically at one of the thousands of truck stops and rest areas that dot the American Interstate system. Solo drivers, therefore, are a particularly good case for thinking about the epoch of flexibilization, because they are confronted by the imperatives of speed and fluidity that characterize the contemporary production economy without a great deal of outside support. Other than their dispatch operator, who helps them book freight and gives advice on how to run, they have only their bodies and wits to rely on. The solo nature of the job thus distills many of the phenomena of interest in flexibilization into a single human body.

## **Flexible Production**

“We are now in a new reality,” notes the labor economist Gilles Paché (2007:315), “an industrial organization where factories are no longer at the heart of the value creation system, but have been replaced by firms able to control the diversity, volumes, and qualities of consumer products.” As speed has become a key lever of competitive advantage in production markets, those who organize the temporalities of objects as they flow across the globe have gained more influence. Not those who produce products, but those who control their movement, control the contemporary production economy. Competition over the temporalities of products manifests at every level of activity, from eliminating idle time in production processes, to reducing the lag time between the creation of an innovative product and its launch on the market, to the distribution of products at the precise time-space coordinate that meets consumer demand. Firms have developed a variety of so called “time compression” strategies to gain control over temporalities at each level, such as “Just-in-Time” (JIT) warehousing systems and “Supply Chain Management” (SCM) (Harvey 1991; Stalk and Hout 1990).

Thus, the most remarkable outcome of the new regime of flexible production is the way it is reconfiguring the classically modern temporal order of the factory system (Harvey 1991), which has long dominated production markets and, as discussed in Chapter 1, is one of the major institutional carriers of the clock time culture of busyness. Some observers have gone so far as to claim that, “Speed, flexibility, and incessancy of market activity have replaced the scheduled rhythm of the factory floor.” (Ciscel and Smith 2005:429). While I would caution the notion that one temporality has wholly replaced the other, there are clear differences and points of tension

between the temporality of the factory system and that of flexible production (Ciscel and Smith 2005; Harvey 1991; Pache 2007). The most visible tension concerns how daily schedules are organized. Where the factory system aimed to ratchet productivity using the time disciplines of standardization, coordination, regularity, and density (Glennie and Thrift 1996), these practices can actually be counterproductive to the aims of flexible production, which include, most notably, the need to continually adjust workers' movements according to sudden shifts in the market. Rather than a routinized and predictable worker, then, flexible production markets are actually better served by workers who make themselves available for erratic shifts in labor demand, which may happen at any time of day (Kalleberg et al. 2000; Presser 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, the trucking industry, being one of the major modes of distribution in the United States, is a linchpin in this new temporal regime. Since the late 1970s, the industry has been under increasing pressure from retailers, especially large firms like Wal-Mart and Amazon that could not exist without a flexible logistics system, to reduce costs and increase speed and efficiency. What is required of the trucking industry to meet these demands is precision and liquidity. Freight needs to get to its destination, not necessarily as fast as possible (though that is typically the default status), but with precision timing—i.e. neither later nor earlier than the customer needs it. Creating this kind of precision requires reducing the number of friction points that might delay freight toward its destination to near zero (e.g. liquidity).

The industry has tackled this immense challenge both “from above,” at the level of policy, and “from below,” at the level of daily scheduling. In terms of policy, in the early 1980s, guided by the neo-liberal theory that increased competition will increase the speed and lower the costs of distribution, the industry pushed through U.S. Congress a series of deregulation



measures that dramatically increased the number of motor carrier firms (and thus competition over freight) in the United States. These measures appear to have achieved many of their stated goals. The price of shipping freight has dropped, as more motor carrier firms compete to get those products to their destination with ever-greater precision of timing. For drivers, however, deregulation has meant that the overall volume of freight has increased, but real wages have fallen considerably, especially with the declining influence of the Teamsters Union (AASHTO 2007; Monaco and Habermalz 2011). Thus, though drivers are making less (in absolute terms) than their pre-deregulation counterparts, their jobs have arguably become more important to the vitality of an economy that is increasingly run on a just-in-time basis.

Because drivers form the foundation upon which precision and liquidity are built into the logistics system, “from below” the industry has attempted to incentivize drivers to carry freight with the desired temporality. The main way this is done is through a “pay-by-the-mile” system. Drivers are paid either a certain number of dollars and cents per mile driven or a percentage of the freight bill upon delivery. Either way, only a moving truck “pays the bills.” The commodification of distance encourages drivers to move freight quickly from origin to destination, rather than “put in hours” on the job, regardless of how far they have driven. Because of this incentive system, then, time is money for truck drivers only insofar as it relates to space. In fact, it is probably more accurate to say that, for them, space is money.

If left unchecked, however, pay-by-the-mile also encourages drivers to drive more miles in a day than their bodies can safely handle. Thus, even though their livelihoods are geared more to space, and even though the industry overall has been deregulated, drivers are seen to need some set of regulations on their time. If the industry is to be both productive *and safe*, drivers

cannot work “on their own time.” Hence, since the early 1990s, the industry has greatly expanded the Hours of Service Regulations (HOS), which dictate how many hours drivers may work and sleep. Drivers are held accountable for these rules by keeping logbooks. Logbook violations are met with hefty fines.

The HOS regulations have been around since the 1930s, but have seen a number of dramatic revisions and expansions since the early 1990s, the most recent changes occurring during my fieldwork between 2010 and 2012. Today, these rules are drafted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). The FMCSA has been one of leading institutions pursuing scientific research on the relationship between sleep duration, work duration, and fatigue. They have encouraged and often commissioned dozens of independent survey and laboratory studies, which attempt to measure the exact duration of “on-task” alertness after which a driver’s performance begins to degrade and the likelihood of a fatigue-related accident increases. Their findings have been very clear: “Performance begins to degrade after the 8<sup>th</sup> hour of [driving] and increases geometrically during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> hours” (FMCSA 2003:22471). Recognizing that drivers rarely spend an entire shift driving—they often stop to deliver or load freight, get fuel, take breaks, and perform other non-driving related work tasks—other studies have attempted to determine the optimal duration of a shift. Again, the findings here are very clear. “After 14 hours from the start of the work period, it is time to stop driving, as the risk of fatigue-affected incidents is increasing rapidly” (FMCSA 2003:22473). Finally, understanding that “human beings are subject to a circadian, biological clock of about 24 hours, which controls natural wake/sleep cycles,” the FMCSA has pioneered studies on sleep and circadian rhythms. These studies are unequivocal that “humans require about eight hours of

restorative sleep daily” (FMCSA 2003:22460). Guided by these quantitative data, the FMCSA has designed a core set of rules that regulate how long drivers may be on-duty, how long they may drive within that shift, how long they must rest before starting another shift, and how long they must sleep. These rules are known as the “14-hour rule,” “11-hour rule,” “10-hour restart,” and “sleeper berth provision” (FMCSA 2003).

*14-Hour Rule.* Also known as the “14-hour clock,” this rule stipulates that drivers can work a maximum of 14 continuous hours before they must go off-duty, thus creating the functional equivalent of a shift-work system. Drivers punch in for a “shift” of driving when they start their vehicles and must shut down their vehicles, or punch out, after 14 hours. Importantly, the 14-hour clock is a continuous countdown timer. It counts down the minutes that have passed since punching in even when the truck is stopped, even if unforeseen events occur, such as traffic jams, bad weather, mechanical failure, or delays at shippers.

*11-Hour Rule and 10-Hour Restart.* Within the time “window” created by the 14-hour rule, drivers may drive a maximum of 11 hours, at which point they must take a minimum 10-hour break. After completing this “restart,” drivers regain, as they call it, “a fresh clock,” meaning they may work another 14-hour shift and drive another 11 hours. Unlike the 14-hour clock, the 11-hour clock is a “task oriented” timer—it counts down the minutes when the truck is moving and stops when the truck is stopped.

*Sleeper Berth Provision.* Within each shift, drivers must log a minimum of 8 hours “in the sleeper berth”—the rear section of the truck equipped with a bed. Drivers may take these hours whenever they wish, but they must take them consecutively. They may not break that time

into smaller periods of sleep. Most drivers plan to take their sleeper berth time during their 10-hour break so as not to cut into their revenue-producing hours during their 14-hour shift.

To summarize, even though the industry, as a commercial entity, has been deregulated, drivers have actually seen a dramatic expansion of regulations over their daily lives. And, even though drivers are paid by the mile, they are regulated by the hour. Under the current rules, a driver's day should ideally consist of 14 hours on duty and 10 hours off duty—a structure that is meant to mirror the 24-hour circadian rhythm of the human body. On-duty time can consist of a maximum of 11 hours of paid driving and 3 hours of non-driving (non-paid) work. Off-duty time should consist of a minimum 8 continuous hours of sleep, plus 2 hours to eat, shower, do laundry, and get refreshed for the next shift. This is the ideal scenario. During my observations, however, I rarely saw a driver use all 11 hours of available driving time (his revenue-producing hours) because of the numerous delays that can occur while driving long distances. Thus, drivers frequently work many hours within a given shift that are functionally unpaid.

### **The Problem of Inflexibility**

Given the dramatic changes to the production economy discussed above, what is most startling about the truck driving industry is that it continues to rely on a highly traditional—ancient, in fact—system of clock time disciplines to organize its main workforce. As Benedictine monks, Protestant worldly ascetics, Renaissance educators, up through modern Taylorist factory owners have all done, the trucking industry too manages workers using a schedule of clock hours, which aims to produce standardization, coordination, regularity and density. Much like a factory work schedule, the HOS regulations provide a standardized, clock-based temporal

framework that seeks to achieve a routine of shifts. Routinization, in theory, gives drivers' movements a degree of predictability that facilitates surveillance and coordination.

But truck drivers do not work in a factory. As drivers consistently emphasized, their jobs are not easily understood in the language of clock time. "My time isn't so much time as it is miles," one driver told me. "I don't look at time as hours." Pointing forward toward his destination, he continued, "We're 22 miles away. At this speed, that's 20 minutes. So, our ETA is 4:15. Hours aren't just hours. It's distance and the HOS, and speed—that's how we experience time." As I discuss more below, in addition to the hours on the clock, drivers must be attentive to any number of rhythmic patterns that figure into a particular driving scenario and impinge on their speed and efficiency. These rhythms include the speed of shippers and receivers to load and unload freight, fluctuations in traffic, the availability of safe parking at truck stops and rest areas, the effect of terrain and weather on fuel consumption, and the rhythms of the body. From the drivers' perspective, truck driving is thus better understood in terms of the rhythms of "freight time" than in terms of shifts of clock hours.

A frequent complaint about the HOS regulations, then, is that they are too rigid and inflexible. One driver noted how other types of professionals who, for example, work in an office are not required to fit within such a rigid temporal framework. They can extend their workday to meet whatever task or project needs to be completed. "Take for instance—you're in your office and you need fifteen or twenty extra minutes to finish your day. You call your wife and say, 'I'm going to be fifteen minutes late.' [...] That's our workday [too]. You just say, 'Thirty minutes is what I need to get done.' But yet it comes down on us monetarily." This driver notes that, just like knowledge work, truck driving is task-oriented. Success in the job is marked not by

completing a shift but by completing a run. Yet, unlike knowledge professionals, he points out, truck drivers are not given the same degree of temporal flexibility. If a driver finds that he needs, say, fourteen-and-a-half hours to make it to his destination, he risks a fine (as high as \$10,000). As one driver put it, “We have so many people [who] want to squash that thumb down—like big brother or daddy wanting to squash that thumb down on his son in order to make him act straight.” He resents being infantilized in this way. “If you take the pressure off, and let us, the professionals do what’s right and do what’s safe, we’re going to do it.”

Complaints about inflexibility apply particularly to the 14-hour rule. Though designed to provide a rigid limit to the number of hours drivers are awake and working, and thus limit fatigue, drivers reported that the 14-hour rule actually produces new work scenarios that they find fatiguing. I will describe two of the most commonly discussed scenarios.

*You Have to Stop When you Want to Go:* Drivers experience the 14-hour clock, which cannot be stopped, and the 11-hour clock, which marks a driver’s “productive time,” as pitted against each other. Especially when one is delayed by traffic, weather, or problems at a shipper, the 14-hour clock can begin to “cut in” to one’s productive time (the 11 hours allotted to make money by driving), thus creating a fatiguing feeling of urgency. For example, Rick, a driver and owner of a small fleet in Kentucky, says, that he “appreciates the [10-hour] rest period” that is built into the HOS rules, but finds that it often falls at the wrong time in the rhythms of delivering freight. “Sometimes factories are open eight to five. Sometimes you haul to grocery stores and warehouses that are [only] open at night.” In these common situations, Rick reports, he may drive 3 hours to deliver freight during the middle of the night but not be able to pick up his next load until the next evening. As a result, he “wastes” the remaining 8 hours of his 11-hour

clock waiting to pick up his next load. While waiting, his shift has come to an end even though he has only driven 3 hours that day. “I have to wait an extra 10 hours to reset [e.g. take the required 10-hour rest break that will give him a “fresh” driving clock] when I’ve used only maybe a couple of hours [of the 11-hour clock]...on a night time delivery.”

This time spent waiting is emotionally taxing, Rick notes, because he feels like he is “losing” productive time. Even though he has technically worked a 14-hour shift, only 3 of these hours have made money. “I’m waiting and I’m getting tired waiting. [...] Waiting can make you more tired than working. And that’s what more flexibility [of the 14-hour rule] would allow you to do better.” Like most drivers who spoke about the 14-hour rule, Rick suggests that one should be able to stop the 14-hour clock during forced down times in order “protect” or “preserve” revenue-producing hours. As another driver put it, “I get paid by the mile. My sit time kills me. It kills my paycheck. So when my 14-hour clock is up and I’ve only driven for five hours, that inhibits my ability to earn a living for my family.”

*You Have to Go When You Want to Stop:* Another common—and perhaps more concerning—complaint was that the HOS rules force drivers to drive when they want to stop. Drivers discussed many reasons to stop driving during a typical shift, including tiredness, traffic, weather, and the availability of safe parking. Many drivers noted that because the 14-hour clock is inflexible—it cannot be stopped when one encounters problems related to these factors—they feel pushed to keep driving until their 11-hour clock has been used, even if it would be safer and more efficient to stop. For example, Hank, a former driver and current vice president of a mid-sized Illinois trucking firm, says:

I’ve been driving down the highway in the truck—and I know my drivers do the same thing—they have hours on the 11-hour to reach they’re destination. They’re currently

within their 14 hours to reach a destination, but they get fatigued. They have a choice to keep driving fatigued or stop and take a two or three hour nap and get up. But then, if they do that two or three hour nap, they're out of their 14 hours.

Drivers often reported that sleepiness can arise at unexpected times and that a simple “cat nap” would be sufficient to allow it to pass. However, because the 14-hour clock continues to tick down no matter the circumstances, a few hours of unplanned sleep can work against a driver's productivity. As he sleeps, his 14-hour clock continues to tick down; the time “window” in which he can drive and make money gets smaller and smaller.

Other sources of fatigue, such as rush-hour traffic, are more predictable. The inflexibility of the 14-hour rule is also a problem in these situations, drivers commented. “When we come into a large city,” notes one driver, “we [often] hit it at the height of rush hour. We can avoid it by taking time off and getting much needed rest and continuing on afterwards.” Unfortunately, this driver reports, the 14-hour clock encourages drivers to push through rush-hour traffic in order to log as many miles as possible in their available on-duty period. “You know when the hours—the peak hours of congestion in the major cities are going to happen,” notes another driver. It would be much better, he advises, “if you can stop your clock for that one or two hours while all this traffic goes away, and then you can leisurely drive in, do your loads and get out of Dodge.”

In short, for drivers, more flexibility in the HOS rules represents greater control not over “how many” hours they may drive and sleep, but over “which hours” and “what kind” of temporality—fast or slow, languid or rushed, staccato or legato—they can create within these rules. Having greater control over the placement and quality (rather than duration) of driving and sleeping within a given shift would enable them to better entrain their workflow with the flow of



traffic, weather, their bodies, the schedules of shippers and receivers, and the myriad other contingent processes that make up the complex world of truck driving.

### **Entrainment and Rhythm Expertise**

Confronted by an inflexible temporal framework of shifts on one side and, on the other side, by a radically flexible logistics system that is built on an imperative of flexibility, drivers' essential task is what I will call "entrainment." I am using the word entrainment in a specific sense. It was originally coined to describe the principle in physics where two pendulums swinging in different phases side-by-side will, incrementally over time, begin to swing in phase together. The entrainment of two different rhythmic systems—clock time and freight time—is the most important task that truck drivers must execute.

Above all, entrainment allows drivers to create precision and liquidity where none exists. Rather than shift workers, then, I will describe truck drivers as "rhythm experts." Their expertise lies in a specialized ability to link the mechanical beat of clock time, which governs both the HOS regulations and the appointment times of shippers and receivers, to the complex patchwork of rhythms that affect the speed of freight as it travels through the flexible logistics system. More often than not, this task falls upon the driver's body. Drivers use their body rhythms—wake-sleep cycles, digestion cycles, shifts in adrenaline and cortisol, etc.—to convert clock time into freight time.

I witnessed many demonstrations of entrainment through rhythm expertise while riding alongside drivers, but one day in particular stands out. One afternoon in October 2010, Alvaro and I arrive at a poultry plant in northwest Arkansas to pick up a load of frozen chicken due in

Crawford, Virginia, by Sunday afternoon. We find a space to park in the freight yard. Rows of loading docks puncture square holes in the side of a featureless building. A chain-link fence topped with barbed wire cordons off acres of cement with truck parking. Alvaro and I get out and walk across the yard toward the shipping office, dodging clumps of chicken feathers as they float across the ground in the breeze. We enter to find the clerk, who sits behind a glass window, visibly frazzled. It is Friday, and he is probably anxious for his shift to end so he can get on to his weekend. Alvaro politely asks if his load is ready, which has been scheduled for pick up between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. (it is now 2:00 p.m.). The clerk rudely barks, "I've got seven things I gotta do right now before I even get to you. Wait in your truck and I'll let you know when it's ready." Alvaro takes his paperwork and politely asks, "any idea how close the load is to being rea--" The clerk cuts Alvaro off before he can finish, "I'll let you know. Just keep your CB on." Alvaro says nothing and backs out of the office. "I won't be talking to him anymore today," he says to me. He explains, "when I was younger, I used to get pissed off about that kind of thing. But now, I just stay cool. What's the point of getting my adrenaline up for that guy? If he gets mad at me, he might screw me by putting me at the back of the list [to get loaded]." We get back in the truck and sit with the cab facing the loading dock door, which has two lights. A flashing red light means the load is not ready. A green light means it is ready. Right now, the red light is flashing.

4:45 p.m. Alvaro and I have been passing the time in pleasant conversation. He makes a few phone calls to his wife in Mississippi just to check in. The appointment window is nearly closed, but there are no signs of the load being ready. I ask Alvaro if we should check with the shipping clerk again. "Nah. What's the point? He'll just get pissed again. They'll call us when

it's ready." I ask him how he is able to avoid boredom while he waits for a load. "I don't get stressed about waiting," he says. "I got everything I need in here—satellite TV, internet, bed. I guess you'd say I'm a patient person." We continue to chat, occasionally checking to see if the red light has turned green.

7:00 p.m. We are now far past our scheduled pick-up window. If the load is not ready soon, Alvaro's 14-hour clock will run out, and he will have to take a 10-hour break, even though he has only done a few hours of driving today. That means he will have spent the majority of his shift waiting here without pay. Moreover, by being forced to take a long break, he will then have trouble making his appointment time on Sunday. Since we first parked at 2:00 p.m., Alvaro has been logged as "in the sleeper." This is a strategy that drivers frequently use when they encounter an unexpected wait. By logging himself as in the sleeper, he is, as drivers call it, "protecting my clock." In this case, if Alvaro ends up waiting so long that his 14-hour shift runs out, by being logged as in the sleeper that whole time, he will at least have gotten a jump start on fulfilling his requisite 10-hour break and 8 consecutive hours of sleeper berth time. Thus, he will be that much closer to being able to start another shift.

However, while Alvaro's logbook says he has been sleeping, he has actually been awake. Sleeping during this moment is risky. First, because there is no indication of when this load will be ready and because he is incommunicado with the shipping clerk, there is a chance that by going to sleep now Alvaro will miss the call on his CB that his load is ready. If that happens, the clerk will likely not come out of his office to follow up, but will just let Alvaro sit there and waste what are becoming precious minutes of driving time. Second, Alvaro has sleep apnea, which has been brought on by a decade of sedentary work that has left him dangerously

overweight. He says, “I should probably try to get some sleep right now, but because of my sleep apnea I have to be careful.” His doctor has prescribed the use of a special mask, called a CPAP, which he wears over his nose and mouth to keep his airway open and promote deep sleep. He says that if he goes to sleep with the CPAP on, he will sleep so deeply that it will be difficult to wake up again if the shipper calls after, say, an hour. He will have to wake up from a deep sleep and then drive in a more groggy state than if he had just stayed awake. Given the unique spatio-temporal constraints of this moment, then, deep sleep is inefficient and potentially dangerous.

8:33 p.m. We get a call from Brian, Alvaro’s dispatcher, who wants to check on the load. Alvaro complains that he is starting to get tired and that he needs to get going soon if the load is going to be on time. Brian suggests, “well maybe you should try getting some sleep now so you can get rolling again right away when the load is ready.” Alvaro gives a long pause and responds, slightly annoyed, “Brian, you know I don’t work that way, man. When I go to sleep, I go to *sleep!*” Brian says, “I know, I know. You run it however you see fit.” They hang up. Alvaro and I continue to wait, now staring at the blinking red light praying that it will turn green soon.

9:30 p.m. Alvaro finally crawls into the sleeper berth against his best wishes. He looks back at me in the passenger seat and says, “I gotta try to get some sleep, man. I could be screwing myself right now, but it’s either sleep now and drive groggy or not sleep at all and drive tired.” Since he does not know if he will be leaving sooner or later, he has to at least attempt to sleep in order to create a somewhat functional body state. He decides to take a nap without the CPAP so that he does not sleep too deeply. He settles in and quickly falls into a

shallow sleep that is characteristic of sleep apnea. He begins to snore loudly. The snoring is interrupted periodically by a shallow breath and then silence. No breathing. Then a kind of loud snort as his body tells itself to keep breathing. This wakes him slightly. He shifts positions. Repeat.

11:30 p.m. Green light! I cannot believe my eyes. A green glow fills the interior of the truck, replacing the red pulses that have been marking the slow passage of time since this afternoon. I can feel a tension in my chest lighten that I had not noticed until just now. I wake Alvaro and tell him the load is ready. He sits up and looks at me through slit eyes. He groans and, without speaking, slides into the driver's seat and starts the engine. He looks very groggy but manages to expertly back the truck to the now-loaded trailer. After some paperwork, we finally pull out just after midnight. We have just waited for 10 hours.

On the way to the interstate, Alvaro says, "we had better try to at least get some miles in today, otherwise we'll be late." Although Alvaro has had just 2 hours of real sleep, his logbook reads "in the sleeper" since 2 p.m., which means he has "slept" at least 8 hours and has taken a 10-hour "break." According to the logbook, then, he is now eligible to start another shift. "We'll just see how far we get before I feel like we need to stop," Alvaro says. "That sleep did not make me feel good, man. I am tired."

1:50 a.m. After nearly 2 hours of driving, Alvaro says he thinks he should probably shut down for the night, even though he has 12 hours left on his 14-hour clock. He would like to get more miles in, but he is feeling too tired. I am feeling exhausted too, barely able to keep my eyes open over the last hour. We pull into a tiny truck stop somewhere along Interstate 40. It quickly

becomes clear that every space is occupied. Much to my disbelief, Alvaro pulls back onto the interstate to see if we can find another truck stop with available parking.

3:32 a.m. Over the last hour-and-a-half, we have stopped at three more truck stops and one rest area. They have all been completely full. We pull into another truck stop—a fifth attempt at parking tonight. Yet again, it is full. Alvaro tries to remain optimistic. He turns to me with a wry smile and says, “looks like we’re going to Little Rock, man!” The chances are slim that there will be any parking between here and Little Rock (another 120 miles away). So, Alvaro decides to push on to a bigger city where there will be more parking. Plus, he informs me, by that time spots will begin to open up as other drivers start their shifts.

Alvaro pulls back onto the highway. My head is bobbing up and down as we drive. I can barely keep my eyes open for more than a few minutes at a time. Alvaro keeps complaining that his eyes are burning. “That’s how I know when I’m at my limit. But, we don’t really have a choice [to stop] at this point.” I look over at Alvaro periodically. I never see him doze off, but he eventually positions himself so that his right elbow is resting on the steering wheel, allowing him to prop his head up with his right hand and steer with his left hand. I assume this keeps his head from bobbing up and down. He rolls down the window and lets the cold autumn air stream into the cab. The chill is bracing and forces our eyelids open. Every now and then the truck veers slightly, but Alvaro keeps it going remarkably straight. At some point (I do not record the time in my field notes) Alvaro pulls into a gas station. He gets out and starts walking around the truck. He hops back in after a few minutes and says, “now I’m just working with my body. Sometimes you just gotta get out, take a walk around, breathe some fresh air. You gotta get the blood pumping again.” We drive on.

5:08 a.m. Dawn approaches. We finally pull into a small truck stop on the outskirts of Little Rock. Alvaro does a lap around the lot, and at first, I get the sinking feeling that we are again out of luck. But then we see one spot in the corner of the lot. It is a tiny spot, and Alvaro pauses in front of it. “I don’t know if I can do this right now, man,” he says. He eases the truck into position and starts to back in slowly just inches from the two trucks on either side of us. The angle is a little off, so he pulls out and repositions himself for a second attempt. Success! Despite having just driven 5 hours in the middle of the night on 2 hours of sleep, Alvaro has managed to safely maneuver his 53-foot trailer into the tiniest of spaces without a scratch. He shuts off the engine, crawls into the sleeper berth, and throws on his CPAP. I follow closely behind, climbing into the top bunk. We fall asleep in seconds knowing that, despite the risky drive tonight, we are now well positioned to get this load of frozen chicken to Virginia right on time.

As Alvaro clearly demonstrated to me, through the conduit of the body, drivers turn late loads into on time loads. What I am calling entrainment, then, involves the transmutation of one set of rhythmic patterns into another set of rhythmic patterns using the vigilant body as a medium.<sup>2</sup> As Alvaro describes it, “You have to get your body into the rhythm. You have to get into that rhythm of riding. The rhythm of driving and changing.” By carefully timing his sleep, by skillfully propping his head up while driving, by knowing when to open the window or step out of the truck to “get his blood pumping,” Alvaro demonstrated rhythm expertise—a professional knowledge of his body’s capacity for attention, fatigue, and alertness. This knowledge allows him to convert the illiquidity and imprecision created by friction in the logistics system—in this case, the rigidity of the HOS, an inefficient shipper, and a national truck parking scarcity problem—into liquidity and precision.

## The Stimulus Shield

Because rhythmic transmutation through entrainment is so important to their jobs, drivers surround themselves with both high- and low-tech ways to manipulate their body rhythms.

Unlike the technologies that surround financial professionals, which are designed primarily to enhance individual working memory by increasing the number and speed of stimuli that an individual can receive, drivers' technologies are designed to enhance the body by creating what Wolfgang Schivelbush (1979), following Sigmund Freud (1922), has called a "stimulus shield."

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud attempts to describe how human consciousness protects itself in environments of heightened (and potentially traumatizing) stimulation, such as a war zone. He draws a picture of consciousness using photographic symbolism. Consciousness is "an undifferentiated vesicle of sensitive substance...its surface exposed as it is to the outer world...which serves as an organ for receiving stimuli" (Freud 1922:29). He continues:

This morsel of living substance floats about in an outer world, which is charged with the most potent energies, and it would be destroyed by the operation of the stimuli proceeding from this world if it were not furnished with a protection against stimulation (*Reizschutz*). It acquires this through its outmost layer...becoming in a measure inorganic, and this now operates as a special integument or membrane that keeps off the stimuli, i.e. makes it impossible for the energies of the outer world to act with more than a fragment of their intensity on the layers immediately below which have preserved their vitality. These are now able under cover of the protecting layer to devote themselves to the reception of those stimulus masses that have been let through. But the outer layer has by its own death secured all the deeper layers from a like fate—at least so long as no stimuli present themselves of such a strength as to break through the protective barrier. (Freud 1922:30–31)

Freud is describing consciousness in the moments leading up to traumatization here—an organism, suspended in an environment of intense, chaotic stimuli, that must learn how to protect its "inner layers" by creating a *Reizschutz* (literally "stimulus protection"). In the process, as



Freud (1922:29) describes elsewhere, “a rind would be formed which would finally have been so burned through by the effects of stimulation that it presents the most favorable conditions for reception of stimuli and is incapable of any further modification.” Working from Freud’s metaphor of an “encrusted vesicle,” we can think of a stimulus shield as system of filters that protects the body and psyche from exposure to both chronic and sudden jarring stimuli. Rather than allow more stimulus in, it allows in only the right amount and kind of stimulus necessarily to protect a person’s sensorium from fatigue, while still allowing them to experience their environment.

Let us examine, then, a typical driver’s *Reizschutz*. The most obvious of these shields is the cab of the truck itself, which can include a variety of high-tech tools, depending on the sophistication of the motor carrier firm one is working for and/or the degree to which the driver has invested his own money in upgrades. For example, drivers’ seats feature an air-cushioning system and a forward-backward rocking mechanism designed to mitigate the characteristic up-down, forward-backward rocking of a tractor-trailer combination. This system is fully adjustable, allowing drivers to feel the truck on the road with greater or lesser sharpness. Many newer trucks are equipped with a lane departure warning system. This gadget detects the left-right movement of the truck. Before the truck can begin to cross the side or centerline of the road, speakers located at head level project a loud rumbling sound, meant to mimic the sound of the rumble strip carved into the side of American interstates. Should a driver become distracted or nod off and begin to depart his lane, this system is meant to jolt him to attention. Newer trucks are also often equipped with a Collision Mitigation System, which projects a radar signal forward of the truck to detect the speed of vehicles directly in front. Like submarine radar, this system gives a

sharp, repetitive “ping” that increases or decreases in frequency relative to the speed of an oncoming object—in this case, a slower vehicle heading in the same direction as the driver. Not only does this allow drivers to detect the onset of a forward collision before it happens, but also the system provides a digital readout featuring the distance and speed of the closest forward vehicle, giving the driver precise information about the space-time ahead of the cab. When on cruise control, the system adjusts the speed of the truck to maintain a safe following distance. Together, these technologies create, to paraphrase Jack Katz (1999:33), a humanized truck or, alternatively, an automobilized person. They allow the truck to become an extension of the body, connecting the driver to the rhythms of the driving environment, while shielding the body from direct exposure.

A well functioning *Reizschutz* is only partly effective in facilitating drivers’ efforts to transmute rhythms. Just as important as mitigating chronic and jarring stimuli, is producing enough stimulus in the work environment to avoid boredom and remain awake, alert, and focused. The techniques drivers use to produce this ideal level of stimulus are as varied as drivers’ personalities, but I observed several common techniques. The most notorious of these are legal and illegal stimulant substances. While the truck driving population is well known for illegal stimulant drug use, after the institution of mandatory randomized drug testing in the 1980s, use has declined (Couper et al. 2002). Aside from illegal stimulants, though, drivers have ready access at truck stops to a variety of legal stimulants, such as coffee, caffeine pills, and specialty caffeine drinks, like *Monster* and *5-hour Energy*.

While many drivers I talked to reported occasional use of legal stimulants, they always noted that these substances only provide a short-term fix. If used improperly, they can be more

dangerous than helpful because, as one driver put it, “Those things come down quick, and when they come down, you come down with them.” Paul, a 55 year old driver who has worked in the industry off and on for nearly 30 years, discussed the best way he has found to use caffeine pills, something he has given up in his older age:

Now, in my very early years—I started drivin' when I was 26, 27, and I tried the NoDoze things [a brand of caffeine pill]. I found out if I was absolutely *tryin'* to stay awake, that what I needed to do was take that *before* I got tired, cuz it don't take long to find out that once you get tired, then the only thing's gonna help is sleep. Period.

Only if I *knew* I was gonna be up all night [...] I would just take a couple of NoDoz. Then I would never get that tired feelin'. But once that tired feelin' comes on ya, there's nothin' out there that's gonna help but some rest.”

As Paul noted later in the interview, the number one thing a driver should avoid when using stimulants is “to push their body into doin' something, rather than just layin' down and tryin' to get some sleep.” Randy, a 57-year-old driver with nearly 40 years of experience, shared Paul’s opinion, having made this mistake himself earlier in his career:

You have to know when enough is enough. A lot of guys don't.

*Yeah. That's when they get in trouble?*

Years ago, it used to be, okay—well, I never did it, but I know guys that would be popping pills [i.e. amphetamines] all day long. You can't do that no more. Now, you got guys that, I don't know, do one of those five-hour energy bottles. I don't do that 'cuz that's too much sugar, caffeine, so I walk and I get a cup of coffee, then I'm fine. But that's for me personally. Everybody else has their own little system that they do, but my rule of thumb is: if I'm fatigued, and no matter what I do, I can't change it, I'm done. Because too much can happen when you don't know what's going on. I've already had that happen to me, and I got away with it.

*Yeah?*

I was working for another company, and I was up all day because something was going on, and I didn't get sleep. I told my dispatcher, “I can't go.” “Well, you're gonna have to go. Just get there and tell 'em just to put you in the hotel.”<sup>3</sup> All right well, I had one

of those energy drinks—I fell asleep behind the wheel. Next thing I know, I was up against the guardrail.

Paul and Randy demonstrate an intimate knowledge of their capacity for alertness. Though they do not shy away from stimulants, they note that these substances must be precisely entrained with the rhythms of the body—in Paul’s words, prior to the onset of “that tired feelin.” Stimulants work but only if one has enough expertise to make them work.

More frequently, I observed stimulant practices that had nothing to do with ingesting substances. Many of these techniques were mundane, such as listening to the radio or getting out of the truck to stretch and breathe. Most interesting among these techniques was the way drivers use cell phones. Like financial professionals in the financial economy, cell phones have become an indispensable tool for drivers to maintain a state of constant availability and connection to the production economy. Where communication was once limited to CBs and truck stop pay phones, drivers today use cell phones to communicate with their dispatchers as well as shipping and receiving offices. However, they also use cell phones to stay awake. This is especially useful when driving at night. As many drivers told me, driving at night has the up side of lower traffic volume and less chance of surveillance from the DOT. The down side, however, is that fatigue is much closer at hand because the body reacts to the lack of sunlight with lowered energy.

Alvaro, for example, frequently drives at night. Over the years, he has developed friendships with several other Latino drivers from different companies. Calling themselves the “Spanish Club,” these drivers hold occasional conference calls during the night. “We talk and relax and keep ourselves awake,” Alvaro notes. When I asked him why talking on the phone makes it easier to drive when he is tired, he replied, “It motivates your brain. When you’re tired, you need something to get your blood pumping. What makes you tired is sitting here, driving. So

we argue a lot and get our blood boiling and that keeps you awake.” In the early evenings, I also observed Alvaro call his wife and extended family back home. On several occasions, Alvaro told me that his wife had placed the phone on the kitchen table so that he could listen as she interacts with the children, grandchildren, or anyone else who is around the house. As another driver put it, “I may call my wife [at night] or somethin' and kinda see if she's up. Cuz again that is another one of those things that'll just break that cycle of—I've been drivin' here for four, five, six hours and the brain is—I'm woke but seem like the brain's tryin' to go to sleep.”

The sum total of a well functioning stimulus shield and a system of stimulant practices is still not enough for drivers to accomplish rhythmic transmutation. The most important form of expertise for converting clock time into freight time, then, is sleep. As one driver said of creating an authentic feeling of freshness and alertness, “I’ll tell you one thing I’ve learned: coffee don’t work, energy drinks don’t work. Sleep is the only thing that works.” Riding with Kevin—27 years old and just a years’ experience behind the wheel—gave me a particularly good look at the skills necessary to sleep effectively within the ever-shifting timescape of the logistics system.

Being a relatively new driver, Kevin approached route planning with a greater degree of consciousness than older drivers I met, because he had not yet developed a stock of strategies for negotiating different load scenarios. One night, Kevin received new load information at around 7:30 from his dispatcher just as he was pulling out of the freight yard somewhere in New Jersey upon completing a previous delivery. “Looks like the next load will be 1,460 miles to Rolla, Missouri at \$1.20 per mile,” Kevin comments to me. “Pretty shitty, but not unexpected.”<sup>4</sup> I can see the excitement in Kevin’s eyes as he begins to plan. He has told me many times on our trip how much he likes truly long hauls like this one, which give the driver freedom to run the truck

as fast and continuously as it can go. He begins to work through an array of scenarios. “Let’s see. We could either run this in two really long and fast shifts—worse gas mileage but it will get us there quicker. Or, we could run it in three shorter and slower shifts.” Kevin says that he is tempted to do the first option, because, “I just really want to run fast right now. I just enjoy it more.” But, doing that would potentially get us to our destination too early, which would mean a longer wait, not to mention the extra cost of poor fuel economy. The load picks up in the afternoon tomorrow, which means there is no way to start the next shift of driving right now. “It looks like we need to sleep now and then start running a little after midnight,” Kevin says. “That would be [he checks the clock] about 4, 5 hours of sleep.” He pauses and contemplates that scenario. “I can do 600 miles [tomorrow] on 4.5 hours sleep. As long as I get a shower in there sometime to wake my ass up...”

After figuring out the locations of several truck stops along the way for fuel and sleep, we hop in our bunks around 8:20. Kevin pulls closed a blackout curtain between the front cab and sleeper berth area. This cuts off the waning sunlight of the late evening that is streaming through the front windows, creating a more ideal sleeping environment. A few minutes after we are settled in, I hear Kevin rustle around in the bunk beneath me, then get up and pull open the blackout curtain to hop into the front of the cab. “I should be sleeping right now,” he says to me. I can sympathize. This sleep feels like it is coming at the wrong time. I am feeling awake and ready to run, but Kevin’s nearly spent 14-hour clock will not get us to our next pickup location. He takes a second look at the load information, obviously still turning over in his mind how to properly run this load. After another half hour of double-checking his calculations, Kevin is satisfied that we should, indeed, sleep now and crawls back into the bunk around 9:15.

1:00 a.m. As I have learned over the course of our journey together, Kevin is, to put it mildly, a heavy sleeper. He typically sets eight separate alarms, knowing that he will often turn several of them off without consciously realizing it. Having had several instances of sleeping through all eight of his alarms, he recently purchased a special alarm called the “Screaming Meanie,” which is marketed to long-haul drivers. Much like a fire alarm, this device shrieks at precisely the right decibel level and alternating pitch to agitate one’s ears. It is so loud and so irritating that it simply cannot be ignored, especially given the fact that the alarm can only be turned off by simultaneously pressing three buttons, which requires the use of both hands. Kevin affectionately refers to this alarm as “the bitch.” On this occasion, Kevin runs through all eight of his normal alarms. Being a light sleeper, I hear him turn them off and then fall immediately back to sleep each time. As expected, only the dreaded “bitch” manages to wake him. But it still takes Kevin a full minute of deafening shrieks to be moved to turn off the alarm. Through now ringing ears, I hear Kevin mumble, “Fuck” in my direction. “Is it time to get up?” I mumble back. “It has been for the last half hour,” he replies. I am expecting him to get up now, but we remain in our bunks for another half hour contemplating the idea of work. We both succumb and fall back to sleep. It is just too early; too soon to work.

3:45 a.m. Kevin finally rises, this time on his own without an alarm, and makes his way to the front of the cab. I follow behind shortly. “The alarm went off and I was just like ‘No way,’” Kevin reports. “I’ll sleep a little more and then get up. I can’t run 600 miles today like this.” Like me, Kevin tells me he was not ready to sleep last night. He wanted to run, but didn’t have the log hours to do it smartly, given our afternoon pickup time today. With a yawn and through groggy eyes, he peers into the darkness and reluctantly starts the truck. We roll out.

5:00 a.m. The last hour has been difficult for me. I am hungry, having had to skip dinner last night, and dead tired. Like me, Kevin looks bad off. He does not appear to be falling asleep, but is periodically yawning. He stares ahead at the road with a zombie-like blankness. We drive along in silence, both of us too tired to talk.

5:30 a.m. In an uncharacteristic move, Kevin decides to stop quickly at a rest area to go to Starbucks. As he has told me before, he normally drinks only water and juice, but, as he tells me now, “This is an occasion when a little coffee could really do the trick.” Kevin gets the largest size latte on offer, as well as a muffin. I get a regular coffee and something resembling a bagel. Back out on the road, I start to feel a thousand times better. The caffeine kicks in. The “bagel” temporarily pushes back the hunger. Then, the sun peaks over the horizon and fills the cab with orange light. I can literally feel the sun fill my body with energy. I look over at Kevin. A mask of alertness has replaced his zombie-like stare. We get chattier. Things are better.

As Kevin demonstrates, in order to create a seamless bridge between his logbook hours and the flow of freight, drivers must become “vigilant” sleepers. Much like their predecessors, the Benedictine monks, drivers use the ancient technique of the alarm clock to spring to action when work requires it. Unlike Benedictine monks, however, this ancient technique is put into the service of a highly irregular and unpredictable rhythm that is characteristic of the new flexibilized economy. Drivers frequently use a phrase that would likely never have been needed to describe monastic life: “I sleep when I can.” Drivers must continually switch from a “night shift” to a “day shift” and back again, depending on the rhythms of the flow of freight. I heard drivers have long debates with themselves, their dispatchers, and occasionally with other drivers about whether or not they should sleep or drive at a particular moment.



When drivers become more experienced, they gain a more precise understanding of what works for their bodies, not just in terms of sleep duration—e.g. I can do X number of miles on X hours of sleep—but also in terms of the timing of sleep with the rhythms of the earth. Paul, for example, the most experienced driver I talked to, said, “One of the things that over the years that’s appealed to me about drivin’ at night is—actually, I’ll try to do this with an alarm clock: If I get up at 10, 11, 12 at night and start drivin’, then at 6, 7 in the morning when the sun’s startin’ to come up, it’s like I’ll feel a little source of energy that comes along with it.” By timing his drive so that the sun rises in the middle of his shift, Paul is able to “smooth out” the inevitable dip in energy that he might otherwise feel. “A lot of that [knowledge] is probably what makes us, or what should make us professionals. Knowin’ what it is we have to do to be responding properly,” Paul notes. Of course, having this kind of control over the timing of a particular shift changes from load to load, but, as Paul highlights, knowing when to implement this stock of techniques is precisely what differentiates rookie drivers from experienced drivers.

### **A Heavy Phantasmagoria**

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the central characteristics of the timescapes of global capitalism is their disembedded and abstract character, which produces new “phantasmagoric” experiences of place. Being the lynchpin in the flexibilized logistics system, truck drivers are certainly a fundamental part of these new timescapes. But, as we have seen, drivers engage with these timescapes through a more rigid temporal structure than knowledge professionals—the HOS. This rigid quality also extends to their experience of place. Drivers live in a concrete environment of real objects that are subject to all the frictions of the material world as they move

through space. Consequently, there is a kind of solidity and hardness to the timescapes of truck driving that lies in stark contrast to the financialized timescapes I saw.

The concreteness of truck driving was made most clear to me when drivers discussed crashing the truck. Dax, a 37-year-old rookie driver who would only give me his CB handle when I interviewed him, says that during the one year he has been driving, “there have been just so many crazy experiences. I’ve had near-death experiences and so many close calls, it’s hard to pick out just one.” When pressed further, Dax discussed a time when he was driving north on Interstate 95 from northern Virginia into Maryland near the notoriously dense traffic corridor between Washington, DC and Baltimore. “You know that area and how crazy it can get,” he comments. Dax was in the right lane of the four-lane road and a car had just sped up and passed him, then cut dangerously close in front of him as they crested a large hill. “We come up over the top of that hill and there’s just a wall of traffic. A dead stop.” Dax realized that he was going way too fast to stop without rear-ending the car that had just cut close in front of him, surely causing a massive pileup and loss of life. Fortunately, another truck driver in the far right lane saw what was about to happen. Reacting quickly, he slowed down just enough to create a gap for Dax to slide his truck into and find enough distance in front to stop safely. “I sort of locked eyes with this other driver and fortunately I saw what he was doing and was able to get over real quick.” Dax says that this experience “absolutely terrified me. If it wasn’t for that other driver looking out for me, I would have been in serious trouble.” He says that this experience highlighted how, in order to do this job, “you gotta remain calm and slow everything down. You gotta be able to slow everything down in your mind.” Later that same day, Dax began to feel extremely tired, even though he still had ample time left on his logs. Rather than push through it, he, “decided to

pull over anyway. I was so tired; I basically just fell right to sleep and started dreaming. In my dream I thought I was still driving and that I was falling asleep at the wheel. I had forgot that I had pulled over and was taking a nap.” The image of the truck beginning to careen off the side of the road in his dream startled him awake. Experiences like these have left Dax, as he puts it, “burned out.” He is ready to quit. “Some guys are built for trucking and some aren’t. I’m still trying to find my niche in life, even at 37, and trucking isn’t my niche. You need to like being busy and rushed, or you need to have it in your veins, and I’m just not like that.”

As Dax demonstrates, exchanging economic objects is not an achievement of the imagination for truck drivers, in which they must learn to see and feel abstract representations of the objects they exchange as though they are “really real.” The reality of economic exchange in truck driving is given in the aesthetics of the work environment itself. Consequently, as Dax’s account of his horrible day illustrates, when exchanges “go bad” for drivers, they do not need to conjure up the emotional consequences. Compare Dax’s account to Chuck, the bond trader, whom you will recall was haunted in his sleep by a trading “blowup”—i.e. losing 25 millions dollars. Though Chuck deeply felt the emotional consequences of his loss, the severity of this event was debatable, and thus his colleagues were able to “talk him down” to see this event as “not that big a deal.” The blowups that haunt Dax’s dreams, by contrast, cannot be debated. Serious mistakes with the truck cannot be imagined away. Help from colleagues can only take the form of the kind of quick, potentially life-saving reactions that Dax received from an anonymous fellow driver in the lane next to him. In short, though drivers form an integral part of the timescapes of contemporary global capitalism, there is nothing phantasmagoric about their

sense of place. The road has a certain clarity and hardness that cannot be disembedded and abstracted.

But, just when I have claimed there is nothing phantasmagoric about truck driving, I would now like to argue the opposite. There are at least two senses in which the concrete material places and objects that populate the trucking environment—bodies, roads, traffic, towns, truck stops, shipping and receiving facilities, and the like—have a certain ethereal unreality to them. Drivers frequently commented to me that, though many of them were lured into the industry, in part, by a promise to “see the country,” they slowly come to realize that, as Kevin put it, “In this job, you will see everywhere and stop nowhere. I’ve been by the Grand Canyon countless times; never been there, never really visited.” As Kevin hints, though drivers certainly have the sense of traveling to different *spaces*, they do not necessarily experience different *places*. This is primarily because they are either discouraged or forbidden by their company to travel outside the logistics system to “see the sights,” as one might in one’s car, even in their downtime. Rather, they must stick to the roads and parking facilities that can accommodate a tractor-trailer. Consequently, many drivers I spoke to reported remarkable experiences of adventure as they circumnavigated the entire country over the course of several years of hard driving. But, after awhile, this excitement wears off. Tommy—48 years old, 16 years behind the wheel—told me that he has been trying to get out of the industry for almost a decade now, but cannot seem to find any better employment. In the beginning, though, his attitude was different.

*Did you enjoy it when you first got into it?*

Loved it. I wanted to see every state in the United States and I did. After about five years I had my fill of it and after that it wasn’t fun no more.

*What made you get fed up with it?*

It became a job instead of an adventure after about five years.

As Tommy notes, the adventure of traveling cross-country quickly becomes “a job”—a routine of, as another driver put it, “the same sections of interstate all the time.” As another driver put it, “Everything gets boring because you’ve seen every inch of interstate eight thousand times. It has nothing to offer you, nothing new.”

What gives drivers this experience of monotonous routine? For one, the shipping and receiving yards in which, as we have seen, drivers spend many hours of downtime, are highly utilitarian spaces. Shipping/receiving facilities are designed to be as interchangeable as possible



*A shipping yard in rural Pennsylvania*

in order to facilitate a frictionless routine of pick up and delivery. A typical shipping yard is a concrete patch on the side of a featureless building surrounded by a barbed wire fence. At best, shipping facilities include a sparse room attached to the shipping clerk's office, occasionally equipped with a television, for drivers to sit in while they wait.

More so than these workspaces, though, drivers discussed the boredom and monotony of truck stops. This is especially the case today, drivers reported, now that the vast majority of America's truck stops are owned by just three companies, which have merged through a series of massive buyouts: Pilot Flying J, T/A Petro, and Loves. Like other forms of convenience franchising, corporately owned truck stops aim to provide exactly the same consumer experience regardless of location. Drivers thus experience a monotonous set of choices in their downtime as they travel through the diverse geography of the United States. For example, during my fieldwork, Pilot Flying J began replacing all of its restaurants with Denny's franchises, thus further reducing the variety of dining options available on the road. Not surprisingly, then, I rarely saw groups of drivers congregate in truck stops during their downtime. Even in the rare cases that I observed larger truck stops that include forms of entertainment, such as coin operated arcade games or big screen television rooms, they typically sat unused. Rather than places of community, then, drivers primarily experience truck stops as oversized convenience stores. As one driver noted, "Most guys just sit in their trucks [during their downtime]. There's not really anything to do at a truck stop, and plus if you're not driving then you should probably be sleeping anyway." Taken together, the spaces outside the truck in which drivers spend most of their time do not ground them in a sense of "place," because these spaces are designed for fleeting, utilitarian interactions. Thus, though drivers physically pass through the American

landscape, they do so within a closed system of relatively placeless spaces that keep that landscape at arms' length.



*A dispatcher at his terminal*

The trucking environment is phantasmagoric in a second way. This is best seen, however, not from the drivers' seat, but from the perspective of dispatchers—the men and women who direct and oversee drivers' movements by providing them with load information and tracking the progress of freight. I observed the dispatch operation of the same company whose drivers I rode with on two separate occasions, far less time than I spent with drivers. These brief periods, however, gave me a feel for the basics of life on the other side of the cab. What was most remarkable to me about seeing the dispatch operation for the first time is just how similar it is to the digital trading floor I observed in New York City. Much like financial traders, dispatchers

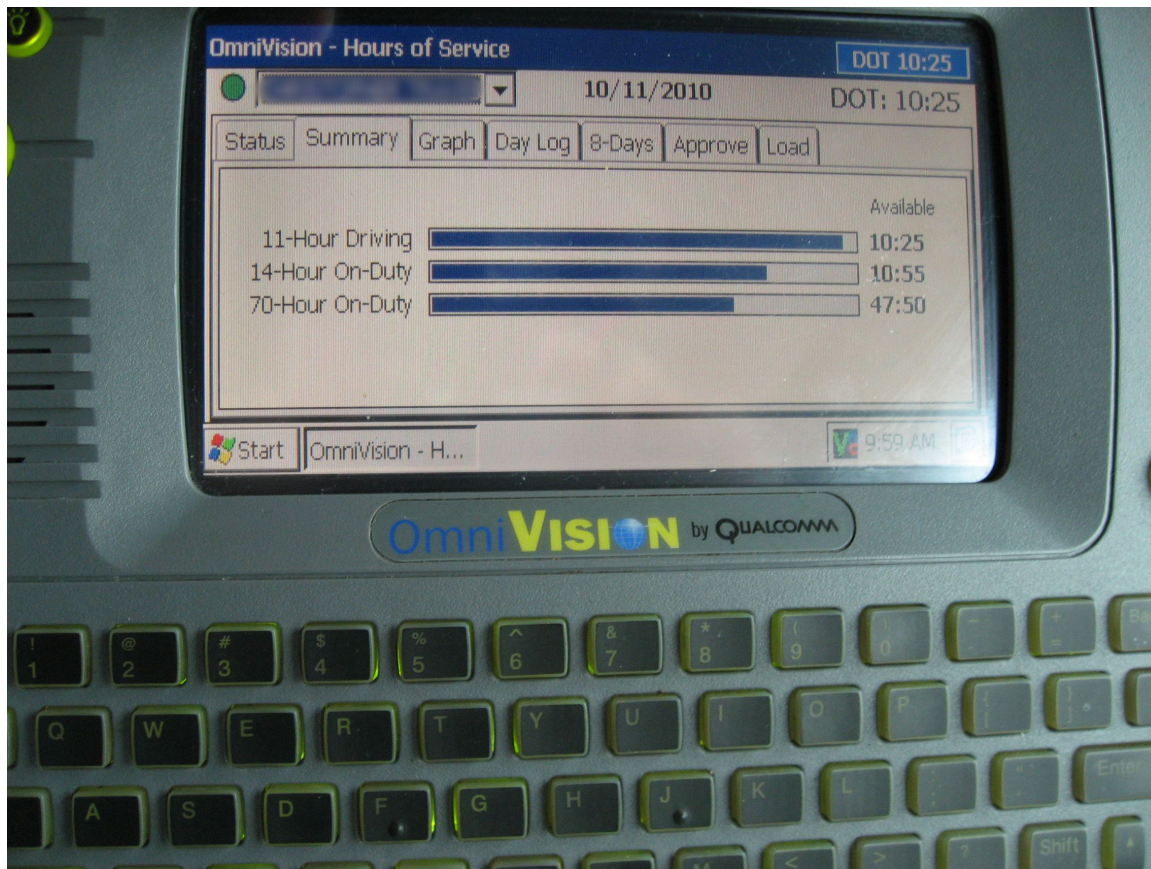
work in a large, open-air office environment, at computer terminals with two or three monitors, and in close quarters with their fellow dispatchers. Each dispatcher is assigned a fleet of drivers with whom they match loads of freight located throughout the country. Dispatchers' primary motivation, then, is to achieve a perfect "on-time-rate" for their fleet. The higher the rate for each fleet, the higher the average on-time-rate for the company. Companies with the best rates tend to attract more clients, due to a reputation for fast and reliable service.

When dispatchers start a shift—typically 11 hours, which mirrors drivers' shifts—they spend the first hour or so, as one dispatcher put it, "tapping" each driver to check his or her status. "Problem loads"—i.e. those that are running late—are then followed up on using a set of communications technologies that, again, are similar to those used by financial traders.

Dispatchers primarily communicate with drivers using what are officially called Electronic On Board Recorders (EOBRs), but which workers colloquially call "the Qualcomm," referring to a popular brand name of EOBR. The Qualcomm system tracks drivers' precise GPS location, instantly streams all of their logbook activity to dispatch, and features a messaging application that allows drivers and dispatchers to communicate in real time via text. Dispatchers also talk to drivers frequently on cell phones.

In much the same way that financial professionals observe the movements of financial instruments, then, dispatchers gain access to drivers movements mainly through disembodied abstractions: mostly letter and number codes that represent information about each driver, such as his available drive time, hours logged in the sleeper berth, current GPS location,





*The “Qualcomm” displaying a driver’s current log book status*

estimated time of arrival, etc. This information is streamed to them in real time to two or three computer monitors. This company also uses specialized logistics software, which runs algorithms that calculate the ETA of each load and flash warning signs to the dispatcher when a load is predicted to run late.

Brian, a well-respected dispatcher in his late 30s, begins his day by pulling up basic statistics on his entire fleet. He immediately notices that a load being run by a team of drivers from Southern California through the mountains toward the Midwest, is running late. Yesterday, he had seen this coming and had communicated with the drivers that they needed to pick up the pace. “I was hoping that they would have made up some of that time last night, but...” Brian trails off as he clicks through some screens to see the drivers’ logbook information. He looks at

the time and GPS coordinates recorded each time they switched their logbooks from driving, to off-duty, to sleeping. This allows him to gain a rough estimate of their average speed, which, he tells me, looks to be somewhere around 40 miles per hour. “They’ve been dogging it,” he sighs. “Granted, they are moving through the California mountains, but if they had just pushed it a little harder last night, we could have made this happen.”

Now, Brian has to find a way to prevent this load from being late. He comes up with two options. The first is to contact the Wal-Mart distribution center, where this load is due in less than a day, to see if he can push the appointment window back. He quickly calls the receiving clerk and finds that she is amenable to changing the appointment. He hangs up and tells me that, though they now have a later appointment time, “I’m not going to tell the drivers that yet. If I tell them now, they might be tempted to run slower knowing that they have a new window. I want them to think they need to keep pushing hard right now just in case something else holds them up.”

Though Brian is feeling satisfied that the load is back on track, he decides to look at a second option as well. He can also choose to “repower” the load—hand it off to another driver who has enough time left on his logs and is in the right location to get the load there on time. Looking at the overview screen of his entire fleet, he finds a solo driver who, according to his logbook, is just finishing a 10-hour break and coming on to a fresh 14-hour clock. He is located in an ideal position to intersect with the late team and take their load. Brian uses the instant messaging application to ask the driver about his status:



*A driver using the Qualcomm to communicate with his dispatcher*

Brian: morning sir! You ready to run?

Driver: pls be gentle today. Am on 3 hrs sleep since I was trying to get loaded last night.

Brian: gentle? Never! Get ready to work :)

Brian sends the driver the information for the repower, but tells him it is not a sure thing yet and to get back in contact when he finishes his current delivery. Having found two solutions to his problem, Brian finally feels satisfied that he can move on to his next task.

Like traders and the financial economy, dispatchers have a disembedded and abstract relationship to the production economy. Unlike traders, however, the underlying referent of the abstracted objects that dispatchers manage—i.e. real people carrying real production goods—can talk back. This can create some tension because drivers, as we have seen, tend to experience the

timescapes of the production economy in a more concrete way than their dispatchers. A typical complaint that drivers lodged against dispatchers, then, was that, as one driver put it, “sometimes they treat us like machines.” Dispatchers sometimes see drivers as their logbooks, rather than considering the many physical and emotional challenges that come with the flexibilization of the body.

While riding with Jeff, a 32 year old former insurance salesman who had been driving for just over a year, we encountered a difficult transition from a relatively steady routine of day shifts to a shift of night driving and then back again to a day shift, all within the span of 50 hours. After receiving the bad news from Brian over the Qualcomm that he would need to make this transition, I commented to Jeff that, “Maybe Brian will feel bad and give us a good load next time that’s on a better schedule for you.” Jeff laughed, saying, “No. He won’t feel bad. That’s the general attitude from people in dispatch—that we’re robots and can just turn it on and off whenever we want.” I pressed him further to describe what he means by “we’re robots.”

Because Brian can see everything that’s going on with my logs and he can see, ‘Oh, it says you’ve been in the sleeper for 15 hours, why can’t you drive tonight?’ And I say, ‘Well, Brian just because I’m in the sleeper doesn’t mean I can just switch like that [snaps fingers] from one cycle to another.’

*And what does Brian say to that?*

Well, then he turns it around on me and says, ‘Well, maybe you shouldn’t be in this line of work if you can’t be flexible, and yada-yada-yada. That’s when we start to get in fights and feelings get hurt. Fortunately, he’s a good guy and we always end up making up in the end.

As Jeff so clearly articulates, tensions can run high between dispatchers and drivers, not necessarily because of conflicting personalities, but because of a confrontation between a concretized worker, who experiences the production economy in his body, and a disembedded

manager, who experiences the production economy through the manipulation of abstract symbols. When dispatchers mistake the symbolic representations of drivers' body rhythms that they encounter on their screens—i.e. a drivers' logbook—to be the real thing, drivers experience their own bodies as machine like. Dax, who after only a year is more than ready to quit, put it succinctly, "I am always being monitored. I don't feel and think. It's like I know I'm in my skin, but I don't feel like I'm in my skin. I'm like a human robot. I have to move at someone else's pace. I'm on someone else's time."

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Production capitalism has long sought to create profit by conquering time and space. Today, however, firms are competing directly over speed as an end in itself. At the level of the individual worker, this has meant a shift in the conception of the laborer from a standardized, predictable worker to a flexible, on-demand worker. With this epochal shift in temporal culture, however, production capitalism has not simply jettisoned its old tricks. As the trucking industry illustrates, firms continue to rely on the traditional forms of clock time discipline—standardization, coordination, regularity, and density—and traditional forms of temporal practice—shifts of clock hours—to create precision, liquidity, and flexibility. Truck drivers demonstrate how a link can be forged between the old and the new in both time—through the transmutation of rhythmic systems—and space—through a tense alliance between the concrete and the phantasmagoric.

The agonistic relationship between old and new forms of social time I observed is not unique to truck driving, though the trucking industry is at the vanguard of this trend. It is only becoming more widespread as an increasing number of organizations seek to create flexible

workers, but can think of no other way to organize labor than through clock time logic, such as shift work systems (Beers 2000).<sup>5</sup> While I have concentrated on the trucking industry, then, I could have just as easily seen many of the temporal textures observed here (though perhaps less chaotic and extreme) in other occupations that feature a similarly flexible approach to time management, such as shift workers within manufacturing and retail sales, freelance construction laborers, or even doctors, nurses, and medical students. What truck drivers' demonstrate perhaps better than any of these other examples, however, is the ways in which workers' bodies bear the brunt of the uneasy relationship between old and new timescapes.

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<sup>1</sup> Ciscel and Smith (2005, p. 429) have aptly called this "market incessancy: the tendency for output and employment markets to be always active."

<sup>2</sup> This corporeal transmutation is similar to the emotional transmutation described by Hochschild (2003) in her ethnography of emotional laborers.

<sup>3</sup> Some companies will occasionally pay for or reimburse drivers for staying in the limited number of hotels along the US Interstate system that have truck parking.

<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, loads running east to west pay less because they deliver freight from the "consuming" areas of the country in the East to the "producing" areas in the West and middle of the country.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, the HOS regulations and the new research on human fatigue, sleep, and biorhythms that this system has elicited, have become a starting point for other organizations seeking to reform their time-management strategies. For example, the Accreditation Counsel for Graduate Medical Education has relied heavily on the HOS rules and research conducted under the auspices of the FMCSA to draft their own duty restrictions for medical residents (Papandria 2002).

#### 4 Precarious Futures

The job seekers I talked to rarely referred to themselves as “unemployed.” I quickly learned not to use that word when speaking with respondents for fear that I would make them feel uncomfortable. More often than not, respondents preferred to think of themselves as “between jobs,” “seeking employment,” “looking for my next opportunity,” or “in transition.” While early on in my fieldwork I did not find the use of these alternate terms for unemployment particularly significant—perhaps my respondents are merely trying to avoid stigma, I thought—as I learned more about the temporal experience of job loss, I began to see them as crucial. Not only does the term unemployed carry an implicit negative moral evaluation, but more importantly, it implies a certain finality and a backward looking attitude that does not adequately capture the temporal structure in which job seekers preferred to see themselves. It was only upon seeing multiple stories side by side, and witnessing job seekers interact with one another, that I came to understand job loss as a predominantly future-oriented process. Job seekers saw themselves as “transitioning,” not from a loss located somewhere in their recent past into a new present, but from one time map to another.

Of the many kinds of fallout associated with global post-industrial capitalism, periods of high unemployment, which have tended to follow the boom-bust cycles of financial capitalism (Calhoun 2013), have captured the most attention because they signal the collapse of one of the most foundational time maps of clock time culture: the career. This was especially the case during my fieldwork, which occurred in 2011 and 2012—the height of the “Great Recession,” which followed the bursting of the American housing market bubble in 2007 and 2008 triggering

a massive global economic crisis. Not only did respondents have a distinct personal event through which to make sense of the transformations in social time they were experiencing, but also they were doing so at a time when national alarm about the changing economy, the future of the career model of employment, and the future of corporate capitalism more generally, were at an all time high. 2011, for example, saw widespread global protests of financial capitalism in the form of the Occupy movement.

Social scientists have well documented the dissolution of the career trajectory and its cultural, political, and economic sources (for example Hewison and Kalleberg 2012; Moen and Roehling 2004; O’Rand 2011; Silva 2012). Few scholars, however, have sought to understand the career as a form of time and its waning influence as a shift in individuals’ relationship to clock time culture. The most notable exception to this is Richard Sennett. In a series of path breaking essays, Sennett describes the career as one of the foundational temporal structures of modern life and discusses how trends such as the global outsourcing of labor, automation, the shift to a shareholder value model of corporate governance, and a series of economic bubbles, have eroded the career even in white-collar professions, which were once the hallmark of the career (Cobb and Sennett 1972; Sennett 2000, 2006, 2009). Above all, Sennett (2000) describes this transformation as a shift from a long term, durable structure for the lifecourse to a short term, flexible structure. As corporations abandon the long-term predictability of the career, workers are left without established grooves in social-time space in which to narrate their lives.

While Sennett’s portrait of the meltdown of the career is powerful, he uses broad brush strokes that cover over important nuances of the temporality of unemployment and, moreover, downplay the degree to which workers continue to actively engage with the culture of clock



time, even in the temporal “vacuum” created by job loss. In this chapter, I build on Sennett’s important work by revealing the fine-grained rhythmic texture of the meltdown of the career, illustrating precisely how those who have experienced this transformation most directly—the unemployed—attempt to build a bridge from an exploded past into a precarious future.

### **Deceleration**

Because the job seekers I talked to were largely middle class corporate employees, many of them began to relate their stories to me, and generally understood their life histories within, the framework of a deeply institutionalized sense of the future that took the form of a linear, vertical march from a lower rung in an organization to a higher rung—what Phyllis Moen and Patricia Roehling (2004) call the “lockstep career path.” Much like the mechanical movement of the clock, respondents imagined the career as a rigid, predictable beat, which, to varying degrees, held some promise of increased security, status, and power, if only they could become entrained with it. This deeply naturalized time map was often taken for granted by respondents as they moved (or imagined themselves to be moving) securely within its boundaries, becoming noticeable only in retrospect as it began to falter or, more often, after it had long since crumbled.

Colleen is a 40-year-old former television broadcasting professional who had worked her way up to a middle manager’s position in a highly prestigious network television studio in Boston. Throughout our conversation, Colleen placed her race and gender front and center to her life narrative. She had been raised by a career-driven, single African-American mother, who had always stressed that, in Colleen’s words, “for a woman of color, [education] is not optional, it is mandatory.” Recalling her mothers’ advice, Colleen says, “The mantra I was given was, ‘Go get

your education. Be your own woman and have your own.” By the age of twenty-four, Colleen seemed to be living her (and her mother’s) dream. She recalls, “I worked my way up from entry level. I was a production assistant all the way to associate director. [...] To go from undergraduate Radio, TV, and Film [school] to being in a top ten market and establish your career was like unheard of, and a dream come true for most people that aspired in that field.” She adds, “My career progression was such that, by the time I got the promotions, I was already performing the job that was ahead of it.”

Between 2005 and 2006 Colleen says she “hit the glass ceiling.” Despite having given her heart and soul to her job, which included getting up at two in the morning and working eleven and twelve-hour days, her movement upward in the company began to stall. She was passed over for promotions and given undesirable work tasks that signaled her lower status in the eyes of the news director. At the same time, several members of her family, including her only brother, became sick and passed away, but she was so busy with work that she was unable to help her family through this difficult time. “So it just—it was chaotic,” Colleen recalls.

I mean, the draw for [working in] media is people are like ‘Oh, my gosh. You get to meet so many exciting people and go to so many places around the world. And that’s the glitz and glam and the window dressing we put on it. But a lot of people are cogs in a wheel and have that supposedly high profile, or the impression of having the ability of power. But you pay profoundly personally. [...] Yes, I had a gorgeous condo split-level in the suburbs of Newton *[laughs]*. But the thing is, I was living on such a level where I would come home, literally dress there, sleep there, eat there, but I really wasn’t able to enjoy my home anymore. And just—it just got to be very cannibalistic.

In early 2006, Colleen performed, as she calls it, “a holistic review of my life,” which led to an epiphany; she could no longer continue in the field of media. “It’s just like, you’re doing this for what?” she recalls. “You’re not moving forward and your career is no longer giving you the high, or the promise of the high, that it did in years before. And look how much has disappeared

from under your feet on a personal level.” So, in late 2006 she “made the very profound decision to resign.”

I felt like to stay in my job, it was the equivalent of being on a freight train going at top speed that you knew was heading for a collision. And I had two choices: I could either collide with the train that I was on, or I could jump off and possibly break a leg or arm. So I chose to jump, thinking that, okay, well, we can repair this and move on. Not having the—not being aware of this tremendous blind spot of what was going on in the economy. [...] So I sold my home, turned a nice profit, decided, ‘Oh yea, I’ll explore another career.’

It is only in retrospect that Colleen can see a “blind spot” in her life trajectory—the immense risk she had taken by resigning in 2006—a particularly inauspicious historical moment. However, on an emotional level there was simply no other decision to be made. Having turned her vision of an empowering media career into a reality, she began to see it for what it was—a meaningless status game that unsustainably pitted her personal life against her professional life.

Even more so than Colleen, Henry, a 58-year-old former customer service specialist for a multinational communications corporation, could narrate his past as a linear progression upward through a chain of positions with ever-greater status. Henry originally joined the firm directly out of high school when it was a large printing company.

I worked for my company there for 25 years. Started right out on the ground floor as a press helper. That was 1973. June of ’73. I progressed through my career at the plant. I was promoted to quality control technician, and then, about four years after that, I was promoted to quality control specialist. And then, after that, I was promoted to production planner. Then, in 1999, [name of company], they sold the division that I worked for to a competitor.

Henry’s narrative moves fluidly through this period, despite there being a major change. “I didn’t want to leave the company,” he notes. “I spent a lot of my career there, built a lot of relationships.” So, in 1999, he applied for and was offered a sales support position within the

company that required him and his wife to move to Maryland. Henry worked in this position from 1999 to 2007.

The transition to new surroundings within the same company was one of the best things that had ever happened to him. He recalls, “It was a tremendous growth period for me. In September of 2007, I was promoted to customer service supervisor. Again, from 2007 to 2011, my career continued to just boom and grow and...” Henry’s voice trails off as his narrative reaches the present. He pauses and looks away. Turning back, I can see his eyes begin to water. Looking me directly in the eye as though to make sure I see the importance of his next point, he says, “I am *very* passionate about customer service. I love what I did.” The curious mix of present and past tenses in his speech signals a coming temporal confusion.

Henry notes that “Unfortunately, in July of 2007 our company had merged into [name of Fortune 500 company]. They—you know, our senior management was looking to cut costs. They began a process where they were starting to outsource our customer service.” This process of, as Henry calls it, “workforce reduction,” eventually led to his being laid off. It is important to pause here to notice a narrative slight-of-hand in Henry’s storytelling. In retrospect, he sees that the merger in 2007 with a larger corporation was “unfortunate” for him. However, just moments earlier in our conversation, he had described the period between 2007 and his job loss in 2011 as a major period of growth in his career, which featured an important promotion. Perhaps unconsciously, Henry provides a glimpse of the difficulty of reckoning his long, linear, upward career trajectory with the fact that the temporal foundations underlying this life narrative had been eroding beneath his feet for some time, perhaps as early as 1999 when the original company had sold his position away, causing him to reapply and relocate.

The lockstep career pattern of employment was not the only one that respondents described. Especially those I talked to who had been in service, blue collar, and lower level white-collar office jobs experienced multiple rounds of layoffs, downsizing, and outsourcing throughout the last several decades. Linda, for example, is 57 years old and describes herself as a “seasoned employee” who has “been in transition since October of 2011”—fifteen months at the time of our interview. She notes that her “original career” was in education as a teacher of “business subjects.” This eventually led to her seeking employment in the business world “looking for administrative assistant [positions]. Back then it was called secretary [*laughs*].” She eventually found employment with a mid-sized regional bank as an executive assistant to the senior vice president. She entered the company “hoping to get into the training department.” Shortly after being hired, however, the bank began to outsource this department. Foreshadowing things to come, Linda mentions offhandedly, “Outsourcing has proven to be a valuable term, let me say, in job seeking.” Despite this small setback, Linda was able to “work my way up to an information specialist in budgeting” throughout the late 1990s. But, soon after, in 1998, the bank merged with a much larger national chain, and, for the first time in her life, Linda was laid off.

Reacting instantly to this loss, Linda followed her “first thought” and went to a staffing company to seek a temporary position, which she hoped would blossom into something bigger. She was “immediately placed within a week,” and found a permanent position as an executive assistant to the president in a growing regional corporation that manufactures fire safety products.

When the president retired just a year later, Linda was again laid off. Again, reacting quickly, she “did what I had tried before, and it worked well. I went back to the same staffing

company—immediately got placed again,” this time at a regional branch of a large national life insurance company. She spent the next eleven years there without a promotion, working a series of executive assistant positions to different district and branch managers. During her time there, Linda “had some health issues” causing her to go on unpaid sick leave for four months. “When I came back, the district manager had moved on to greener pastures,” she notes, “so it left my [former] position unavailable. I was moved to the receptionist’s role, which was fine.” The way Linda adds the phrase, “which was fine,” belies the neutral attitude she is trying to convey to me. She is just barely able to cover over her disappointment.

Though she does not mention it in our conversation, I later learned that the insurance company Linda was working for was taken over by a global conglomerate headquartered in Paris at the same time that Linda began to experience a more tenuous employment pattern. Throughout 2010, seeking to cut costs, the company began to streamline its lower level support positions, eventually leading to Linda’s severance. When I asked her why she thinks she was let go, she explained, “Processes changed. Insurance companies used to send a lot of paper at you. Well, then they slowly declined and put it mostly online. Instead of getting stacks of 10,000 sheets of paper a week, we ended up with maybe 1,000.”

Unlike Colleen and Henry, then, Linda does not tell a story of a career that is moving steadily upward. Having been laid off three times and experienced only one major promotion, her trajectory has been steadily horizontal, if not downward, through a series of relatively short-term positions. Summarizing her movement through the company up to the present, Linda ruefully comments, “The joke is, I started at the very far back of the office, and every time I

changed positions I got closer to the front door. Well, in October, the front door opened and the position was abolished. I accepted another severance package.”

Still, just like Colleen and Henry, Linda sees her past self as aspiring to a career within an organization, which is why she always operated with the assumption that a temporal foundation exists (or at least existed at one time) upon which this trajectory was possible. At times in our conversation Linda sounds like Colleen. She describes her work history as a “career” that kept her “always too busy.” Explaining why she never wanted to have children, she notes, “My life was my career. I worked 60 hours a week. There was only time for my husband and my home.” Only by looking back on her past efforts from the present does Linda now see that “I did more than what the company ever expected so that I would have seniority, and it did me no good.” Despite having never experienced the markers of the lockstep career path, Linda always saw herself as existing within this type of time map, that is, until it was clear that it had always been a bit of a myth for her.

### *Moments of Reckoning*

The most distinctive feature of the temporality of unemployment is its eventfulness. As Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2010) has argued, events are “restless.” Inherently rhythmic, they are “flows” of effects, which feature decelerations and accelerations. Each beat in the rhythm of an events’ effect flow provides an opening for meaning making, which social actors struggle over through heated semiotic exchanges (see also Simko 2012). An important mechanism of the restlessness of events, then, is what Wagner-Pacifici calls the “moment of reckoning”—a “pause” in the effect flow of an event, which precipitates a “realization that the very contours of

the social and political world have been transformed” (2010, p. 1383). For job seekers, especially those who were laid off during the recent economic downturn, the moment of job loss presented itself precisely as this kind of pause in the flow of daily life, which radically transformed the contours of respondents’ worlds. During these moments, respondents were suddenly able to see that the time map they had assumed was intact beneath their feet—and by association, their entire life narrative to that point—was in fact in great jeopardy.

For some, job loss came seemingly from out of the blue, especially for those who had been working in stable companies that had only recently been destabilized by the financial collapse. Respondents in these situations found that only in retrospect could they see that things had been heading this direction for some time. Henry’s moment of reckoning, for example, could not have felt more abrupt, though he now sees impending signs of it throughout his recent past. Shifting from the longer wavelengths of decades and years, which characterize earlier parts of his narrative, to the shorter wavelengths of months and days, he recalls:

The day before my birthday—July 19th—I remember it well. I was working at my desk, and I’d gotten up to go out to the restroom, and I was walking down the hall and just happened to glance in our conference room, and I saw our H.R. manager in there. Then, as I got up even with the door I saw my manager. I knew my number was up.

*You knew it then?*

I had no clue before.

*Really? Absolutely no clue?* [Henry nods his head yes] *Wow.*

Matter-of-fact, Friday before that, I was—all of the supervisors and managers were engaged in an employee reduction program. I had to travel to one of my satellite offices up in Linthicum, Maryland and workforce-reduce one of my CSRs. Anyhow, so I walked into the conference room and I said, “I guess you guys aren’t here to wish me a happy birthday.”



Notice how this radical pause in the flow of his career trajectory spins Henry into a cycle of retrospective-prospective temporal reckoning. Jumping from a recent past—July 19<sup>th</sup>—to an earlier past—the Friday before that—and back again, he can now see this moment as both unpredictably sudden and tragically predictable. As he continues to describe that day, the pace and rhythm of Henry’s narrative slow to a near standstill—the tiniest details take on larger significance, signaling entire worlds of meaning.

*July 19<sup>th</sup>. I mean, you remember the exact date.*

I remember the exact time.

*What was that meeting like?*

Well, I have to tell you, Ben, it was—I mean my manager was pretty emotional. She and I, we really hit it off. We came from the same background. [...] I loved working for her and she was a real people person. She was very up front. [...] She always used to commend me for the spirit that I brought to my team. I always had an open door. There was nothing that anyone on my team could never come to me with. I had some pretty challenging situations.

Henry then plunges into a long story about how he went above and beyond the call of duty to rescue a 35 million dollar account that nearly slipped away from his company when the account manager suddenly quit. A heroic tale, Henry heard of the problem on a Friday, jumped in his car on a Sunday, and moved to New Jersey for three months to finish the work and save the contract. Detailing this story spins Henry into another long tale of when his former boss passed away from cancer leaving only Henry and his current boss to work side-by-side to lead the team through the transition. Finally, returning to the “recent past” of his last day on the job, Henry recalls:

So, when we sat down on July 19<sup>th</sup>, I mean she was crying.

*Yeah. How could she not? Who else was in the room besides her?*

The H.R. manager. Even *she* was crying. She was a key piece—a key contact to me even through the emotional time when [his former boss] passed away. She always supported me and she did everything that she ever could for me

*How did they break the news to you?*

Well, you know my manager started, but then she was pretty emotional, so then the H.R. manager said, “This was a trip that neither of us wanted to make today.” They said, “Unfortunately, you understand what’s going on and we’ve got to cut back even deeper than we had originally thought. Today’s your last day.”

*Wow.*

We talked through and we went through the paperwork and stuff. At the end of that, they said to me, “You know, we normally don’t do this because—” and I had witnessed to it the Friday before when I workforce reduced the CSR. We just had to tell her—we had to get up, escort her out of the room, take her to her desk. Let her get her personal things and she had to walk out the door. They said to me, “You know, we don’t think that’s right.” They said, “Why don’t you take some time and—or if you want to, we’ll go around and tell the rest of the staff and sales people that are in the office.” I said, “You know, I appreciate your offer, but I’ll do it myself.” I said, “I’m a big boy.”

A single detail that occupies no more than a few moments in his life narrative—the sincere regret displayed by his boss and the H.R. manager—signals an entire complex of meaningful impressions for Henry: his deep respect and warm relationship with his bosses, that this respect was mutual, that he was an admired team leader with remarkable accomplishments. Even more significant is the fact that, just a few days prior, Henry had been in his bosses’ shoes. The kindness they show him by breaking protocol and letting him say a proper goodbye to his colleagues further marks this moment. These brief exchanges of emotion, with all their semiotic weight, fix this moment in time as a solid marker in an otherwise fluidly flowing career narrative. It ropes off everything happening before this moment as “before” and everything happening after as “after.”

While Henry's moment of reckoning felt sudden, others saw that trouble was brewing long before job loss. Even these bad omens, however, were often explained away or simply endured, leaving respondents still reeling during their moment of reckoning. I met Janice and Cindy, for example, several months after having been laid off at the same time from the credentialing department at a managed health care provider. They entered the company when it was a state licensee for the nation's largest healthcare association. Over the course of the next fifteen years, they saw the company through two mergers and two name changes. During the last of these mergers, which occurred in the early 2000s, Janice and Cindy began to see dramatic changes to nearly every aspect of their daily lives in the company. The first signs of change were subtle. Working in different sections of the department at the time, Janice and Cindy both got new bosses who resided on opposite coasts. As Cindy puts it, "It became that all of our managers, all of our directors, everybody, they used to be down the hall. You knew everybody. They'd been there forever. They knew their jobs. All of a sudden, my new boss...was in Andover, Mass."

The credentialing department "wasn't doing so well with this new infrastructure," Janice notes, so the department director was replaced with a new director from California. "She was a formidable force," Janice recalls. "She was just—talk about company oriented; everything was for the company." The new director began holding weekly conference calls with the department and making two in-person visits a year. "When she came in, it was like a hurricane to clean house. It was like, you're not doing this, you're not doing that. If we spoke up in a staff meeting, she was like—it would always be 'One company, one team. You're not thinking about the company.' Boom, that was it."

The clearest expression of a harder, more company focused management style came with new performance expectations for the credentialing department. “You’ve got to hit this mark; you’ve got to hit these numbers,” Cindy recalls. “And this was the funny part too: and you’ve got to hit it with no errors [*laughs wryly*].” Jumping in eagerly, Janice adds, “Because they also started pulling quality on us. They had a woman based out of—I don’t know where that—Ohio right?” Cindy nods in confirmation. “Pulled quality on us every week, which went over our work. We would get back itemized things like ‘You didn’t capitalize this. You didn’t spell out the street number.’ I mean, we started getting dinged for everything. It was an impossible perfection thing to hit.” Cindy, agreeing with Janice, notes, “I mean, it got to the point—I did my job, I worked my butt off, but nothing was ever good enough for them at one point.” Foreshadowing things to come, she adds, “That’s how they managed to phase out credentialing.”

As Janice tells me late in our conversation, even by this time “the writing was on the wall. They had been talking about outsourcing for a while even before this.” A credentialing department in an affiliated company was outsourced to India just a year prior to Janice and Cindy’s layoff. “We worked closely with them,” Janice recalls, “so it was like, ‘Okay, if they’re outsourcing them, we can’t be far behind.’” Worries were increased, then, when the company began a major reconstruction project, which scattered the credentialing department to several temporary offices on different floors. They recall:

Janice: [*To Cindy*] I don’t know what it was like on the third floor, but I was on the fourth floor. It slowly—you saw all of these Indians—contract workers coming in to the office.

Cindy: Yes.

Janice: It started off gradually. I don't know if it was happening on your floor, but I definitely saw it. More, more, more. You'd ask, 'What are they doing?' Nobody seemed to know. *Somebody* had control of them.

Cindy: *Somebody* knew. They were all computer oriented. They weren't going out in the field doing sales calls or contract negotiations, that type of thing. No one seemed to know what they were doing.

Janice: [...] Well, I remember when the renovations were almost finished. They started at the top and worked their way down; it was six stories. They said, 'Oh, sixth floor is all done.' We wanted to...see what it was going to look like with all this new stuff, cuz they made the cubes smaller. [...] I remember, I went up on the sixth floor and we were walking around. The cubes were all empty but they had the little nameplates out. We started noticing it was like—names that were like 16 feet long.

Cindy: [...] It was just—after a while it became—you know, I hate to sound racist, but the running joke there was that the sixth floor, we started calling it Little India

Janice: I called it Little Pakistan. On the fourth floor we were calling it Little Pakistan.

It was not too difficult for Janice and Cindy to see what was ahead. New bosses who were no longer just down the hall, unreasonable expectations for work performance, rumors of similar departments being outsourced, and then an influx of IT specialists with strange names who had already staked their claim in a newly renovated office.

Remarkably, the actual day that Janice and Cindy were laid off still came as a surprise to them. As Cindy recalls:

We kind of—you know, you could see what was going on with the outsourcing. At the same time, we had no inkling that day. They called us in to this [meeting] and it was funny. We sat down. Sat next to—I think it was Barbara. She said, "Oh, I bet she's gonna talk to us about how we're up and talking too much or something like that." And I said—the HR person was sitting behind us. I said, "Barbara, something bigger is going down." She goes, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "Why would HR be here?" I said, "This isn't a, you know, 'you're slacking off' meeting."

As it was for Henry, the meeting during which Janice and Cindy were let go was conducted in such a way as to enhance the surprise. However, unlike Henry's experience, the emotional tone of Janice and Cindy's meeting was far colder. Janice recalls:

I came in that morning and there was actually a post-it note on my computer from Mary Sue [her boss] saying staff meeting, blah, blah, blah, first floor, nine o' clock. [...] Normally if we had a staff meeting it was in an email when you turned on your computer. I kinda said out loud, "Why did Mary Sue leave me a post-it note about a staff meeting?" I said, Sarah—the girl who sat in the cube behind me—I said, "She leave you a post-it note?" and she's like, "No." I'm like, "Oh." Then I said, Randy, who was the guy who sat in front of me, "Randy did you get a post-it note from Mary Sue about a staff meeting at nine?" and he's like, "No." [...] They were like, "No, we don't know anything about a meeting," so I said, "Okay." When I got in there and I saw people sitting there but I saw some people *weren't* sitting there, I thought okay, this—but it was still kind of—I wasn't quite sure.

Having sat down with a group of other employees who looked just as confused, Janice and Cindy suddenly realized what was going on when the H.R. manager walked in and began taking attendance. "Never in fifteen years had anyone ever taken attendance at a morning meeting," Janice recalls. Next, Mary Sue walked in carrying a piece of paper. Walking briskly and sitting down without looking anyone in the eye, she began to read from the paper.

Janice: [*To Cindy*] She sat there with the—

Cindy: Just staring at the paper.

Janice: She just read it. "Due to, you know, profit blah, blah, blah, and it's been decided that—so the credentialing department—and these are the words she used. She said, "As of August 12<sup>th</sup>," she said, "your jobs are being eliminated and are being outsourced overseas."

Cindy: Uh-huh.

Janice: I just sat there like, "Holy shit. It really happened," you know?

There is a four second pause as Janice and Cindy allow me to take in the weight of this memory.

Cindy picks up where Janice left off.

Cindy: She finished her statement, which took all of what, 30 seconds?

Janice: Oh yeah, just to say HR will review with you, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. She got up and walked out the door. I was in shock [...].

Cindy: I just looked at her like—so when the HR lady got up [to speak next], the first thing I said was—you know, I was pissed at that. I was like, “Excuse me, where is Mary Sue going?” She said, “Oh, we find in situations like this it’s best to be, you know, to let HR handle the situation.” I felt like saying, “Bullshit!” She’s afraid to face the people that she’s been manager of for so long and tell me, a 56-year-old, middle-aged woman who’s divorced—I don’t have a second income to help me out. I’m lucky I got to the point I was—she’s afraid to tell me, “Guess what, honey, you’re on your own.” She couldn’t bear to face it.

Janice: Yeah. “Find a job and live your life.”

Cindy: Six months later, boy, I’m living the high life.

Despite all the signs that this moment was just on the horizon, Janice and Cindy were not prepared for the temporality with which the moment arrived. And how could they be? Conducted as a kind of sneak attack, to mitigate any uncontrollable emotional outbursts, the suddenness and coldness of the meeting fixes a clear before/after point in the narrative flow. As in Henry’s case, the smallest details matter: the specific date, the paper in Mary Sue’s hand, the way she walked and held her head, the specific configuration of words used to terminate their employment. Each of these performative signals causes entire worlds of meaningful impressions to flow from employer to employee, fixing the moment forever in time as a new center of gravity that will pull their future trajectories into a new orbit.

### *Hysteresis and Stagnation*

Having now passed through a moment of reckoning, which, like a crucible, melts and distorts the once seemingly solid time map that grounded a vertical and linear narrative

trajectory, respondents typically found themselves spiraling out of control emotionally.

While this reaction may seem self evident, a closer look at how and why emotional collapse tends to follow job loss reveals the crucial role played by clock time as a moral institution. Far from being a simple matter of reduced income, a deeply troubling aspect of job loss is the sudden lurch into a daily timescape with no rhythmic structure—no schedules, no deadlines, no routines—which triggers deeply felt moral emotions, such as guilt, shame, and anxiety (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, and Zeisel 1971).

For some, the transition to the new timescape of joblessness felt surprisingly liberating at first. A world without rigid temporal boundaries gave some a rare chance to relax and regroup before setting out to find employment again. Some took advantage of this freedom by becoming, as one respondent cleverly put it, “funemployed.” Linda, for example, recalls that right after being laid off she “became very lazy.” When I asked her what she meant by lazy, she replied, “I took some time off, just played around a little. [...] Instead of looking for a job, I went line dancing. Instead of looking for a job, I took my girlfriend to Charlotte. Instead of looking for a job, I went shopping. I mean, I just did the things that I had never done before because I was always working.”

Similarly, Shirley, a 49-year-old laid off graphic designer, at first began to pursue some of her favorite hobbies, such as fishing, photography, and scrapbooking, but found that

My frame of mind is not—I look back at things that I did on the side for hobbies, in addition to all the clubs and things I was involved in, and now I sit there and I can’t even do it.

*Why? What is it that’s keeping you from doing it do you think?*

Guilt. If you’ve got time to do this, you’ve got time to look for work. Work.



*So you feel like that should be the priority?*

Oh yeah. I cannot take the—I think what you're asking is, can I take on a retirement mentality?

*I hadn't thought of it that way. That's interesting.*

No, I can't do that.

The critical moral evaluations that Linda and Shirley apply to their time is typical of those I talked to. While job loss may have at first provided the chance to reconnect with old friends, take trips to interesting places they had never had the time for, and reconnect with old hobbies and interests, these activities always take place against the backdrop of the culture of busyness. The deeply internalized time disciplines of regularity and density produce a background mood of guilt that spoils their attempts to lead a life of leisure without its twin: work.

Other respondents did not pause to relax after their moment of reckoning; they put their noses right back to the grindstone. When Henry returned home on the day he was laid off, he called his brother-in-law to break the news and then immediately went to the unemployment office.

I signed up for *[laughs nervously]* unemployment compensation. I got hold of the benefits center and started the process with my COBRA and—you know, I'm a pretty—I like structure, I like organization, and I like to have all my ducks in a row. I just began the process that day.

*Really? You started looking for jobs right away?*

Yeah. Some of my friends said to me, "Why don't you take some time?" I said, "You know what? I don't want to take time off." I love to work. I enjoy building relationships and building teams and building client relationships. Partnering with the sales team—I loved it.

*You were just in your element, yeah.*

Totally.

Henry's nervous laughter at the mere mention of unemployment benefits signals the deep feelings of guilt and shame he associates with joblessness. His immediate response to these moral emotions is to deploy the trusty clock time disciplines of regularity and density: seek out a routine, focus all attention on that rhythm, and begin to fill it with as much productivity as possible. These disciplines, while taking place outside the world of work, produce warm emotional memories from that world—building, partnering, connecting, etc.

As Henry's example shows, respondents typically approached the new timescape of joblessness by relying on a stock of strategies for action that had worked in the past. Because many respondents were older and had never been jobless before, however, they often began their job search using strategies that are better suited to a bygone era of corporate capitalism. Linda, for example, went back to the same staffing company she had used twice before. When she arrived with copies of her paper resume, the company informed her "We don't submit resumes mostly. We do it by video." Shocked by this, she recalls, "I wasn't told about this ahead of time, so when I arrived, I was put in a room with a computer, webcam, and asked to give a sixty second elevator speech." "Elevator speech? That was new terminology to me *[laughs]*," she confesses. Later that month, calling the company to find out what had become of a particular application, she found out that the company had itself gone out of business. "They didn't even notify me. I got a recording saying to contact their New York office. This was not a good sign *[laughs]*."

Like Linda, other respondents spoke of early experiences when once reliable strategies for action seemed out of step with the times, a condition Bourdieu (2005) calls "hysteresis." Henry, for example, had the remarkable fortune, just days after being laid off, of finding a job

listing that was “right in my sweet spot”—the customer service department of a large trucking company. “My biggest challenge,” he notes, “is that I had never applied for a position outside of my company—in 38 years.” So, scrambling to find help, he contacted a career-counseling firm that gave him advice on phone interviewing. “For the next couple of days, I just engrossed myself in learning about the company.” Feeling rushed but prepared for the interview, Henry recalls,

I had positioned myself in front of my kitchen table looking out the window. [The employer] calls and we start talking about the position, and the interview’s going actually pretty well. Then, she said to me, “Well, tell me about your trucking experience.” I said, “Well, I’ve never worked for a trucking company before.” I said, “I’ve worked with trucking companies in both of my previous roles. I had extensive relationships with a lot of major careers—[name of this company] being one—where you scheduled deliveries and tracked shipments and worked with your freight management people and things like that. She said, “Well, it sounds like you really don’t have any trucking experience. I’m going to end the interview right now.”

*Oh, my gosh. Just because of that?*

I said, “I didn’t see that as—it wasn’t a requirement on the job description.” She said, “Well, I think it’s something that you would need to have, so sorry for taking up your time.” Click. Then, I’ll tell ya, then I was pretty devastated.

Henry’s deep disappointment put him into a tailspin, unable to resume his job search for several weeks. He had learned his first hard lesson about job seeking in the new economy. Because there are so many equally qualified individuals competing for the same positions, hiring managers spend much of their time looking not for the “best person for the job,” but for ways to filter out applicants whose resumes do not fit perfectly within a job description. Thus, applications and interviews can often turn on a single detail. Henry had, naively he now realizes, put all his energy into becoming the “right person,” when the hiring manager was looking for the “right resume.”

As their job searches continued to return negative results using their existing stock of strategies, respondents reported a deeply disturbing sense of stillness, inertia, and stagnation. As I heard from many respondents, their initial strategy of applying only to “good jobs” quickly opened up to applying to just about anything. Several respondents who had once worked in white-collar jobs began applying to entry and management positions in the service sector, such as fast food and retail. Colleen, for example, eventually moved back to her hometown in North Carolina and took a part-time job at a local family restaurant to help pay her way through a masters program in family therapy. Having gone from earning six figures in the glamorous media industry to this, she notes, “I feel like in some ways I’ve reverted to the status of a 12-year-old. Right now I’m working part-time as a hostess. [...] I remember when I left North Carolina from undergrad, my thought was I am not going to come back there no matter what. So, to come back at this time—I was 37 when I got back here, and I was 17 when I left. I felt like I had failed.”

While Colleen describes a kind of metaphorical and existential regression, a few respondents I spoke to experienced such chronic hysteresis that they were literally unable to move. They describe a kind of “protentional death” in which their old stock of strategies proved ineffective to coordinate even the most basic actions. I was introduced to Gregory, for example, through an advertisement on Craigslist and met him at a Starbucks just down the street from his apartment. At the time I talked to him, Gregory was 33-years-old and had lost his job as a technician at a commercial medical processing laboratory 16 months ago. After several months of “funemployment” traveling the country’s amusement parks and visiting old friends, he entered a difficult period of job seeking that involved only one promising lead, which fell through.

Having descended into a deep depression—something he had a history of already—Gregory described a typical day:

*So, do you have any kind of a routine right now to your day?*

No.

*So what does a typical day look like?*

Say I get up—I've been sleeping on the couch for a while. So it's kind of, get up from the couch and turn the TV on. I have a set up where I have my PC hooked up to my television, just from the little entertainment center. So I piddle around on that and either go in through amusing blogs or the internet. I won't even say I answer emails anymore cause that just seems like it's just too much. People want something from me. Just don't wanna deal with it.

Or video games. And I tend to gravitate towards games that take large amounts of time, things that I would set up civilizations. [...] To play a game now, could take anywhere between 24 and 200 hours to play one game. So, you know, I'll go to one of those. Depending on finances, at some point, I'll be motivated to go out and get me a junior bacon cheeseburger. Or just make me some rice and just continue on until very late hours, 3:00, 4:00, 5:00 in the morning.

*That's typically when you—*

Fall asleep on the couch. Sort of ironically it's very large power consumption doing this, between the large TV and very powerful computer. You know sitting here saying, oh I'm just trying to save money, but then I'm just using massive amounts of money by leaving these things on 24 hours a day.

Gregory is perfectly aware of what is going on with him. He is not in a good place psychologically and should be looking for better ways to cope. "I am playing armchair psychiatrist with myself," he notes, "I just say, 'Are you just self-sabotaging yourself?'" Still, he cannot seem to tear himself away from his entertainment system because, at least in part, it provides a comfortable stock of protentional strategies from his past that always used to do the trick.

It's kinda what I do anyways. Like when I was working. My down time, I mean that's my comfort zone. That is my blankie and teddy bear when I used to do that. I think it's just I sort of—I seek that hypnotism. When you're playing a game or watching television, you sort of get hypnotized. But then now it's just this perpetual state of hypnosis.

Gregory adds that this hypnosis, while palliative in the short term, is beginning to have ill effects, particularly on his cognitive abilities. As a lab technician, he had always prided himself in his ability to remember details and make quick decisions—something he had to do while working in the central receiving area of the lab. “I loved the fast pace and constant pressure. [...] How many different irons can you have in the fire and not drop them? Everyone hated doing it. I loved it.” Now, he explains:

It's getting a little bit tougher to remember things. Just being able to recall a list of facts even. My job was always very important for me. I just knew all these numbers and everything. They were constantly changing, so I constantly had them in my head. So this was always being rehearsed. I don't rehearse that anymore and so I can only seem to remember very limited things now. [...] So that is very frightening because it's always been one of my strengths in life is my ability to retain information. So now that one of the better cards that I've been dealt in life is...dwindling in value, it's a little unnerving.

Having been removed from his familiar work timescape, Gregory can no longer “rehearse” the protentional skills that once gave him satisfaction, such as the quick working memory required of an environment with high temporal density. Now, he is left only with the counterpart to those skills—his entertainment system—which he once used to gain comfort and unwind from the job. But these old strategies are terribly out of synch with the timescape of joblessness, creating worrying cognitive imbalances. “I'm passive. I am in this hypnotic state. I am receiving entertainment. I'm not actively doing anything.”

The only thing saving Gregory from this downward spiral, he explains, is that he still maintains a connection with friends and neighbors. He notes:

I haven't sort of lost touch with schedules and the external world. [...] I live in this duplex, so my downstairs neighbor, he works Monday through Friday 4:00 a.m. to noon. So I can always kind of hear the car coming, and I have that in my head as an external reminder. I have a couple of close friends with whom I enjoy spending time, and I know their schedules. I mean I have one friend—he works in food service, but I just know his schedule. So I just have to know like oh it's Thursday he works from 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. So because of just maintaining relationships, I haven't lost complete context of external schedules.

Through a kind of “vicarious scheduling,” Gregory is able to build some kind of temporal structure into his day using the rhythms of his friends' schedules as a metronome. Like a Proustian rope from heaven, these reliable patterns pull his mind back into the outside world.

### *The Disembedded Job Search*

As Gregory shows, becoming stuck in the timescape of joblessness can lead to spatial isolation. This sense of dislocation is exacerbated by contemporary hiring practices. Human Resources departments conduct themselves almost entirely online today. Gone are the days when an applicant would go door-to-door “dropping resumes” and talking face-to-face with representatives of the company in a physical place of work. This transformation is driven by a combination of technology and changes in the job market. During the time of my fieldwork, there was a drastic oversupply of applicants due to massive unemployment. At the same time, hiring departments had themselves been severely downsized in an attempt to control payroll costs. Consequently, respondents were faced with, on the one hand, increased competition from other job seekers, and, on the other hand, understaffed and time-crunched hiring departments.

To cope with this imbalance, Human Resources departments in many of the country's mid and large size companies have come to heavily rely on software packages designed to streamline some of the tasks in the hiring process that used to be conducted by human beings.

This includes, most importantly, reading resumes. Companies typically require applicants to submit a resume through the company's website as well as fill out a series of online forms, many of which are redundant to the resume, which detail the applicant's employment history. This process, most respondents told me, typically takes between one and two hours per application. Once this information is received, it is processed using hiring software. Most hiring software works by allowing hiring personnel to filter out resumes that do not meet the desired criteria of an advertised position. The programs scan resumes for "keywords" and return a ranked list of applicants that best fit the job description based on—and this is a crucial parameter—the *number of times* these keywords appear in his or her resume. More sophisticated programs also note *where* on the resume keywords appear, the assumption being that crucial keywords higher up on the resume will indicate more recent qualifications. With this list in hand, then, the hiring manager only needs to read, say, 10 or 20 of the best resumes, rather than several hundred.

While online-only applications and hiring software may save company resources by reducing the amount of time managers spend looking at resumes, it reconfigures the temporal and spatial dimensions of job seeking in ways that can be maddening for applicants. A phrase used by job seekers to describe online applications in dozens of interviews I conducted was "the black hole." The black hole refers to the way hiring software reconfigures the temporality of the resume. Respondents noted that keyword filtering encourages applicants to think of the resume not as a gilt representation of a person's past, but as a purely instrumental document engineered to get past a series of "firewalls" that separate the applicant from the hiring manager. Savvier respondents described spending hours reading and rereading job advertisements trying to figure out which keywords the HR department is looking for, and then reengineering their resume each



time to feature those words more frequently and as early as possible in the document.

Respondents shared advice with each other on how best to format a resume, not so that it would impress a hiring manager, but so that it will “get past the computers.” Though I never saw it, rumors circulated among the job seekers I met that some applicants in the region were lacing their resumes with extra keywords in such a way that they would be captured by the computer, which would give their resume a higher ranking, but not by the hiring manager—for example, by typing keywords over and over again in very small font or in white text against a white background.

The “black hole” is also troublesome for job seekers because of the way it reconfigures the spatial dimension of the application process. For one, applicants have little means of communicating with hiring personnel, whom they can never see face-to-face nor speak to voice-to-voice. This is, of course, by design. More communication between applicants and hiring staff slows down the process by inundating staff with enquiries. Many respondents I talked to described submitting dozens of applications but never hearing anything back, not even an auto-reply email to let them know their application had been received. Silence from employers was even more bothersome when respondents noticed that a particular advertisement remained on the job boards well after they had submitted an application, leaving them to wonder if the position is still open or had already been filled but the ad never taken down.

Online job seeking also tends to isolate applicants in a location where they can access the internet—typically their homes—rather than allowing them to physically travel to an employer’s place-of-business and see it with their own eyes. Raquel, for example, a 55-year-old former small business owner, told me that she is typically on the computer from 8:30 in the morning to 6

or 7 at night. “It became almost an obsession,” she says of looking at online job listings. “It’s like, I’ve been on this computer five, six hours sending my resume and doing cover letters and going to every job posting site I could think of. It just is sickening. It was just really like, okay, got to get out of here.” Jennifer, a 26-year-old photographer’s assistant, says she has “problems now and then with being stir crazy.” She notes:

I can’t stand being in the house all the time. I just like, just got to walk out of there sometimes. [...]

*Tell me more about that kind of stir-crazy feeling? Where is that coming from?*

It’s the same thing everyday. I have the internet at my fingertips but there’s only so many times you can check the job boards. There’s only so many times you can figure out what other ways you can be managing something.

As Raquel and Jennifer point out, the Internet disembeds the job seeking process, making it easier to apply to more jobs in a day than would be possible going door-to-door. However, it also turns job seeking into a lonely search through placeless space. As Raquel notes,

It’s always just send an e-mail to jobs@. It seems like that’s the catchall thing for resumes and stuff now—jobs@ something, something, something, and it might be a string of letters. It’s not really a name of a company, so you don’t know who you’re applying to. You’re hoping it’s not some circus looking for workers [*laughs*].

Combined with the more existential feelings of stagnation that come with job loss, then, respondents’ sense of isolation and dislocation within the black hole of online applications left many feeling as though they could gain no traction or momentum in their lives.

## **Acceleration**

Having struggled in an irrhythmic action environment for months on end, it takes considerable strength for job seekers to emerge from protentional death. Respondents noted that,

working ones way back into a state of eurhythmia is difficult, if not impossible to do on one's own. One is benefited greatly by, as many described it, "getting out there"—generating some kind of forward momentum through interaction with others. The first steps were often taken through mundane acts of synchronization, which created "pockets" of eurhythmia. Leanne, a 59-year-old former office administrator at an evangelical Christian mega-church, was forced to move her online job search to a nearby public library after her computer gave out. She recalls:

I feel like it really helped me from getting totally defunct in it all and go to sleep, watch TV, get tired of doing that, still watching TV, and all that.

*Yeah, what is it about that? I mean, just having something as simple as that—you have to go to the library.*

It gets you out. It makes you take your shower, because you're not going to go somewhere looking there smelling nasty. When you take a shower and you get dressed, you actually feel better about yourself, because you're not sitting around in your jammies. [...] There's all these little things that you need to do. It's giving you a schedule, and I had no schedule in the beginning until I found out I had to go to the library. Then I started having a schedule. And guess what? I started meeting people.

*There you go.*

I was out in the sunshine and the smell of the air. Then, it got to the point of I didn't want to go home. I wanted to stay out. It made me feel good. That was my encouraging that went on there, and don't go home and make a sandwich, take your sandwich with you. Go sit in the park or go somewhere. Go sit in a parking lot and watch all the people. It's activities and it's life moving. Stuck at home, you don't see any life.

As Leanne makes clear, even basic acts of synchronization with others can help jolt job seekers out of irrhythmia by placing them in a new timescape that is full of, as Leanne puts it, "life moving." Aside from conducting their job search away from home, respondents reported great success with strategies like cleaning the house to prepare for the arrival of a working spouse, exercising at a gym or public park, or volunteering in a local organization.

Having gained a toehold on some experience of eurhythmia, which provides a much-needed mood boost, many respondents emphasized the importance of creating a routine for one's job search in order to sustain that rhythm—the more rigid and predictable, the better.

Respondents thus often engage again with the time disciplines of regularity and density, recreating the rhythmic structure of their old work environments. At the time I spoke to Linda, for example, she was a week in to a new schedule that has her up early and out of the house nearly all day. “Last week I started back in [on a new schedule],” she tells me brightly. “I get up at 5:30 a.m., I eat, I do my walking or running or I do my exercise. Monday mornings I hit that computer. 8:30 a.m. every Monday morning I hit that computer. [...] I'm looking for jobs. Then, based on the job, I'm rewriting my resume. Rewriting my resume means redoing my LinkedIn, which redoes my Twitter. I'm spending a good six hours a day on the computer, perhaps for one job.” She adds, “I also do something else. [...] I have started my own accountability group.”

Here, Linda references a technique that she has learned about from a job assistance support group she is actively engaged in. This group is composed of several smaller “accountability groups”—typically four to eight job seekers who meet periodically to help each other network and set goals. A key strategy used in these groups is requiring participants to write down, on a special form, concrete steps they can take each week to get them closer to their goal of employment, followed by statements about weaknesses that might prevent them from reaching that goal and how they can work around those weaknesses should problems arise. This form helps members break their job search into small, manageable steps and anticipate bumps in the road ahead. Group members are asked to hold each other accountable for these goals. Some groups I observed even created rigid rules about membership—those who do not attend regularly

or do not regularly meet their goals will be asked to leave the group. Linda, not yet a member of an accountability group, has found this form useful as a personal tool. She explains, “I took the form that was handed out to us and you can see.” She shows me the form with several lines filled out.

Now I have everything—and I use this. I carry it with me so that if I do start to get off track—and I have a tendency here to get off track. I know what my goals and objectives are. I know what my weaknesses are and I'm trying to train my mind from a work environment. How would I do this if this were my job, okay?

*Yeah. So, in a way, you're putting looking for a job into a job mode.*

Looking—into a job, right

*Yeah, which involves schedules, and accountability, and goals, and—yeah.*

It involves a tight schedule, accountability, goals, weakness, identifying weaknesses, and coming up with a way around them.

Linda has used scheduling and listing to create a new rhythmic structure out of irrhythmic circumstances. Whereas earlier in her narrative the culture of busyness was a backdrop for guilt, shame, and anxiety right after her job loss, now this culture provides an important set of tools for reconstructing a moral self. The time disciplines of regularity and density may be rigid and unforgiving, but that is precisely what respondents like Linda say they need to sustain a sense of forward movement.

### *Making a New Time Map*

Having sustained eurhythmia for more than a passing moment by deploying clock time disciplines, job seekers gain renewed energy and can finally face the prospect of constructing a new narrative trajectory that can provide them with some sort of orientation in social time-space. Employment assistance centers and job transition support groups are important places where

many of the middle-class professionals I spoke to went to begin constructing this new trajectory together. Career Transition Ministries (CTM) is one of many popular job seeking support groups in a mid-sized city in the mid-Atlantic that many of my respondents attended regularly. Run by Jim, a 62-year-old financial planner who works for a global insurance and financial conglomerate headquartered in the city, CTM operates under the auspices of St. Timothy's, a local Episcopalian church. Having lost his job due to downsizing in the 1990s, Jim personally knows the struggles of job loss. He started CTM in 2008 with a group of his fellow parishioners as a reaction to a number of corporate office closures in the city that left hundreds of white-collar professionals without jobs following the financial collapse. CTM provides a number of services, all of which are free of charge. The main feature is a series of public talks by career coaches, business executives, HR personnel, headhunters and other consultants working in the burgeoning "change management" industry. CTM also provides one-on-one mentoring and publishes "the binder"—a collection of materials about the contemporary job market that gives advice on virtually every detail of job seeking, from tips on state unemployment benefits, to networking techniques, to examples of how to answer a "behavioral interview question," a favorite genre among today's HR personnel.

St. Tim's, as parishioners call it, is located in an upper-middle class suburb that is home to many of the largest corporate employers in the city. Driving to the church, one passes corporate office parks with artificial ponds and fountains surrounding their large (mostly empty) employee parking lots. Strip malls and planned housing developments connect the office parks to the church. CTM meetings are held in the church's parish hall—a large roundish room with a vaulted ceiling, bell tower at top, and slightly elevated stage area at one end. The room features

10 to 12 round tables that seat 8 to 10 people. During the winter of 2012, when I attended CTM meetings regularly, these tables were often completely full. Participants tended to be in their late 40s to early 60s, mostly white, more men than women, and had a history of steady employment in white-collar professions. An unspoken norm in the group was “dress for success.” Men tended to wear business suits or collared shirts; women in dresses, makeup, and jewelry. Over the course of several months, I learned that many had never been unemployed before and lost their jobs through downsizing, outsourcing, and automation.

Weekly CTM meetings follow a standard structure. Jim begins with a prayer that typically invokes God’s help for the participants’ successful and “speedy transition.” Then he announces how many people CTM has helped “land,” as Jim calls finding employment, often adding that, “Many of them were just like you and were sitting exactly where you are sitting now. And they landed.” Jim then asks participants for any good news of progress toward employment. Participants announce a call back, an interview, an offer, and occasionally even a new job, which is met with rounds of applause from the audience. When he sees a lot of new faces in the audience, which happened frequently during my observation, he delivers some version of the same sobering speech about job seeking in the contemporary economy. “There is no more employment for life,” Jim says, leaving a dramatic silence in the room. “Everyone will be changing jobs throughout their working lives, probably several times. This is not the last time you will be in this position.” So, Jim then explains, “You need to arm yourself” with new skills and techniques, which is what CTM is designed to do.

As the last part of Jim’s speech suggests, while CTM advertises itself as a space for developing skills and techniques and a clearinghouse for cutting-edge advice, its real function, I

observed, is to motivate. This is done primarily by presenting an emotionally evocative conception of the future, which is meant to replace the career model that many participants arrived with, in order to spur them into constructing a new narrative about their lives that will “work” in the new economy. CTM draws on a specific, highly formalized ideology of positivity, connectedness, and forward movement to construct this vision of the future, grounding its claims in the burgeoning “positive psychology” movement and the so called “new science of happiness” (Ehrenreich 2009; Wallis 2005). The speakers I saw at CTM meetings, for example, included a former “headhunter” for a Fortune 500 company turned career coach, a networking consultant, a former member of CTM who has become a career coach, an executive coach at one of the nation’s largest commercial banks, a sales consultant for a local consulting firm, a life coach and therapist, and two HR managers for large corporations headquartered in the city.

The ideology of positivity, connectedness, and forward movement—and how it connects to a new conception of the future—was presented most clearly by Kathy Kerr, an executive coach at a large commercial bank and member of the International Coaches Federation, the official licensing body for the burgeoning field of career and life coaching. Kathy matches the demographic of the room. In her mid 50s, graying blond hair, and dressed in a business suit, she begins her talk by telling her own story of job loss. Having been laid off twice, moved her family across the country twice, and worked for three years as an unpaid intern in the HR department of a local university to get to her present position, Kathy tells the audience, “I’ve been in your shoes. I know how hard it is to be out of work.” On the positive side, however, she realizes now that “I didn’t really like those first two jobs anyway. I wasn’t happy.” Even though she had to struggle as a part-time worker with no pay for so many years to get where she is today, her



perseverance has paid off. She is now able to “do what I always wanted to do—work with people, help them transition through work problems.” With this story, Kathy draws a portrait of the grand time map of the new economy—precarious employment that puts the onus on the job seeker to carve out his or her unique path in life, which lies in stark contrast to the old plan of the lockstep career.

As Kathy does here, other speakers encouraged participants to see the positive potential in this new pattern of time. Bill Goldman, a former headhunter for a Fortune 500 company, put it this way:

Your next job will only last for three years. The day is gone when you can give your career to your employer. He doesn't want it and he won't take it. So, you need to take control of your career and do it yourself. You can either bumble through life from job to job, or you can make it so that jobs come to you rather than you having to go out and seek jobs.

While it is true that your employer will no longer watch over your career, guaranteeing its security and predictability, speakers emphasized that one can choose to see this as a source of liberation rather than anxiety. Rather than the death of the career, then, one can see it as no longer having to “give your career away” to someone who will not treasure it the way you do. The key to constructing a trajectory within this new time map, then, is to “make the jobs come to you.” As speakers repeatedly emphasized, one should always be “networking”—forming new connections and nourishing established connections—so that when the inevitable moment of job loss arrives, the roots of the next opportunity have already been planted. A good worker in the new economy, then, is by definition a permanent job seeker—one who is constantly sowing the seeds for another career move, even when he or she appears to be securely employed.

Speakers were adamant that a positive, energetic, forward-looking psychological orientation is the essential characteristic of the successful permanent job seeker. As a career coach, Kathy Kerr's task is to tell job seekers how to cultivate this attitude. She did this first by contrasting coaching with "counseling." "Counseling is past-focused," she notes. "It focuses on fixing what's wrong from the past and moving away from what is causing pain." She explains that, "some of you may need counseling before you can benefit from coaching. If you find that you are fixated on the past—losing your job, feeling depressed, not able to forgive yourself or your employer—[...] if you have this kind of anger, fear, etcetera, it could be hard to move forward without getting counseling first." She notes that it is only when "you've been able to put the pain of job loss behind you" that you can move on and are ready for coaching. "Coaching," she then explains, "is future-focused." It is designed to help people move "toward a goal, toward success" rather than away from past pain. Coaching is thus "action-oriented."

Using an overhead projector, Kathy then displays a graph of what she calls the "change curve," a popular tool used throughout the change management industry to coach individuals through the "emotional rollercoaster" that comes with work transitions. Kathy notes that "job transition is a series of emotions" and that the graph depicts "the natural course of emotional change for human beings going through a hard transition." Some "go through this change easily," progressing smoothly to a state of hope and exploration, while some get "stuck" in the attitude of anger, resentment, and resistance. As a coach, Kathy says she judges where clients are on the curve by "the degree of positivity and forward looking attitude in their speech." Speech is an important indicator because "the stories we tell ourselves can limit us." "The negative stories we tell ourselves are usually based on some kind of fear. Fear prevents you from moving

forward.” Kathy gives the example of a client she had who lost his job and was very angry toward his employer. “He just couldn’t seem to get past this anger.” He was “focused on the past,” and could not move forward to a state of hope and exploration. So, Kathy suggested he “write that employer a letter telling him exactly how he feels. But don’t mail it.” The audience gives a wry laugh. “Bring it back to me for our next session.” At the next session, she asked him to read the letter out loud. Then, she suggested he take it to a nearby stream, tear it up, and throw it in the water. “This is a pretty extreme technique,” she admits, “but this symbolic, behavioral demonstration allowed him to stop looking to the past and move through the change curve.” She adds, “When you worry, you’re giving your power away.”

As Kathy emphasizes, positive emotions are the only things that truly propel one forward, not because they allow one to better enjoy life, but because they are strategic. As another speaker put it, “You have to project confidence. Even if you’re having a bad day, fake it! The attitude you have during your job search affects everything you do. If you are down and negative, it will come across in every interview and every networking opportunity you have.” Portions of several CTM meetings, then, were dedicated to techniques for generating positivity. During a talk by Jolene Jenkins, for example, who is a life coach and therapist, participants were asked to place the tip of a plastic straw between their front teeth and hold their mouths in that position while she gave a short talk on the neuroscience of positive thinking. After a few minutes, we were asked to remove our straws. “How do you feel?” Jolene asked. “Can you feel your smile? It’s still there, isn’t it? You might even feel a little happier. That’s because the act of smiling has made your brain think you’re happy. Your brain is saying, ‘If I’m smiling, I must be happy.’” Jolene explained that numerous “scientific studies” have shown that putting one’s body into states

associated with positive moods can actually create those feelings. Jolene then distributed a handout entitled “Confidence Boosters,” which included twenty-eight techniques for generating a positive mood “from the outside in,” that will improve your job search. For example, “Dress up every day—you never know who you will run into—people you meet/know need to see your ‘success persona.’” Or “Write emails with only positive words—eliminate ‘no’ ‘can’t’ ‘won’t’ ‘couldn’t’ ‘not’ etc.” That this handout is titled “confidence” boosters and not “mood” boosters is indicative of the instrumental attitude toward positive feelings being encouraged.

Returning to Kathy Kerr’s presentation, to conclude, she emphasizes that everything she has said is “just talk.” What is really important is that one becomes “action-oriented” and designs a plan with clear goals that can be worked on day-by-day. Above all other activities, Kathy encourages job seekers to put most of their energy into networking. CTM speakers often presented networking as the most effective technique for getting a job because, as one speaker put it, “people hire people they know and like.” However, networking was also discussed as a kind of good in itself, as an activity fitting the positive, outgoing, forward looking professional job seeker (Spillman 2012). The hallmark of a good networker, CTM speakers emphasized, is one who can give a good “elevator speech”—a ten to thirty second “sales pitch” for oneself as a job candidate that participants are encouraged to have at-the-ready when they encounter a networking partner. A good elevator speech, participants were told, is one that “conveys energy,” “leaves a lasting impression,” and, above all, “sells yourself.”

During one meeting, for example, the audience was asked to break into small groups and perform their elevator speeches and then rate each other on a 1-10 scale. Evelyn, sitting across from me at a table with six other participants, began her speech so quietly that it was difficult to

hear her in the din of the room. After the others politely ask her to speak up, she nervously began her speech by saying, “I used to be a data analyst for the FAA and I’m looking for jobs as a data analyst.” She hesitates after this sentence, stops, and says, “I’m sorry. I can’t really do this.” The group immediately jumps in to support her. One group member gives some advice. “I noticed you started by saying, ‘I used to be’ and not ‘I am an analyst.’ You should say ‘I *am* an analyst’ because the other way is a bit too rearview mirror.” Others agree and ask her to try again. She begins her speech again, her voice now slightly trembling. “I am an analyst,” she peeps. Becoming more upset, she begins to tear up, much to the group’s horror. Others begin to console her and advise her to “write it down and rehearse it in the mirror until you can give it confidently and without thinking about it.”

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Far from a simple shift from a long term to a short term experience of the future, the dissolution of the career time map is the decoupling of workers’ experience of their immediate present from their previously established expectations of the future. This violent break in the fabric of social time leaves workers in a state of irrhythmia. From a state of stagnation, they have the unenviable task of regaining existential momentum outside the familiar timescapes of the workplace and with a loss of confidence in the solidity of the career time map. Job seekers negotiate this quagmire by bootstrapping many of the tried-and-true disciplines of clock time culture—regularity and density—to a new “post-career” schematic of the long-term future as flexible, temporary, and precarious. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, clock time plays an important role in job seekers’ experience of career loss because it allows them to build a “temporal bridge” between old and new time maps.

Job seekers do not engage in these acts of projectivity alone. The new precarious future is actively packaged and sold to them by spokespersons for the very corporate system that handed them their pink slips in the first place through an ideological narrative of positivity and movement (Smith 2001). Without explicitly saying it, much of the advice that surrounds job seekers is not intended to give them practical techniques for landing a job, it is intended to help them acquire a new narrative that can turn the self from a vertically oriented thing that moves up and down on a pre-fabricated career ladder, to a horizontally oriented thing that moves forward from one self-made opportunity to the next. As Richard Sennett (2000:134–135) observes, “Narrative in general does the work of healing through its structure...not through offering advice. [...] The reader of a novel, the spectator at a play, experiences the particular comfort of seeing people and events fit into a pattern of time; the ‘moral’ of narrative lies in the form, not in advice.” Under the guise of advice-giving, job seekers are encouraged to naturalize the precarious time maps of the new capitalism by re-synchronizing the three levels of future projection that have been so brutally scrambled by job loss. They are presented with a new “pattern of time” that features a tightly-constructed set of links between the grand time map of flexible, precarious employment, the “limiting” past-oriented narratives one should avoid, the “liberating” future-oriented narratives one should cultivate, and a set of protentional strategies to keep one moving forward by generating a surplus of positive feelings. As Jim noted during one of the final CTM meetings I attended, “What I hope you get out of this, if not anything else, is motivation. I hope this brings you energy that can then be brought to everything you do. Because if you don’t bring energy to the job search, employers will notice. No one wants to hire someone who is negative and dragging.”

The experiences of those who have lost their jobs after the 2008 financial collapse crystallize some of the most dramatic transformations to social time that are occurring as a result of the new capitalism: the institutionalization of new “precarious” time maps, which feature discontinuous and staccato trajectories of movement through the life course. My analysis reveals, however, that only certain temporal conditions make it likely that workers awaken to the new forms of social time that surround them. These conditions are a) a period of *long term* unemployment and b) the presence of a wider cultural conversation about the economy that creates a collective mood of crisis. This is evident in the fact that respondents I talked to who had experienced minor breaks in employment in the past *did not mark these prior moments as particularly significant turning points*. It is only in retrospect that the most recent instance of *long term* unemployment is designated as a moment of reckoning because enough stagnant, irrhythmic time has passed to make this moment shine ever brighter in their memories as “when everything changed.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, their suspicions that things are different were then reinforced through a widespread public discourse about a “Great Recession” by nearly every newspaper, magazine, radio program, and website devoted to the economy, not to mention the numerous job seeking support groups that formed during the height of the financial collapse.

These trends have the potential to affect anyone who desires to work with some sort of constancy and predictability. But many workers who remained fully employed while they saw their colleagues displaced, and even those who experienced only short breaks and hops in employment as they lived through the financial collapse, may still be blind to the rise of precarious time maps because they have not been exposed to these trends through the crucible of a moment of reckoning. As many workers I talked to had done during prior economic troubles, it

may be surprisingly easy to continue to operate as though the career time map is intact, even when there is evidence all around of its corrosion. Understanding how sequences of employment and unemployment unfold through time, then, is crucial to understanding the effects of the boom-and-bust nature of the new capitalism on the culture of time.

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<sup>1</sup> It is certainly significant for the culture of time, then, that the 2008 recession featured higher rates of long-term unemployment than any prior recession in the modern era. Moreover, while layoffs disproportionately affected the young, working class, and ethnic minorities, rates of long-term unemployment were similar for nearly all demographic groups (Elsby, Hobijn, and Sahin 2010). If one found oneself unemployed during the 2008 economic collapse, then, you were more likely to experience long-term unemployment than at virtually any other time in recent US history.



## **5 Moral Labor in Unsettled Times**

Now that I have outlined some of the ways the timescapes and time maps of working life are changing under the conditions of the new capitalism, I will turn to the larger existential questions about “moral labor” in the new economy. The three cases I examine present an excellent opportunity to evaluate the relationship between the temporalities of global post-industrial capitalism and moral labor because they include a wide variety of workers who are exposed to those temporalities in different ways. Through an extended comparison of the three case studies, I can, therefore, better specify what aspects of those temporalities affect meaning making and how for different kinds of people. What possible selves do the new temporalities of global post-industrial capitalism invite the respondents in this study to create? To what extent and how do these new timescapes and time maps challenge the culture of busyness, which has long provided a stable (if troublingly imperfect) moral compass?

### **The Buzz of Finance**

If there is one group of Americans I talked to who seems, at first blush, to be thriving in the unsettled temporal conditions of global capitalism, it is financial professionals. As I discuss in Chapter 2, financial professionals experience a great deal of stress because of their spatio-temporal ecologies—dealmakers because of the duration, irregularity, and urgency of time, market workers because of the density of time and the disembedding/abstraction of space. For many I met, however, these conditions also provide opportunities for certain kinds of “flow experiences” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) in the form of what Henri Lefebvre (2004) calls

isorhythmia—when rhythms seamlessly merge, producing feelings of unity, togetherness, connectedness, and collective energy.

Dealmakers I talked to, for example, discussed a kind of glorious, almost heroic aspect to the temporality of their unpredictable, marathon-like work sessions, which made the stress much easier to bear (at least in the short term). Isorhythmias occurred most frequently for respondents during the end of a deal cycle, known as a “live deal.”<sup>1</sup> Many respondents I talked to were working in powerful Wall Street firms at the epicenter of the financial collapse of 2008. During these hectic months, which saw the collapse of “too-big-to-fail” firms, like Bear Stearns, and the downgrading of gigantic corporations, like General Motors, respondents reported being constantly involved in live deals, sometimes many simultaneously. Gillian, now 27-years-old, worked as a junior analyst at a large asset management firm right out of an Ivy League university and was promoted to associate after the financial collapse. “The weekend we worked on the Bear Stearns collapse,” she recalls, “I got to the office Friday. I didn’t leave until the middle of Sunday.” After telling her I cannot imagine working that many hours straight, she promptly replied:

But it was awesome! It was so exciting. We were working on something that was on the front page. It was a really big deal. It was really secret. We were ordering food every four hours until like 2am, then you’re meeting [again] with coffee. There’s actually a picture of me that I have with my—I showed up Sunday morning. [...] Everybody went home to take a shower except me, cuz I was the most junior and somebody had to man the phones. My associate came back and took a photo of me asleep with my coat over me with everybody’s phone in a circle around me. [...] The stressful times were often the most fun.

Meaningful work allowed Gillian to string together energizing tasks that ensured her attention would remain consistently entrained with the rhythm of the deal.



*Gillian catches some sleep midway through the Bear Stearns deal*

Tom, head of a private equity group in a large investment bank, expressed similar thoughts, this time using an analogy to describe dealmaking that felt more appropriate than his earlier references to military combat.

Part of it is there's *esprit de corps* that comes from just knowing you've got the whole night. [...] You're not the only ones [working late]. It's not uncommon to see a group of people there, certainly at 10 at night, sort of having dinner together, the last one not leaving until 4 or 5 in the morning [...]. It's like a college dormitory. [...] There is a lot of horsing around and giddiness, but also a sense that you need to get something done because you've got an exam.

Being desynchronized from the normative cycle of Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 actually facilitates the meaningfulness of work during live deals, Gillian and Tom suggest, because an abnormal temporality feels special, exotic, and sometimes even luxurious. A sense of temporal prestige is conferred, in part, by cultural representations of deal making as “really secret” and worthy of the “front page,” but also, more subtly, by forms of lavish expenditure, such as ordering food from restaurants every few hours. The ease with which clock and calendar times are pushed aside,

then, depends upon the ability to produce isorhythmias during work. High cultural and economic temporal prestige provides more favorable conditions for generating this rhythmic structure.

Through moments of isorhythmia, then, financial professionals are readily able to see the timescapes of finance as meaningful. As one trader I talked to put it, “[Traders are] always operating with these unknowns—a lot of balls in the air, flying around. And one of them can pop up at unexpected times. A lot of people...hate that uncertainty. I love it. That’s a high for me, sort of. That’s the buzz.” As another trader I talked to responded, when I asked him what he likes about his job, “I have a different day every day. When I get up in the morning, I have no idea what the market is going to bring.” Unlike for many workers in the new capitalism, for most financial professionals I talked to, this fragmentation is stimulating. In this way, they seem to have transcended the culture of clock time to a certain degree. They are constructing moral labor, not out of predictability and regularity, but out of flexibility, uncertainty, and irregularity.

On the face of it, then, it would seem that financial professionals have it good. Compared to most, they stand at the top of the structures of power and sit at the crest of the waves of financialization that are driving global temporalities from above. As Sennett (2000:63) puts it, “The true victors [in the new culture of capitalism] do not suffer from fragmentation. Instead, they are stimulated by working on many different fronts at the same time; it is part of the energy of irreversible change.” As I discuss next, however, things may not be this simple. Even among financial professionals, financialized timescapes present certain problems for constructing moral labor.

*Masculine versus Feminine Time Maps*

Nearly all of the women in finance I talked to, both dealmakers and market workers, expressed a great deal of anxiety surrounding the long term time horizons of their work— anxieties that were not expressed as frequently nor as forcefully among the men I interviewed. Gillian, for example, who just moments before in our conversation had gushed about the euphoria of the Bear Stearns deal, surprised me when she said she has left her position at the investment bank, despite having won an extremely competitive promotion, to pursue a business degree and enter the field of health care management. When I asked her why she chose to leave, she said:

It was partly seeing there are almost no women where I work. I was the second woman in my group. I am the only female associate... I saw the woman I worked for, who I have a lot of respect for, who's brilliant. She had a baby. She came back. We were working on a very intense hostile transaction. It was tough. She actually drew a line and said, 'I have to go home at 6:30. I have to see my son.' There was a part of me that said she wasn't available between 6:30 and 8:00 and that meant that I'm home an hour and a half later... I wanted her to succeed, but I was kind of, 'Okay, that's really annoying.' It was really inconvenient. I'm glad she saw her kid, but I realized that I was in an industry that work-life balance is tough because it's not actually how smart you are. A lot of it is how hard you work. And because it's a service business, it's how available you are. Do I really want to be in an industry where I'm valued on how available I am versus my individual contribution?

When Gillian looks around the office, she does not see a temporal order that is made for people like her, who aspire to have children and be there to take care of them. She sees people who are judged by how “available” they are, not by how “smart” or “hard working” they are. “I was not seeing a future for the sacrifices I was making,” she notes. “I was seeing what it did to people who are managing directors, who have really made it, and being like, ‘I see that you’ve made it and I don’t like your life.’”

Echoing Gillian's sentiments, Casey, a 25-year-old MBA student and former M&A

analyst, recalls:

For a brief period of time, there was some overlap where I was there at the same time as this woman who did have a couple of children, but she was more senior, so she had managed to make it work for a certain amount of time. She had managed to work out this deal where she didn't travel, which—I'm not sure how she did that. And then she also could work from home on Fridays. So that worked for her. Obviously, she had to get to that level where she had a certain amount of history and credibility and respect, I think, in order for her to get that. But she ended up being let go during a period of layoffs.

Seeing this affected Casey profoundly. She began to think about her own viability in finance as a person with aspirations to have children. Just like Gillian, Casey ultimately decided to leave investment banking and pursue an MBA in order to move into a non-finance related area of business. "I just felt like life is so short," she muses, "and I did like the high intensity environment, and I liked that I was learning a lot, and I felt like it was interesting on some level, but I just didn't think that was sustainable."

Older women I talked to who had worked their way into upper level management positions seemed to embody Gillian and Casey's worries. I met Marybeth, CFO of the asset management firm I observed, on a particularly hectic day. She was hunkered down in a temporary office because she works from home three days a week (excluding weekends), and was on the phone chewing out an IT specialist when I walked in. "I needed that file at like 6 this morning. It's 8:30 now," she yells, "Call me when you get it fixed." Now in her mid 50s, Marybeth tells me that she was a dance major in college but quickly realized, "as much as I love the arts, I don't want to be a waitress the rest of my life." She switched to a business major and found out, to her surprise, that she was good at it. She began in banking right out of college, first as a bank teller, and worked her way up the career ladder into senior management.

Several years ago, she arranged to work only four days a week at the office so she could spend more time with her two children, one of whom has special needs. She has found that these four days rarely cut into her to-do list, so, she had an office built at home, outfitted with the same extravagant three-monitor setup used throughout the firm. She frequently spends long hours at the office and then works at home during her “long weekends” away. “I’ll be at home and I’ll log on just to check email and do a few little things, and before I know it, the entire day is gone. One day, my daughter told me, ‘Mommy, we’re really sick of seeing the back of your head.’” Her daughter was referring to the fact that, when Marybeth is home, she is buried in her computer screens. Hearing this, Marybeth has attempted to “put some solid boundaries on my screen time. I can log on at 6, but that means I have to log off by 10.” But this causes other anxieties. Marybeth holds up a sheet of paper with a printed list of to-do items on the front and handwritten list of other to-do items on the back. She says that this list is “just totally overwhelming. Some of these things are like a year old right now. It’s totally out of control.” She says, “It’s amazing how fast time goes. If I could get 36-hour days, I would definitely take them and I would still only use four of those hours for sleep.”

I ask Marybeth if she feels like the men in the office are having these problems too. She says:

It’s harder for women with kids because I don’t have a wife at home and I don’t have a full-time nanny either. I could get a full time nanny if I wanted, but I don’t. I want to raise my kids. So, I’m very aware of the fact that I just can’t always do everything that I want to do or everything that the men can do. But, you know what? So be it! Just don’t pay me as much! [laughs wryly]

*Do you feel like you’re being penalized because you’re a woman who wants to raise her kids?*

I can't think about it that way. That may be the case, but I don't have the upper level management view of things enough to know if that is the case. But, like I said, so be it. I'm going to raise my kids. That's why I hate performance reviews, though. I never know what to put. I mean, what am I going to tell them: 'Started this thing but never finished it.' No! You can't put that! [laughs wryly]

Marybeth is being modest. As CFO of one of the most powerful financial firms in the world, she is now at the top of her game by anyone's standards. Still, she tells me about a state of constant anxiety caused by two arrhythmic temporal orders: on the one hand, the rhythms of financial dealmaking, which demand constant availability and a sense of urgency. On the other hand, the rhythms of care, which she feels also demand constant availability and a sense of urgency. From the outside, Marybeth seems to have made this tension "work," by negotiating a flexible schedule, but on the inside, it feels unsustainable. "Anxiety is what I live with all day, every day," she notes.

The kinds of arrhythmias discussed by Gillian, Casey, and Marybeth have been well-documented by other scholars, so much so that I frequently found the scholarly language of "work-life balance" to have cycled back into respondents' common vernacular (Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). But work-life "imbalance" was not the only type of arrhythmia discussed. Some women diagnosed the texture of work time itself as being somehow out of step with their ability to feel feminine.

Elizabeth, for example, is now in her early 30s and finishing an MBA, but worked as a sales desk analyst during her 20s before being let go due to downsizing after the 2008 financial collapse. Having just graduated from an Ivy League university, Elizabeth found herself in, as she describes it, "the best place, the place everyone wants to be"—the sales desk of the high-yield corporate bonds group in one of the most prestigious investment banks in New York.<sup>2</sup> She was



the first analyst ever hired by this prestigious group, one of two women in a group of twelve, and, at just 23-years-old, “the youngest person in the group by over ten years.” Like other market workers I talked to, Elizabeth describes the density of time on the digital trading floor as “exhausting,” but also found the prestige of the lifestyle rewarding at first, particularly because she was one of the only women. “Not only was I really young, but I was one of the first women and, back then, I was single. It put me in a position to really shine because people were watching me because I was different.” Working in sales, Elizabeth spent many of her nights entertaining clients. “It’s just heavy drinking, heavy partying, heavy money spending,” she describes. I ask if that part of the job felt like work to her. “It didn’t when I was younger,” she responds. “I really enjoyed it when I was younger... That’s one of the things I really liked about the job. I liked the ability to form relationships outside of work, and many of those people have really helped me in my career.”

After four years on the sales desk, however, the high-flying lifestyle began to wear on her. On one hand, she found that she had to manage her emotions within the hectic environment of the trading floor in such a way that she began to feel artificial. She notes:

There kinda was a double standard when women would get really angry. People would get really scared. Whereas men, when they get angry, it would be much more like they’re just getting tough.

*You had to cultivate something less emotional?*

You have to be very even keeled. As even keeled as it’s possible to be, even though the work environment is anything but that. You have to keep as much of it under the surface. As calm a mind as you can.

Additionally, Elizabeth notes, the types of emotion management she engaged in outside the office also made her feel like she was compromising herself. “I got sucked into the culture,

which, when you're in it it's fun, but, my friends who were on the outside [of finance] I think would probably tell you that I became a bad person. Maybe not bad—well, not a bad person, but I was not the best version of myself, I will say.” I ask Elizabeth what she means by “not the best version” of herself. She says:

I started to talk like men [laughs]. I was sorta crude and I swore a lot. I was one of the guys, you know what I mean? It was not feminine. I was not feminine. So, I was in a place that I think any guy who met me would've been like, 'That's not the right person for me.' [...] I did not have a steady boyfriend for four and half years. I had short relationships, but none of them worked, I mean, for whatever reason—that I just was so self-absorbed in what I was doing and that community. Gwen, who's my friend who's [also] in the group, she had the same problem and she actually left the group shortly after I did. Since we've left, I mean, she's now married with a baby, and I'm moving to Chicago, living with my boyfriend. I've been in a serious committed relationship for a number of years now. Whether that's New York...or it's the job, it does seem somewhat coincidental.

Inside the office, Elizabeth reports having to dampen her emotions lest she be perceived as overly emotional and “scary,” even though men were encouraged to express their emotions. Outside the office, she felt as though she had to act in ways that were, for her, “not feminine”—late nights, heavy partying, short-term relationships. It is only in retrospect, Elizabeth explains, that she realizes “I had been unhappy for many years before I was laid off, but [at that time] I would say I never looked long term at anything.” Only now, having stepped away from the temporalities of finance, can she see, “I never really gave any thought to what I was gonna do [in the future], but I think I knew I was never going to be doing this forever. If I was just gonna do it until I burned out and then retire at 35. I mean, who knows?”

It is not surprising, then, that Elizabeth sees the loss of her job as, “a bit of a relief, honestly.” She explains:

I spent a good chunk of time becoming what a lot of people would've said was successful. I mean, I made a ton of money. I did well in the job and I liked it. I bought an apartment

when I was 26 years old in New York... I don't want to say it was one hundred percent bad, it just got to be really exhausting—unsustainable, I think, after a while. [...] I know I'm not the only person that thinks that. I mean, there's a reason that there are not—Gwen, who was on the desk when I started, once she had kids, she switched to a different role. It wasn't sales anymore. It's very, very apparent that women don't continue, and they don't stay in the job after they have families.

Like a lot of market workers I talked to, Elizabeth describes becoming immersed in the intense, staccato temporalities of the trading floor. These temporalities began to shape other parts of her self beyond her work persona, leading to a kind of chronic short-termism in her personal life as well. She saw this with other women in her office too. Interestingly, unlike the men in her office, she and other women experienced these temporal textures in terms of a loss of gender identity, which could only be negotiated by leaving the market environment altogether.

In short, though the isorhythmias of finance—the “buzz” as one trader called it—allow some to transcend clock time culture and create new visions of moral labor out of flexibility, uncertainty, and irregularity, these time maps feel unsustainable for women who continue to be held responsible for upholding traditional temporal cultures surrounding care, emotionality, and relationship building, that place higher premiums on a longer term, gentler, less staccato rhythmic structure for action. The more short-term oriented time maps that spin out of the rhythms of finance, then, feel out of step with respondents' visions of the good life as feminine.

### *Phantasmagoric Moral Labor*

Are men in finance Sennett's “true victors” in the new capitalism, then? In many ways they are, my research suggests. By and large, the men I spoke to like their jobs and feel engaged by the chaotic temporalities of finance, which enhance, rather than detract from, their gender identities. As one trader put it, “I think you tend to find that our industry, it's fairly male-

dominated. That's not to say that a female can't succeed, but I think you have to have that guy's guy mentality. And I suppose, if you don't fall in that camp, that makes things a little bit more difficult." Moreover, though a few of the men I spoke to did mention problems with "work-family balance," these worries seemed less pressing for them because they had someone who ran the household in their absence. Male traders, in particular, described being able to more satisfactorily (though not ideally) engage with their spouses and children at night and on weekends.

I did notice, however, a curious turn of phrase among the (male and female) market workers at the asset management firm I observed, which provides some suggestive evidence that there may be challenges to constructing moral labor, even for the most privileged among these workers. Again and again bond traders and analysts I talked to used phrases like "I would hope," "I would think," and "I would guess" when referring to themselves as having demonstrated expertise and success on the job. Alex, for example, a 28-year-old analyst, mentioned to me that having a quick and capacious memory is important for his job because analysts are often asked to recall and disseminate very specific numbers about company financials on the spot. Then, in an off handed way, Alex remarks, "I would like to think I've gotten better at this—that people see I can do a better job at analyzing and disseminating company financials." At first, I thought nothing of Alex's turn of phrase. But then, I heard it again just moments later when talking to Allison, another young analyst. Having interviewed her several months earlier when she was just out of the intern program, I asked Allison to reflect on how things have changed since our last conversation. She says, "The hardest thing for me has been the learning curve." Like Alex, she has had to gain a working knowledge of dozens of companies and then become better at

producing that information at a moment's notice. "I would like to think," she says, "that people see how I've gotten better at that."

I then began to hear versions of this turn-of-phrase among traders too. When I asked Trevor, a derivatives trader, how he knows when he is having a good day, he first gave a wry chuckle, as though to say, "How does anyone ever know if they're having a good day." He then replied:

For the trader, it is very hard to know day-to-day how you're doing. Maybe I wanted to get something at a certain price and I got it at a better one. That would be good. Or tomorrow, for example, I've got a meeting with a big-time guy. If that meeting goes well, then that would be good. But it's hard to know until further down the line if you're really doing well. I would hope that in the long term, I am doing well.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the digital trading floor produces a phantasmagoric experience of place, where the reality that matters—the manipulation and exchange of financial information—is concealed within the disembedded and abstracted workplaces that provide access to that reality. Financial reality is not given; it can only be apprehended by learning to see it as "really-real." Market workers' frequent use of the phrase "I would think" in regard to their work performance, suggests that this phantasmagoric relationship to the objects of their work may extend to their experience of moral labor as well. Market workers have some idea that they are doing good work, but it is always partially concealed. Experiences of excellence must be painstakingly constructed from multiple subtle signals over time. It is only after many of these subtle indications have accrued—a good trade here, a good meeting there—that workers can gain some understanding of themselves as good workers.

Trevor drove this point home for me in a later conversation when I told him that I had been riding around the country with truck drivers. Not answering any particular question, he

mused, “I imagine that truck drivers’ work is more...” he hesitates, then continues, “I don’t want to say simple, but, it’s just—a trucker probably knows when he’s done a good job because he got the stuff there on time.” He pauses again and then tacks back, “On the other hand, I imagine truckers are limited in what they can possibly do. They can’t drive six trucks at once. They can’t haul a billion pounds. There are limits for them. I *can* drive six trucks because I have technology and other traders, analysts, and all that.” Though Trevor may have difficulty seeing moral labor, in the end, the disembedding and abstraction of time-space are more than worth it because they allow him to dominate the market. “That’s why you join a big shop like this one,” he remarks, “because you can scale things up almost infinitely. I mean there are limits, of course, but they aren’t that rigid and clear.”

### **Running Hard**

As Trevor so clearly observed, truck drivers have a much different relationship than financial professionals to post-industrial capitalism. For one, though drivers are involved in the exchange of economic objects, these objects cannot be easily disembedded and abstracted. Drivers cannot make a derivative of fifty tons of frozen chicken. Objects in a truck driver’s world are more concrete, in the sense that they are subject to all the frictions of the real material world. This is so, despite the fact that the pressure to move these objects with a high degree of liquidity is continually increasing within the epoch of flexible production.

Truck drivers also lack the economic, cultural, and structural prestige that financial professionals have. Economically, they have seen an overall decrease in real wages since the 1970s—precisely the opposite trend of the financial services industry (Monaco and Habermalz

2011). Culturally, truck driving is stereotyped as a “working class” job, occupied by drug addicts and loners. Despite the fact that drivers refer to themselves as professionals, and do in fact require a great deal of specialized training, their job is symbolically marked as a relatively “unskilled” position—anything but a profession. Structurally, drivers have less control over the labor process than financial professionals. Drivers’ movements are entirely dependent on the schedules of shippers and receivers, are monitored closely by managers using GPS technology, and are highly regulated by the federal government. These key differences mean that truck drivers are exposed to the speed and fluidity of the contemporary economy in a more direct, unmediated way and without the feelings of control and satisfactions of economic reward that financial professionals experience.

### *Indignity*

As I describe in Chapter 3, truck drivers live syncopated lives, rushing in the off beats of everyone else’s daily rhythms in order to deliver goods to American consumers when and where they want them. Unfortunately, despite providing this essential service to the economy, many drivers I spoke to talked of a pervasive sense that the sacrifices they make each day for the job go mostly unrecognized. Their perception is that most Americans see them not as the “backbone of the economy,” but as “just some dumb trucker” whose job is so simple, so mindless, that anyone could do it. This message comes from a variety of sources but is conveyed most clearly by two parties: the FMCSA and shipping and receiving facilities.

Many drivers I talked to find that the inflexibility and one-size-fits all nature of the HOS regulations contradicts drivers' conception of themselves as professionals. One veteran driver put it this way:

The thing I resent the most is that the people in the FMCSA treat us all the same. [...] I've got...over 30 years of driving, close to three and a half million safe miles. But yet I'm treated like I'm a rookie. I know my limits. If I want to drive 11 hours today, I'll drive 11 hours. I know I can lay down 700 miles. Some days, if I want to drive a thousand, I should be able to say, "I can do a thousand miles today." No problem. I know what my limits are and when I'm tired. I guess the point I'm trying to make is: I don't need a babysitter.

Many drivers I met see the FMCSA as a kind of "big brother" figure. One driver noted how other types of professionals who, for example, work in an office are not treated with the same degree of scrutiny over their time. They can extend their workday to fit whatever task or project needs to be completed. "Take for instance—you're in your office and you need fifteen or twenty extra minutes to finish your day. You call your wife and say, 'I'm going to be fifteen minutes late.' [...] That's our workday [too]. You just say, 'Thirty minutes is what I need to get done.' But yet it comes down on us monetarily." This driver notes that, just like knowledge work, truck driving is task-oriented. Success in the job is marked not by completing a shift but by completing a delivery. Yet, unlike knowledge professionals, he points out, truck drivers are not given the same degree of temporal flexibility. If a driver finds that he needs, say, fourteen-and-a-half hours to make it to his destination, he risks a fine. As one driver put it, "We have so many people [who] want to squash that thumb down—like big brother or daddy wanting to squash that thumb down on his son in order to make him act straight." He resents being infantilized in this way. "If you take the pressure off, and let us, the professionals do what's right and do what's safe, we're going to do it."



While many drivers I talked to had resentments toward the FMCSA, some just took the HOS for granted as “the way things are.” However, there was not a single driver I encountered who had nice things to say about shippers and receivers. The brief exchanges drivers have with clerks and dock loaders are a painful reinforcement of the sense of indignity they feel more generally. The most poignant of these experiences occurs during the frequent long waits that happen without justification. As one driver put it:

[Shippers] show complete disregard for my time. They don’t know what I’ve been through in the last few days to get the load there—that I’ve gotten no sleep. So when they say things like, ‘We’ll call you [when the load is ready]’ and give you a nasty look when you ask how long that might be, I get so pissed.

Especially problematic is an obvious arrhythmic relationship between motor carrier firms and shipping facilities that exacerbates drivers’ feelings of powerlessness. Clerks and loading dock employees are typically paid by the hour, so there is little incentive for them to work fast and to keep track of the speed of individual loads. For drivers, by contrast, each minute spent not moving is potential revenue wasted. As a result, drivers frequently experience disrespect in the form of aimless waiting. One driver recounted delivering to an upscale supermarket in downtown Chicago this way:

They force you to sit on a hard bench for four, five hours and wait to unload when you could be out there [in your truck] sleepin’. [...] Would you like to sit on a hard bench for four or five hours...and watch these people unload you and taking their time doing it? And joking around? ‘Here’s a driver, who cares about him?’ [...] Anymore, nobody appreciates us, the work we do and the hours we put in out here.

The problem here is structural—a mismatch of incentive systems—but the lived experience of that timescape is deeply symbolic and infused with moral emotions. As one driver commented, “It wouldn’t take much to make waiting [at a shipper] better for us. Just common courtesy, like if [shipping clerks] could just give me some kind of estimate—doesn’t matter if it’s 4 or 10 hours, I

don't care—that's still better than, 'We'll call you.'" Drivers understand and accept the many arrhythmias of the logistics system; however, that these are continually pushed downstream to the driver without justification feels disrespectful because, more often than not, drivers are held responsible for smoothing over these inefficiencies using their own bodies.

### *Concrete Moral Labor and the Run Hard Ethos*

It would seem, then, that truck drivers have it bad. They lie at the bottom of a status hierarchy within a flexible logistics system that dictates their every move. As Sennett (2000:63) notes, the spontaneity and uncertainty that may give those at the top of the economy a buzz, "become more self-destructive for those who work lower down in the flexible regime." Again, my research suggests a more complex picture. Despite the indignities of the job, many drivers I talked to remain proud of themselves and their work. Many love their jobs. These drivers constructed moral labor around a conception of themselves as "running hard." "Running hard" means many things for drivers—a willingness to drive fast, drive far, sleep and shower irregularly, take fewer breaks, take a difficult load when no one else will—but adds up to a kind of ethic of rugged perseverance. The run hard ethos allows drivers to construct a conception of themselves as tough, street-smart problem solvers who are willing to get the job done even when the risk is high and the reward low.

What is most remarkable about the run hard ethos is that it is made from many of the same temporal norms that make up the culture of busyness. For example, when I asked Paul, a 50-year-old driver with 15 years behind the wheel, what, if anything, excites him about the job, he quickly replied:

A part of me wants to say that I really like the—if it doesn't seem odd—the challenge of it. Because, to me, I take a lotta pride in the fact that I haven't been late with a load. Not ever. And to be able to sorta do what it takes to, on a day-to-day basis, pick up a load and get it where it needs to be and get it there on time. Takin' into consideration all the issues that we've talked about here today—the drive and the fatigue, the traffic—and still on a daily basis do a good job. I take a great deal of pride in that.

As Paul indicates, the task of delivering freight to a precise time-space coordinate is deceptively difficult. Regardless of an external reward, completing this task with excellence can be intrinsically rewarding. Reveling in the challenge of constant punctuality, the clock time discipline *par excellence*, is one of the signs that a driver has cultivated a professional attitude. As another driver noted, “I actually like the 14-hour rule, in a way, because it makes you plan everything out that much more precisely. It rewards those of us who are good at problem solving.”

Other drivers constructed dignity around the most ancient virtue of the culture of clock time: vigilance. “I feel like I’m a better person inside the truck compared to outside the truck,” one driver mused. “I’m more of a conscientious person. I’m aware of my surroundings more. I guess it’s almost the same thing when you’re a parent. Like when I’m with my daughter, my eight-year-old. [...] I’m not as loose as I normally would be because I gotta be aware of everything around me.” Drivers frequently discussed watchfulness and the ability to focus their attention, especially through periods of boredom, combined with an ability to make quick, potentially life-saving decisions as key virtues for which they are particularly proud.

It’s just having that—what’s the word I’m looking for? Knowing what other drivers are gonna do before they even do it. It’s like you can sense it, you know?

*Like intuition or something?*

Peripheral vision or whatever they call that. [Turning his head back and forth] You just kind of keep yourself going back and forth noticing everything. Be observant; that’s all. I

couldn't tell you how many times I've backed out of something cuz I knew something was gonna happen. [My truck is] eighty thousand pounds—you could fucking kill somebody, you know what I mean?

As another driver remarked, “Whenever I’m driving behind a car and I see mom, dad and the kids in there, I imagine that is my family in there. I couldn’t live with myself if I killed someone with my truck.” Drivers frequently expressed deep respect for and a healthy fear of the power and responsibility of driving a massive vehicle around the general public. The kinds of skills required to conduct themselves safely in this environment—caution, unwavering attention—were a distinct source of pride. At least when things are going right, much like for financial professionals, driving even provided moments of isorhythmia for some drivers. As one driver put it:

You try to push yourself...and once you get going, then I develop a rhythm and a flow. [...] I get in the truck. Boom, four hours until my first stop. There for a half an hour. Okay. Boom, next stop. Five stops in a row and you feel like you can just go on and on and on. [...] That’s when you get into a rhythm. It’s like a quarterback. They’re throwing one pass after another. The receiver’s catching. He throws an incomplete, but no interceptions; then he throws five touchdowns in a row. [...] Once he gets into a rhythm, he’s like Johnny Unitis, Joe Namath, ‘Slingin’ Sammy Baugh, all those great ones that ever played the game. He’s got it all rolled up into one—can’t touch ‘em. Same thing with this job.

Truck drivers are anything but trapped in the rigid temporal structure of the HOS. Despite the indignities of the job, drivers I talked to were readily able to discuss their working lives in terms of becoming, slowly over time and with experience, excellent. Unlike some financial professionals I talked to, who had difficulty seeing when, where, and how they are becoming good workers, drivers had immediate access to the morality of their labor. This seems to be, in part, because their work is concrete. Unlike exchanging financial objects, delivering freight provides clear, tangible evidence of one’s capacity for excellence: you deliver freight on time or

you are late; you drive safely or you are reckless. In addition to this, drivers, unlike financial professionals, have a more direct relationship to clock time—the HOS regulations and its factory-like system of shifts—and therefore a more direct relationship to the culture of busyness. Cultivating ancient temporal virtues like punctuality, constancy, and vigilance is much easier when the temporality of everyday life is constructed around clock time.

### *The Paradox of the Body Revisited*

In terms of having direct access to a coherent cultural logic for constructing moral labor, then, truck drivers actually have it pretty good. But this comes at an extremely high cost. As I describe in Chapter 3, truck drivers are tasked with transmuting two incompatible rhythmic systems—clock time and freight time—using highly innovative corporal practices of “entrainment” that allow them to create the ideal level of focus and attention to deliver freight with precision and liquidity. Engaging in entrainment essentially means intentionally exposing one’s body and psyche to damaging (i.e. arrhythmic) stimuli. Thus, drivers must develop a *Reizschutz* (stimulus protector), which allows in only the right amount and kind of stimulus necessary to protect drivers’ sensorium from being overwhelmed, while still allowing them to perform their jobs.

Engaging in entrainment with the help of a stimulus shield is an effective way to deliver freight. It works. And for some, it even provides experiences of moral labor that feel authentic and gratifying. However, entrainment cannot be sustained for long before one’s body simply gives out. As Freud suggests, using his metaphor of the encrusted “vesicle,” while the stimulus shield protects drivers’ “inner core” from the potentially traumatizing environment that

surrounds them, this protection is secured only by sacrificing—i.e. “by it’s own death”

(Freud 1922:31)—parts of the “outermost layer.” For drivers, the outermost layer is the body itself.

The risks to drivers’ “outermost layer” was driven home to me when, after having spent several months around truck stops, I became aware of the fact that I could identify a truck driver from a distance by his walk. Encased behind the stimulus shield of their trucks, remaining, paradoxically, motionless in their seats as they careen down the road, drivers begin to develop a hunched posture and a stiffness in their shoulders, necks, and knees that results in a characteristic ambling, forward-leaning gate. This walk hints at other chronic conditions in drivers’ bodies that are better observed statistically. Drivers have, for example, higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and sleep disorder than virtually any other occupation (Dahl et al. 2009; FMCSA 2006; Sharwood et al. 2012). These “lifestyle risk factors,” as studies of driver health call them, are at least in part a result of routinely exposing the body to certain “necessary arrhythmias”—such as irregular eating and sleeping patterns—that are required by flexible shift work and are therefore voluntarily not filtered out by the stimulus shield. For truck drivers, then, a distinct challenge to their imaginations is not the morality of labor itself, but envisioning a working life of any kind once their bodies give out in their 40s, 50s, or, at best, 60s.

I met Tommy, for example, who is 48-years-old and has been driving for over 16 years, at a truck stop in central Virginia. Sitting in the small television room/café attached to the truck stop, I watched Tommy walk—slowly, hunched—from his truck, which was some distance away. Dressed like most drivers in jeans and a baseball cap, as he got closer, I noticed that Tommy has a graying, stubbly beard and walks with shoulders that are, like Chaim Soutine’s *Le*

*Patissier*, completely misaligned, one sitting several inches below the other. Striking up a conversation with him, I find out that Tommy is on an “unintended break,” because his dispatcher bungled his delivery time and got him there a full day late. He has now been waiting four and a half hours (unpaid) for further instruction on what to do with his late load.

Being indeterminately indisposed, Tommy was happy to sit and chat with me for several hours. Like a lot of drivers I met, when he was younger, he found the act of moving a tractor-trailer down the road at high speed exhilarating. Having finished a tour of duty in the first Iraq War, he worked a series of “little jobs,”—roofing, construction, food service—but “never could make anything go.” He attempted college for a year on the GI Bill but he says, “I just couldn’t do it.” Having no home, no vehicle, and no job, he realized that he could get all three by becoming a truck driver. At first, he loved truck driving because of the speed. “It makes you feel alive. You’re just waking up in the morning and it’s—and it just seems like all that pressure and everything, it seems like a release. You’re doing 100 miles an hour through California in the desert when you’re supposed to be doing 55. Just being a rebel. It makes you feel good.”

The exhilaration wore off for Tommy, he figures, after about five years of “running hard.” “I guess I progressively got older and I burnt out on it.” I ask him what made him burn out, he replies, “The pressure. [...] I’m under pressure ninety-nine-point-nine when I’m out here driving, and you don’t make the appointment, and they charge you for it, or you get a bad mark on your record, and you want to do good, and you’re on that timeframe, and under pressure, and...” He trails off and pauses. “Sixteen years of it. The first five, I could handle it, and then I think I just got overloaded. [...] Now, I’m just trying to stop and get out of this.” As I observed when he walked in, Tommy tells me that a big part of burning out is the toll hard driving has

taken on his body. “Right now I could probably...walk into a doctor’s office and him tell me I could go draw disability because of my shoulders. It’s just bone on bone. I ain’t got that much longer because of that. I’ve done all I can do.”

Unfortunately, like many drivers I talked to, Tommy is finding it difficult to get out of the industry now. During the last decade of running hard, he has accrued a number of speeding violations that now make it difficult for him to get anything other than long-haul jobs. “I had a plan. I haven’t been an idiot,” he says. “My plan was to get out there and get some experience and drive for two, three years—maybe five. Stay with the same company. Don’t get no trash on your record, speeding violations or whatever, stay clean and then go drive local jobs like UPS, FedEx, twenty dollars an hour, lifetime. That was my plan.” That plan has been put on hold again and again over the years, though, because he knows no other way of driving than running hard, which inevitably lands him with another violation. All Tommy can hope for, then, is to keep his record clean before his body wears out, so that he can clear his license and find another easier type of driving-related work, such as local freight delivery or dump truck driving. “It’s coming,” he says, trying to sound encouraging. “Something’s gonna change. I’m gonna try and find another kind of work for me to do before I’m way too old. I guess I’m already there, but maybe not.”

Like Tommy, many I talked to had plans of exiting the profession or, more often, “downshifting” into a (supposedly) mellower form of driving, such as local delivery. Too young and not financially secure enough to retire, but too chronically fatigued to keep driving for much longer, drivers must eventually come to terms with the fact that practicing entrainment by running hard, however meaningful it may be, presents an unsustainable time map. The body



cannot take it for very long. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, truck drivers share a similar narrative dilemma to the women financial professionals I met, though for much different reasons. Stretched between two antagonistic temporal orders, they have “flexibilized” themselves enough to make it work, but find that these acrobatics can only be sustained at a great cost.

### **The Entrepreneurial Self**

Unlike financial professionals and truck drivers, unemployed job seekers have a distinct “moment of reckoning”—the loss of a job—upon which they can hang a tightly constructed, linear, before/after narrative that seeks to make sense of a clearly discernable set of transformations to social time. Job seekers provide, therefore, an important “eventful” contrast to the more “epochal” forms of transformation found in the other cases. In addition to this difference, job seekers also experience post-industrial temporalities in terms of direct changes to the time maps for the life course, rather than in terms of new timescapes, which only indirectly imply larger changes to the narrative trajectories of their lives. Thus, job seekers allow us to examine how the post-industrial economy is reshaping conceptions of moral labor within “longer” wavelengths of social time—days, weeks, months, years, decades, and even the span of a whole human life—rather than the “shorter” wavelengths of seconds, minutes, and hours.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, job loss is about transitioning—from a state of irrhythmia or “protentional death” to a state of eurhythmia, from a career-based time map as a march up a predictable ladder to a post-career time map as a precarious exploration into the unknown. For many of the job seekers I talked to, this transition was facilitated and, more importantly, narrated by elite spokespersons for “corporate America”—HR professionals, change management gurus,

career coaches, and therapists—drawing on the ideology of positivity and the “new science of happiness.” This new time map encouraged them to shift the trajectory of the lifecourse from vertical and past-oriented to horizontal and future-oriented.

The job seekers I talked to, who were introduced to this time map through CTM and other job transition support groups, had a number of reactions. For some, the rhetoric of positivity seemed disingenuous. Janice and Cindy, for example, often attended CTM meetings, but I could never tell why. Perhaps it was just to get out of the house. They would often sit on the periphery of the room, arms folded, not participating. After one meeting, which had been about elevator speeches, I approached them to catch up since our interview. Seeing me come over, Cindy turns to Janice and says sarcastically, “Oh, he remembers us Janice, we must have had good elevator speeches.” Laughing, I ask them what they thought of the meeting, but they just roll their eyes and dodge the question entirely. Cindy begins telling me about last night, when she and Janice attended an information meeting about a local company that is hiring. Much to their surprise, the company turned out to be their former employer, the large managed health care provider. Janice thought they should leave at first but, Cindy exclaims excitedly, “I thought, oh no, I’m staying for this. I want to see what she says.” After the HR representative leading the meeting had finished her pitch for the company, Janice and Cindy began peppering her with tough questions, such as “How does your company deal with pressures to outsource?” The HR woman, getting red in the face, dodged the questions. Janice and Cindy grew more and more angry. By the end of the meeting, every time one of them raised a hand to ask a question, the HR woman would roll her eyes at the other attendees. Laughing hysterically to each other as they tell this story, Janice tells me, “That’s the most fun I’ve had in months. I guess I’m not moving on

the change curve!” Janice and Cindy clearly feel they have a right to their anger and that moving beyond it means admitting that what was done to them was okay. However, they struggled to find spaces where expressing and acting upon those feelings was welcome.

For others, like Linda for example, encountering CTM was like a spiritual conversion. At first, Linda connected with concrete protentional strategies, such as networking, rather than the ideological content of positivity presented by CTM speakers. However, the energy she gained from the eurythmia of networking has triggered deeper narrative changes. After describing some successful networking encounters that she had early on, she notes, “I have learned tremendously. [...] I no longer introduce myself as an introvert. I am becoming a people person.” Linda sees this as a positive change. “I am becoming a new person,” she smiles. However, she also notices a downside.

The con side of that is my friends don’t understand. They’re seeing somebody they don’t know. [...]

*They’ve noticed a change in you?*

A complete change. I have turned 180 degrees.

*Wow. Well, so tell me more about that. What are they reacting to? How are they reacting?*

[...] My best friend said, ‘I don’t know who you are anymore and I don’t know whether I like you.

*What is she reacting to?*

My outwardness. My ability to say no, my ability to—if there was a discussion and I didn’t agree, I walked away. I enter into the discussion now. I have a right to my opinion. I have a right to disagree with you and I’m not—I guess I was always being used. I let myself be used.

By engaging in the simple practice of networking, Linda feels she has unlocked new aspects of her personality—confidence, extroversion—that she did not know she had. This has led to an epiphany that has completely reoriented her outlook on the future more generally.

I think losing my position was the best thing that could have happened to me.

*Really? Because it's given you this, kind of, new perspective?*

I wasn't happy in the [old] position. It was a chair. I've learned the difference between a chair and a career. It's given me the opportunity to expand my horizons and it's allowing me maybe to be the person that I was always meant to be. [...] I can't have what I've known as a career. There may be longevity.

*When you land that next opportunity, do you think you'll have a different outlook once you've landed there? What will it be like, do you think?*

It won't be 60 hours a week. I will exceed my responsibilities, but not to the point that I've exceeded them before. I will not give my life for any career. *[Two second pause]* I say that, but if I were to start work tomorrow—I would hope that I've learned enough and I'm familiar enough with what I am now, that I wouldn't go back [to a corporate job]. Would I go back? I mean that's a what-if.

Though it is difficult to tell at this stage, it seems as though Linda is in the midst of a conversion to a new way of understanding the relationship between her narrative trajectory and what is possible in the time maps of the new economy. She has come to see her former self, which naively embraced the myth of the career but settled for a series of dead-end office “chairs,” as a pushover, someone who “let” herself be “used.” She will never again, she claims, “give herself” to something so ephemeral. On the other hand, there is more than a hint of doubt here. If hired by another corporation, she “hopes” she has “learned enough” not to give herself to her employer again. But that is a big “what-if.” The conversion is anything but total.

*The Entrepreneurial Attitude*

Linda's comment that "losing my position was the best thing that could have happened to me," may seem strange. I heard that phrase again and again, however, from job seekers. Throughout our conversations, respondents wanted me to understand that things are not as bad as they look from the outside—that, in many ways, their moment of reckoning was a blessing. At first, I thought this reaction was simply a regurgitation of the ideology of positivity that is so prevalent in the spaces where job seekers congregate. Upon further consideration, however, I realized that respondents wanted me to see them as "entrepreneurs" of a new future rather than "victims" of past injustice (Smith 2001).

Job seekers see becoming an entrepreneur as the only truly viable, morally legitimate alternative to the traditional career time map. By entrepreneur, many I talked to literally meant becoming small-business owners. But the idea of being an entrepreneur had other, subtler meanings. For some, it meant continuing to work in existing organizations, but protecting oneself from those precarious places by withdrawing feelings of loyalty and commitment, i.e. trying to "lay low," "keep my head down," and "look out for number one." I talked to Marlon, for example, just a few days after interviewing his mother Sheryl, who had recently been let go from her call center job at a large corporate bank after twenty years of faithful service. Following in his mothers' footsteps, Marlon, 26-years old and a recent college graduate, was fired from his position as a personal banker just a few months later. In addition to his own experience of job loss, seeing his mother, who was one of the bank's star employees, cast aside profoundly affected Marlon's view of what it means to be a good worker.

People feel that the hard work and loyalty that I give to a company is gonna be paid off. I don't think so. Now, am I saying that I'm gonna go work for a company and just screw a company? No. But my mom—man, as kids, anytime it was night and we were home, we didn't even have to ask where my mom was. She was working to 6, 7, 8, 9 at night. She

was never home [...] The company doesn't care! It's not like, 'Oh, well, she works all the time, we can't let her go.' [...] To me, it's not worth doing all the extra effort and stuff that is above and beyond your job to try to impress people, because, in the long run, it really just doesn't matter. 'Cuz if you're gonna get fired, you're gonna get fired. There's nothing you can really do except for do your job to 100 percent the best of your knowledge.

Notice the tension in Marlon's view of work. On the one hand, he has (grudgingly) embraced a post-loyalty, post-longevity vision of corporate labor. He saw what the expectation of reward for seniority got his mother and vows never to fall into that trap. On the other hand, Marlon cannot bring himself to, in his words, "screw" a company. As he puts it, one must still put "100 percent" into the job. How these seemingly contradictory attitudes are linked in Marlon's mind was not entirely clear to me, however, until he told me that he and his fiancé have decided to start their own business. "Now, when I work somewhere, I kind of lay low," he explains.

It's kind of like, you lay low, and you do what you're told, that's the way to progress in business, and actually, because of all that prior experience, it has led to me and my fiancé looking into starting our own business. Before it was—I never even thought of that. I never even thought of doing that, but now it's like—it's kind of like—I'm a *good* person, but that doesn't mean anything. [Employers] don't see it; they don't care about that. They don't care if you're there every day. So, I might as well go out on my own, start my own thing.

For Marlon, cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude toward work means withholding loyalty from an employer, *but not effort*.<sup>3</sup> Hard work still matters for Marlon, not because it promises the reward of higher rank within the time map of a career, but because hard work is the key to eventually exiting the status game altogether, which, in fact, turns out to be a ruse anyway. Much to Marlon's surprise, then, it is only outside the career time map that he can be appreciated as a "good person." Moral labor and career labor are now opposites in his mind.

At a deeper level, for some respondents, becoming an entrepreneur meant not just instrumentally protecting oneself from precariousness by becoming one's own boss, but

cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude as a good in itself. No one I talked to expressed this perspective more forcefully than Colleen, whom you will recall “left” her high-powered career in network television after feeling forced out by a glass ceiling and an exhausting work schedule. In one way, Colleen is an entrepreneur in the sense that she is well on her way to being a small-business owner—she is back in school to become a child and family therapist and start her own private practice. In another way, though, Colleen is an entrepreneur because of a profound transformation in her self conception. Reflecting on the years she spent climbing the status hierarchy in the cutthroat environment of network television, she says:

Media attracts people who want to have power, or they want to be seen to have power. And I definitely was attracted to the power aspect. I think this experience [of job loss] has put me in a place where I am interested in empowering others, not having power over them.

*That sounds like a profound realization for you.*

Well, that’s what I think God wants me to get.

*Do you feel like that’s a bit of a silver lining to all this?*

[Laughs] It is and it isn’t. I just got tired of getting socked and kicked and cut in the back and you’re hemorrhaging at the same time. It’s like, okay, how do I find the resolve to go on? And for me, Ben, the answer has been going back to being a Christian. It’s God. [...] What does God have to say about me? What is the purpose of everything I’m going through? What I got from that was, ‘Colleen, when you work for Me, when you’re under My employ, you have to know not only how to do the most intricate and complicated, but you also have to know how to do the most basic and pedestrian. That’s what this is about.

*So that message you’re getting is—what does that mean for you?*

When I look at someone, whether they are my client in the future or someone that I may meet...I will not—I will be more sensitive to looking at them not just in terms of just their credentials or just their resume or—looking beyond the fact of, ‘Oh, you’re how old and what are you doing?’ There’s a story there and there’s still a whole person there. [...] I’m a much better woman now than I was when I had a house and I had the media career. I have a greater heart, a great compassion, much more depth of soul than I’ve had previously.

*Yeah.*

So, do I love this experience? Absolutely not. [...] But I feel confident—ironically maybe to some people—that my future is bright. I have a lot to offer. I have a phenomenal brain. Like I said, I feel my heart has been enlarged towards humanity. The fact that I can step out of the box of what people tell you you’re supposed to do and live my life—there are a lot of blessings in spite of what looks like a pathetic circumstance.

Colleen’s views on moral labor are complex, tentative, and reflect the rollercoaster ride she has been on for the last five years. One thing is clear, however: she now aligns the concept of gaining power by pursuing a career with qualities like egotism, shallowness, and conformity. She sees her former career-driven self as one who only wanted to “have power over others,” who had no “depth of soul,” and who could only think within “the box of what people tell you you’re supposed to do.” Now, by contrast, she sees herself pursuing a more authentic entrepreneurial path, which involves “empowering others,” treating others as “whole” people instead of “just their resumes,” and feeling fulfilled in life even when though one’s job is “basic and pedestrian.” In short, Colleen has developed a rather robust critique of the career time map and, indeed, the culture of busyness itself. She has exposed its dark side. The culture of busyness, as much as it provided her with material rewards, predictability, and prestige, also consumed her, made her into a workaholic and a social climber who would rather dominate than connect.

As Marlon and Colleen demonstrate, the entrepreneurial attitude can take a variety of forms, but each shares a common logic. In the temporal vacuum created by the dissolution of the career, job seekers are trying to become a particular kind of person—one who negotiates precariousness and uncertainty not by finding stability and authenticity in the same old pre-made temporal markers of titles, promotions, and pay-grades, but by turning inward. No longer placing their self-conceptions in the hands of an untrustworthy employer or in the unpredictable



movements of the market, entrepreneurs attempt to find stability within themselves. So, in addition to turning the self from a vertically moving, past-looking thing into a horizontally moving, future-looking thing, the job seekers I met are also turning inward in an attempt to construct forms of existential stability that cannot be (and could never be) cultivated within the career time map, with its emphasis on conformity to predetermined channels of action. This form of life represents a critique of the culture of clock time.

### *Liberation or Coercion?*

While the entrepreneurial attitude is a distinct turn away from the culture of clock time, allowing some to experience even a sense of liberation, it plays right into the design of organizations that operate on short-term timescales and require disposable workers. Many of today's employers do not require loyalty to operate, and now entrepreneurially minded employees will no longer demand it. If they do strike out on their own, the low success rate of new businesses suggests that entrepreneurial job seekers are moving into an environment that is just as risky as corporate labor. This begs the question then: is Marlon and Colleen's gushing speech just window dressing? Is the entrepreneurial attitude merely a "post-hoc justification" for precarious capitalism, which will give them some psychological stability as they flit from dead-end job to dead-end job? Are job seekers who cultivate the entrepreneurial attitude not just their own jailers?

I talked to Linda again a year and a half after our first interview. Since then, she was hired by another corporation, this time a mid-sized corporate bank and, once again, let go less than a year later. The company had hired a new CEO and decided to dissolve the department she

was working in by moving her role tasks online. Unlike our first interview, Linda narrates her story with a kind of calm detachment that can only come from someone for whom work crises have become a normal state of affairs. Linda says she was “ecstatic” after first landing the job. It was a “perfect fit” and paid just two thousand dollars less than her previous position. The excitement wore off quickly, however. She describes an unsettling state of anxiety that arose immediately upon beginning work and that came from multiple sources. For one, she was taken aback by “how low my self-confidence had gotten” after five months of joblessness. Two, it “was always in the back of my mind that this position may be abolished and I wondered how I would handle that.” Three, she was “trying to learn a new job and new systems.” “I found that I was treading very lightly,” she notes. “I was waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

In many ways, the circumstances of this layoff were worse than before because her employer warned her *three months beforehand* that they were making plans to abolish her position. They would not let her tell her colleagues of the decision, however, nor did they give her an exact date of termination. During those three months, she was tasked with putting herself out of a job by establishing new online systems that could perform her work when she leaves. “I’d much rather have the immediate layoff or firing or termination or whatever you want to call it, because it’s done, it’s over with, and maybe I would have blamed the company more then,” Linda muses. “But how could I blame the company when they told me for three months what they were doing?”

As she suggests here, what is most interesting about Linda’s reaction to this job loss is her remarkable cheeriness and positivity. She tells me that she has now covered the wall in her bedroom with positive sayings, such as “Dare to try” and “If you risk nothing, you risk

everything.” This unrelenting positivity is something I noticed about Linda the first time we talked, so I asked her directly about it:

*People looking in from the outside would wonder why you aren't angry or more angry.*

I'm asked that question all the time. [...] It is my belief that my glass is half full, it's not half empty. I didn't do anything wrong. They didn't do anything wrong. It is a business decision. [...] It's corporate America. They're trying to do their best. They're in business to make money, especially a large corporation. They're not only reporting to themselves. They've got a board of directors, an executive committee, and they've got stockholders. And the stockholders say I want more money. So they do what they have to do. [...] But if it weren't me being let go, somebody else would have been. [The Company] is trying to rebuild itself. They have a new CEO. [...] So with a new CEO coming in, 'the new broom sweeps clean.'

Linda is not angry for a number of reasons. Number one, anger is not strategic. As she tells me later, anger “makes me a lousy interviewer” and less attractive to hiring personnel. More importantly, however, anger is inappropriate when the choices leading to her termination were impersonal and perfectly logical. It was a “business decision” that makes perfect sense within a shareholder value model of corporate governance. On yet another level, Linda is not angry because she no longer pretends that having a single job for life is necessarily a good thing. She tells me, “The number of people I've seen now who were in positions that they were not happy in, but that they didn't know they were not happy in is staggering. They lose their job and then do an assessment and then figure out that they shouldn't have been doing that job for thirty years anyway. And it's those people that are the positive ones.” So, unlike in our first interview, Linda sees herself continuing to pursue positions in, as she calls it, Corporate America. “I look at it positively,” she says. “When I get hired again, I will probably go through those same eight weeks of [anxiety] that I went through last time, but I may not be as scared this time. It may not

take eight weeks. It may only last four or six weeks. But if they let me go, it's their loss, not mine. Because, it wasn't meant to be. [...] Where I'm supposed to be, I will be."

Linda has cultivated what social scientists would call a "sociological imagination." She sees clearly how her "private troubles" intersect with the public institutions of capitalism (Mills 1959). Combining this imagination with the ideology of positivity, she manages to remain unrelentingly upbeat. From one perspective, we can see this attitude as a kind of "coping mechanism," or even more critically, a sign that Linda has been coerced into becoming the type of precarious worker that corporate employers desire. From another perspective, however, Linda's positivity is about calling the bluff of the "career mystique" (Moen and Roehling 2004). "I've been in the company and in the job where I hated it so bad but I persevered because of the security of it," Linda says. "I didn't want to be on the other side. I never want to go back to that type of company again." Indeed, toward the end of our interview Linda finally confides that, even though her most recent job was "probably the best gig I've ever had," she was actually beginning to get bored. "I was ready to move on, honestly," she recalls. "Because I was getting bored with what I was doing. So instead of moving on, I moved out. So, now I can start all over again [laughs]. You know, you knock me down; I get back up. I take little steps. And that's life." Sameness is boredom. Permanent change is life.

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What comes after busyness? As the institutional foundations of the culture of clock time have begun to erode, what types of moral labor are available to workers today? We can begin to answer this question by first simply appreciating how incredibly creative workers are in constructing moral labor. Far from a meaningless toil through a welter of chaotic rhythms,

respondents reveal that contemporary workers find it relatively easy to cherish certain aspects of a more “staccato” life. They develop deep commitments to particular virtues: fast thinking, flexibility, perseverance in the face of risk, or humbleness in the face of adversity. In the case of truck drivers, for example, many of these virtues—vigilance, diligence, punctuality—come from the culture of busyness and are simply bootstrapped to new circumstances. Whatever its specific content, workers aim to cultivate forms of moral labor, become excellent workers, and carry these skills into the deep future so that they can become good people in general.

It is on this last point, then, that I see important and troubling differences. Some groups of workers in the new economy seem to have greater success than others at carrying the virtues of moral labor they wish to cultivate into the deep future. Those with greater control over the labor process and who enjoy more power and prestige within society in general also seem to be able to better protect themselves from the short-term oriented, emotionally and physically taxing, and unsustainable nature of contemporary moral labor. Running hard, for example, is an emotionally compelling moral ethic, but cannibalizes the body. The entrepreneurial attitude makes perfect sense of the precarious time maps of corporate labor, but it provides no account for what happens when one can no longer work anymore due to old age or sickness. In both cases then, the time maps for moral labor seem to stretch only into the near-term future making it very difficult to answer one of the fundamental questions of the good life: “Where will I end up?”

This is not to say that powerful workers are perfectly at home in the new textures of time flowing through their workplaces. Deal makers and market workers, for example, encounter difficulties with anxiety. The immense financial risks they take on a daily basis and the toll that

stress takes on their family lives, especially for women, are deeply problematic. But, in the last analysis, financial professionals tend to be sheltered from the most worrisome aspects of contemporary time maps. They find it far easier to keep healthy bodies. Their jobs are less likely to be outsourced. When they are downsized, which happens quite frequently given the boom-and-bust nature of financial capitalism, they tend not to fall into long-term unemployment because their skills and educational backgrounds are so highly sought after. For example, when Elizabeth encountered the crisis of no longer wanting the “buzz” of the deal room and then, thankfully, was downsized, she used the immense wealth she had accumulated over several years as a trader to open her own business. When that business folded, she applied and was accepted to one of the nation’s best MBA programs. She parlayed that degree into a better job in finance, ironically at the same investment bank that downsized her before. She is now looking forward to what she describes as a much more “female friendly” work environment in the private equity division of the bank. “There are a lot more women in that business,” she notes, “things are just slower paced.”

After busyness come new kinds of “staccato” moral labor that embrace speed, chaos, flexibility, risk, and the short term. In many ways these virtues represent a deep critique of the worst aspects of the culture of busyness—its rigidity, its boredom, its bias toward wealthy white male lifestyles, and its obsession with status and hierarchy. There is good reason to suspect, however, that workers are trading one set of problematic relationships between time, work, and the good life for another. And it is not clear whether this is a trade up or down. Indeed, it seems as though many of the same demographics that benefitted most from the culture of busyness have found ways to benefit from the new cultures of time too. Moreover, it is unclear that any of

the forms of moral labor observed here are sustainable in the long term, which places doubt on their very status as viable alternative time maps at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents contrasted “live deal mode” with “pitches.” Pitching involves putting together a “pitch book,” which is a formal, polished, and bound set of sales materials given to clients. This book is typically prepared by junior level personnel and used by senior level bankers during sales meetings. Finishing a pitch book often entails rather mind numbing work for junior analysts, such as flipping through hundreds of pages of text and charts to make sure the margins, fonts, and layout are perfectly polished. These pitch books are often not read thoroughly, or even at all, when deals fall through in the early stages, which they typically do.

<sup>2</sup> Sales desks in an investment bank primarily create business for the bank by calling on investors to suggest trading ideas and take orders to structure and execute trades on clients’ behalf.

<sup>3</sup> Though most respondents I talked to saw the need to abandon loyalty in order to protect themselves in the new precarious workplace, not all did. Henry, for example, still finds loyalty essential to his self conception. “I still value loyalty,” he says. “I always will. Will I be as tolerant of some people’s methodologies? Maybe not [laughs]. In my eyes, I couldn’t help but be loyal. I just think that adds so much credibility and value to the person.”

## **Conclusion: Fragmented and Unsustainable Time**

Experience and expectation must come together for a person to make some sort of coherent life.

Or so it seems. As the historian Reinhart Koselleck (1985:270) notes, “The one is not to be had without the other. No expectation without experience, no experience without expectation.”

Constructing continuity between our experience of pastness—the quality of things having gone by—presentness—the quality of things being immediately available to our senses—on through to futurity—the quality of things being expected to arrive just over the horizon of the now—is fundamental to our condition as human beings. We are fundamentally temporal; and not only that, we are fundamentally unidirectional in our temporal existence. We do not have the same epistemic access to the future as we do the past. Therefore, what we have come to know from experience, and how those experiences condition our behavior right now, deeply shape what we think will be coming at us from that dark region called the future. This is why Koselleck (1985) has rightly referred to experience as a space and expectation as a horizon. The space of experience is that existential realm in which we pivot from past to future. We gather memories, hone skills, and develop habits from the past, turn toward the future with these tools, and cast up prognoses. These prognoses form a horizon over which we expect certain things to come. But, like a real horizon, the horizon of expectation changes as we move forward through historical time, as we gather more experiences that either reinforce or change the shape of our anticipations. Experience and expectation are thus two separate but necessary ontological orders. One cannot be reduced to the other, but each requires the other to exist.

Is this true? Workers today experience a deep tension between experience and expectation. The skills, habits, and knowledge collected from past work experiences are used to



pivot toward the future within the space of the workplace. As they pivot, workers attempt to cast up a horizon of expectation in the form of time maps—standardized narratives for the flow of their working lives into the future. However, the timescapes they encounter in the space of the workplace seem to make this pivoting action very difficult. Their turning is disrupted by the irregular, dragged down by subtle frictions, and sometimes even halted by the unthinkable. In some sense, then, workers today defy—or at least test the limits of—the temporal unification between experience and expectation that, it would seem, is so fundamental to the human condition. How are we to understand this tension? What is it, precisely, about the timescapes of work today that make it so difficult to access and deploy meaningful time maps? What are the implications of this situation for the types of policies governments and organizations design to make working life better? How, finally, does this situation affect moral life and the culture of work?

### **Fragmented Social Time**

The timescapes of the new economy I observed in this study reveal that social time has become fragmented. I would suggest, following Jeffrey Olick (2007), that workers today are experiencing what he calls “chronic differentiation”—the proliferation of temporalities that accompanies the differentiation and complexification of society more generally. We see a proliferation of rhythmic patterns in the space of the workplace, which makes experience feel disjointed, staccato, and churning. Workers are confronted by a kind of layering of old and new rhythmic patterns—clocks, deadlines, tasks, promotion schemes, the dinging of an incoming email, the buzzing of a cell phone, the ringing of an old desk phone, a mosaic of post-it notes,

rumors of outsourcing, a new work schedule that is different from the last three—none of which seem to be organized, or capable of being organized, into a coherent texture. These conditions make it difficult to get some sort of bearing on the future. As workers pivot in the space of experience that is the workplace they find themselves casting up all kinds of horizons of expectation, many of which dissolve in the very course of being projected. They reach for different time maps, none of which seem to adequately orient them for very long.

This is not a new process. The early German word for modernity—*Neuzeit*—literally means “new time” (Olick 2007). Indeed, chronic differentiation, and thus the increasing tension and even disconnection between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation, can be said to characterize modernity in general (Koselleck 1985). This begs the question, then, is this regime of fragmented social time something truly new, as a growing chorus of scholars are suggesting (Castells 1996; Hassan 2003a; Virilio 1995)? And if so, can we accurately think of it as a “post clock time” regime?

Looking at the lives of the respondents in this study, it is difficult to ignore the many new forms of life that are emerging. Financial professionals, for example, seem to have transcended the regime of clock time in some tangible ways. In terms of temporal practices, repertoires, and skills, they are, for example, using new kinds of technology to extend the human capacity for working memory in order to facilitate the global connectivity of the financial economy. At the discursive level, they are cultivating conceptions of moral labor out of the “buzz” of irregularity, risk, and uncertainty. In these senses, they are participating in a new temporal order whose main social carrier is global financial capitalism. This order has been variously termed “the network society” (Castells 1996), “the chronoscopic society” (Hassan 2003b), or “fast capitalism” (Agger

1989) and refers to the ways in which many individuals in contemporary societies spend much of their days in a kind of, as Manuel Castells (1996) puts it, “timeless-time”—a non-linear, staccato “real-time” produced out of the (incomplete) annihilation of global spaces by communications technologies.

Still, financial professionals cannot be said to have transcended clock time entirely. “Network time,” as Hassan calls it, is not truly “killing” clock time, or rendering clock time “timeless,” as some have argued (Castells 1996; Virilio 1995). Many financial professionals I met continue to regiment their days in terms of clock hours and continue to experience their working lives in terms of a career trajectory.

When scholars speak of the “triumph” of a new temporal order that is “conquering,” “killing,” or even “displacing” clock time, then, it is crucial to discuss *for whom* this process might be occurring. My research suggests that, while financial professionals do seem to have transcended the regime of clock time in some ways (though by no means entirely), I cannot say the same thing for those with lower prestige and less control over the conditions of work—those whose time is “given” to them by others. Truck drivers remain subject to a system of shifts that was imagined using a temporal logic little different from that used to manage a traditional factory workforce. Drivers’ work also remains embedded in a concrete time-space that involves the manipulation of real things. Consequently, they continue to construct visions of moral labor out of traditional clock time virtues.

That being said, truck drivers are still important participants in the flows of global capital, particularly the processes of flexible production. Thus, though the time that they work “in” reflects the culture of clock time, the time that they work “with”—freight time—reflects a

different timescape—one governed by competition over liquidity and flexibility. They find themselves in a highly fragmented temporal milieu, in which the frameworks used by management to shape workers' time and the flexibilized textures that workers must negotiate are pitted against each other. Truck drivers show us how workers' bodies often bear the brunt of this uneasy marriage between clock time and flexible time. If there is a new temporal order being produced by flexibilization, then, it is not necessarily found in a fancy piece of technology, which is perhaps a better symbol of the financialization of time-space. Flexibilized time resides in workers' bodies—in a repertoire of corporal strategies that allow workers to become entrained with new forms of time-space while still existing within ancient forms of time discipline. In short, though many of the features of the new temporal order I have examined are related to dramatic technological advancements like the Internet, this new temporal order also resides in less obvious places, such as the human body itself.

Job seekers find themselves in similarly fragmented temporal circumstances, but experience it on the level of the entire life course. They are caught between two narrative trajectories—the old career time map and the new precarious time map. In the beginning, job seekers rely heavily on traditional clock time disciplines to gain momentum and pick themselves up out of “protentional death.” Clock time is alive and well for them. After transitioning to a new future-orientation, however, they find themselves at the vanguard of thinking about new pathways for the life course, based on the ideal of an entrepreneurial attitude, that are seen to be replacing the ladder-like time map of the career. Thus, as Colleen and Linda so clearly demonstrate, not to mention many of the women financial professionals I talked to, the dark side to the career model and the culture of busyness that drives it, is being exposed by job seekers as a

myth and a ruse. Perhaps surprisingly, this is seen by many job seekers as a happy accident—a silver lining to the troubling precariousness in their lives.

In each case, the condition of social time is always one of fragmentation rather than replacement (Hassan 2003a:235).<sup>1</sup> The process of chronic differentiation, which modern individuals continue to experience today, is a continuation of a long history of temporal fragmentation that reaches back to the roots of modernity. However, as Olick (2007:27) rightly concludes, the condition of social time today “has now brought us to a new level of fragmentation. But it is a peculiar kind of fragmentation, in a sense more schizophrenic than democratic.”<sup>2</sup> The “schizophrenic fragmentation” that Olick describes stems in large part from both the proliferation of rhythms in the space of experience coupled with the deinstitutionalization of meaningful time maps. Workers are confronted by unprecedented spatio-temporal conditions at work but are equipped with skills, practices, and norms regarding moral labor that come from a different historical era and no longer have a solid footing in social institutions. Clock time temporalities scrape against new temporalities, creating dizzying rhythmic patterns. Faced with this moral dilemma, workers must create their “own time.” They must acquire new skills, learn new practices, and, for some, rethink what it means to be a good worker, in order to smooth the way for these changes. Time seems to fragment into a billion pieces. Chronic differentiation continues, then, but in a new register of heightened fragmentation that could just as easily be seen as a distinctly new historical regime of time.

### **Pressures, Imbalances, and “Flexicurity”**

Chronic differentiation has many pernicious consequences for health, safety, and emotional well being that were immediately observable among the workers I talked to. Like many other scholars who have studied the modern workplace, I saw troubling signs of the degrading effects of time-related pressure on workers' bodies and minds—chronic illnesses, high levels of anxiety, and dangerous work conditions produced by the imperative to rush. Many respondents I met also had trouble finding a sustainable relationship between work and home. Consequently, they often came up empty handed when looking for a sustainable pathway to developing themselves further as good workers.

There are immense financial costs to these pressures and imbalances. Employees tend to miss more work due to physical and psychological illness when they are highly stressed. They work less efficiently when putting in extremely long hours. They experience more conflict at home because of stressful work, the emotional toll of which also effects their productivity (Barnett 2004; Karasek and Theorell 1990; Ala-Mursula et al. 2005). Unfortunately, the employers of the workers I met tended not to see these costs, felt incapable of addressing them, or perhaps saw them as problems but put them aside as “the cost of doing business.” Even more troubling was the fact that these pressures and imbalances seemed to disproportionately affect those with less power and prestige. While I came to appreciate the many emotional and physical difficulties of working in the financial markets or making deals, for example, these workers (with the exception of many women I talked to) seemed better resourced economically, technologically, and culturally to deal with the timescapes and time maps of post-industrial capitalism—perhaps even turning them into sources of liberation and power. For those with limited personal resources, by contrast, there were few public resources for them to draw on to

deal with the chaotic temporalities of their working lives. It was not uncommon among the job seekers I interviewed, for example, to be forced to supplement their remarkably meager unemployment checks with odd jobs found on the Internet—such as a paid interview with a sociologist—or the kindnesses of religious outreach groups. To take another example, when the truck drivers I met ran into health problems, they were often forced to choose between unpaid sick leave or pushing through another month of driving in order to pay their health care bills.

On the issue of public resources, then, the fact that my observations are all made within a single country—the United States—makes a big difference. Of all the economically developed nations, America exhibits some of the weakest standards on worker protections combined with one of the smallest social safety nets (Hevenstone 2011). Employers are given generous room to hire and fire at will. They can expect workers to put in sometimes extremely long hours with few mandatory opportunities for paid leave. And workers are given very few public resources to draw on when these temporal conditions knock them down.

In Europe, by contrast, there has been a sea change in labor policies within just the last twenty years. It often goes by the term “flexicurity.” A contraction of “flexibility” and “security,” flexicurity can have many meanings and manifestations. In the most basic sense, however, it aims to combine two demands that are typically seen as antagonistic—the need for businesses to have flexible workforces (employees they can hire and fire at will) in order to remain efficient and competitive, and the need of employees to be continuously employed so they can have financial security and live happy lives. To meet the challenge of balancing these two forces, nations such as Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands have sought a compromise. They have tried to embrace the imperative of flexibility by placing few restrictions on employers

ability to hire and fire (though these restrictions are still higher than what is typically found in the US), but have offset the negative consequences for workers with a large social safety net, funded primarily through high tax rates on businesses and the wealthy, and government sponsored skills training (Bredgaard, Larsen, and Madsen 2006; Van Den Berg 2009). To put a finer point on it, these countries have told workers “We will pay you to lead more flexible lives” and told employers “You must pay to have it your way.” The jury is still out on the degree to which flexicurity is working, particularly after the financial collapse of 2008, and whether or not these types of policies can be translated outside a Northern European cultural context, but there are some promising signs (Van Den Berg 2009).

Whatever its likelihood for success, the rise of flexicurity places a new set of questions on the horizon about the *culture of work*, which demand a more sustained examination than has thus far been the case. If we have the political means to design policies that embrace things like flexibilization, financialization, and the creation of precarious time maps, at the same time that they protect employees from the troubling risks and uncertainties created by these processes, should we do it? Should we abandon the industrial, clock time regime—with all its emphasis on regularity, density, and the security of a career ladder—for a gentler, more humane chronic differentiation? Up to now, the dominant voices seem to answer “Yes.” Leading sociologists and social policy experts are beginning to recommend flexicurity-like strategies even in the US, where there seems to be little political will. Phyliss Moen (2005:205), for example, notes that, with employers’ increasing demand for a flexible workforce, “outmoded conventions and stereotypes constituting the career...operate as a real impediment.” She advocates the creation of “new policies and practices” and “a new frame of reference that incorporates greater



flexibilities.” These new policies will prevent workers from dipping into long term unemployment as they make jumps, breaks, and pauses in their working lives. The implication, then, is that perhaps embracing flexibility by offloading some of its risks from individuals to public institutions would allow a cultural ethos like the “entrepreneurial attitude” or “running hard” to thrive even in the long run because it is backed by robust protections.

I am quite sympathetic to this view given that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the career model—indeed, the culture of busyness itself—has long been a (wealthy white male) myth for those on the margins of society (Moen and Roehling 2004), not to mention a source of existential angst even for those who did fit its structure during the “golden age” of the 1950s (Whyte 1965). As I have continually stressed: the culture of busyness is nothing to romanticize. Particularly for the job seekers I met, having a much larger net to fall into when they faced the unthinkable moment of, say, having their jobs outsourced, would have gone some way toward relieving their anxieties of finding work again. It might, moreover, make the speeches they receive from representatives of corporate America to “be positive” actually sound like reasonable encouragement rather than an indirect way of saying “you’re on your own.” Additionally, it would allow job seekers to put time and energy into upskilling, rather than finding odd jobs to make ends meet or, worse yet, settling for lower paying, lower skilled jobs, many of which lend themselves to outsourcing or downsizing anyway. In short, there is more than enough evidence to suggest that embracing flexibility and making chronic differentiation easier to negotiate for workers is a strategy worth pursuing. If flexicurity strategies show signs of being effective, policy-makers should seriously pursue them.

If the sole focus of our interventions is on helping workers cope with the immediate crises of post-industrial temporalities, however, I worry that we may be losing sight of the bigger picture. The predominantly a-cultural and a-historical view of post-industrial labor out of which flexicurity strategies have been born tends to downplay the ways in which the old industrial time maps have long grounded workers in a centuries-old moral institution—the culture of busyness. As I have argued throughout, the dissolution of the career, for example, is not simply the dissolution of a socio-economic structure—an arrangement of employment relations in time-space—it is the dissolution of a moral order, which turns the life course into fragmented jumps and pauses. A life course of discontinuous, staccato stretches of moral action—even if it is coupled with generous social safety measures—presents workers with puzzling existential questions about the good life. Moreover, strategies like those found in the flexicurity model are almost entirely directed at mitigating the negative effects of the new *time maps* of post-industrial capitalism. They pay little attention to *what people actually do at work*, and therefore tend to overlook important transformations in the *timescapes* of the workplace. The workplace is often treated as a black box—a placeholder for resource accumulation—rather than an actual social space. The new textures of time that workers face today, then, are hard to see from the bird’s eye view of labor markets favored by flexicurity advocates and are therefore missed in their policy recommendations. A bigger social safety net does not give truck drivers, for example, a more regular sleep pattern or prevent their dispatchers from seeing them as logbooks rather than people. Many of the temporal dilemmas of the new capitalism exist within seemingly “traditional” sectors of the labor force, which may look from the outside as though they are unchanged.

In the last analysis, then, the problem of time today is just as much ethical and cultural as it is structural and economic, and just as much about what people actually do at work as it is about the life chances created by certain employment patterns. In focusing only on one side without the other, then, I fear that we miss the richness and perhaps the most worrisome aspects of the problem. The problem of post-industrial time has implications that reach far beyond the workplace and labor market to the very question of moral labor and what it means to lead a good life in this historical moment.

### **Unsustainable Moral Labor**

“The conditions of time in the new capitalism have created a conflict between character and experience,” writes Richard Sennett (2000:31), “the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives.” Sennett’s worry, one that I and a number of other observers share (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003; Gergen 1991; Huyssen 1995), is that, as the space of experience becomes ever more fragmented, creating ever more difficulties in casting up horizons of expectation, individuals will find it increasingly difficult to develop deep moral commitments to a vision of the good life. In the absence of a stable, predictable, unified connection between the textures of social time that shape our habits of experience and the maps of social time that make sense of our expectations, our ability to imagine the contours of the good and put into practice a sequence of actions to get us there is set adrift. Thus, people are less capable of seeing themselves in terms of continuous narratives that provide coherent answers to some of life’s biggest questions: How did I get here? Where am I going? How do I get there?

For those scholars who have deeply considered this possibility, the news could not be worse. Sennett, for example, concludes that we live in an era of diminishing or, as he puts it, “corroded” character. In his framework, character is “the long term aspect of our emotional experience.” “Out of the confusion of sentiments in which we all dwell,” he notes, “we seek to save and sustain some; these sentiments will serve our characters.” If there is little opportunity to experience stability and predictability, Sennett warns, we become less capable of knowing “what is of lasting value in ourselves.” We loose our grasp on some of the fundamental temporal virtues that a figure like Benjamin Franklin, for example, would hold up as beacons: loyalty, commitment, the capacity for “delayed gratification for the sake of a future end” (Sennett 2000:10). In a similarly dour tone, Ulrich Beck (2003:25) and his colleagues have suggested that we are seeing the “birth of the quasi-subject,” in which “rational action no longer constitutes nor guarantees a secure social order.” “Life is no longer planned along a line that stretches from the past into the future,” notes another observer (Rosa 2009:100), “instead, decisions are taken from time to time according to situational and contextual needs and desires” (see also Agger 2011; Hassan 2003a; Huyssen 1995; Virilio 1995).

These are doom-and-gloom claims. Putting all these critiques side-by-side, one gets the impression that people are becoming, inevitably it would seem, short-term oriented and therefore, as harsh as it sounds, morally shallow and confused about why life is worth living. Like many critiques of this sort, however, they are painted with rather broad brush strokes—indeed, they may be more in the spirit of shocking the reader and inspiring outrage than accurately diagnosing present circumstances.<sup>3</sup> In making such brash claims, which are couched at a very high level of theoretical abstraction, however, I fear that critics of the new capitalism

have mistakenly made synonymous the durability and predictability of moral action with moral depth and authenticity *tout court*. In this sense, they are speaking from the point of view of the culture of busyness—the spirit of the very temporal order they claim to be autopsying. Their critiques are ultimately nostalgic.<sup>4</sup> We cannot forget, however, that just a few decades ago other social critics, analyzing society from a similarly high level of theoretical abstraction and with similarly broad brush strokes were making similarly dour claims about the “culture of conformity” produced by the rigid and predictable temporal order of clocks, schedules, and career paths (Lasch 1979; Whyte 1965).

In making a critique of post-industrial time, then, I want to stay as close as possible to interpreting the actual words and actions of the workers I met. If they were given the time and space to sit and think abstractly about their lives, something that they unfortunately rarely get the chance to do, what would they say? Among those I talked to, one word stands out more than any other to describe the deepest worries they have about their working lives: unsustainable. This word dripped from respondents’ lips in interviews, revealed itself in respondents’ relationships with one another, and expressed itself in respondents’ bodies. What could they mean when they say or suggest with their actions that their working lives feel unsustainable? On the face of it, it means that respondents desired temporalities that are more “long-term,” i.e. practices and narratives that are not geared toward next quarter’s sales report. But that is just a surface notion. On a deeper, more existential level, there seems to be a hunger among the workers I met for “legato” temporalities—timescapes and time maps that string the moments of their days or the episodes of their lives into something more continuous and coherent than the fragmented slices of time they are typically faced with. As I have stressed all along, time has long been and

continues to be a source of moral dilemma in modernity. This dilemma, however, continues today on new terms of debate. Where earlier debates over the problem of time were couched in terms of exhaustion from conformity to an unrelenting, mechanical rhythm, today, the debate over the problem of time seems to be more about the absence of coherent rhythms at all, which creates conditions for moral action that feel *unsustainable*.

In the face of unsustainable moral action, however—and this is an extremely important qualification—respondents are *not bereft of moral action itself*. They carry on building life projects, continue to make deep connections with others—often over the shared anxieties of their flexible lives, in fact—and continue to envision what it means to be good. They are creative. They quite easily learn to form moral sentiments around “staccato” things—the “buzz” of the deal room, the machismo of “running hard,” the entrepreneurial liberation of skipping from job to job. The problem for the workers I met, then, does not seem to be some sort of meaninglessness or moral depthlessness that is the result of only being able to live in the short term. The problem is that just as they begin to form moral sentiments and construct visions of the good life, which they fully intend to carry with them into the future, things change. Their moral action is halted again and again by interruptions, frictions, and unexpected crises. Like other critics, then, I also find that the new capitalism frustrates workers’ attempts to build sustainable narrative trajectories for the self. But I want to emphasize that *this is not the same thing as dissolving the capacity to build character and engage in moral action*. Respondents develop deep and passionate commitments to certain practices and narratives of the good life, but they cannot seem to sustain them for very long before they encounter a new set of circumstances. They live expecting legato, continuous moral action amid conditions of staccato experience that

continually shipwreck those expectations. This is a disorienting moral universe, but a moral universe nonetheless.

The most worrisome aspect of moral labor in the new economy, then, is not that people are becoming incapable of developing character, but that the characters—the time maps—that this new economic regime encourages workers to construct have a kind of “cannibalistic” relationship to the self in the long term. The staccato timescapes that provide (often deeply meaningful and authentic) experiences are by definition, by their very rhythmic structures, not capable of encompassing the whole human life. They presume the self will, and indeed must, change sooner or later. A constantly changing self has become an imperative. Respondents, therefore, seemed to always want *in addition* to the “buzz” of their fast and flexible lives, something a little less chaotic for the mind to focus on, a little bit easier on the body as it ages, a little bit softer on the heart as it is tossed among moments of reckoning. They want these things, not because workers feel bereft of meaning in their lives, but because *in addition* to the chaos, they could desperately use some calm.

The moral predicament contemporary workers find themselves in raises some frustrating questions to which I feel bereft of good answers. Is there something intrinsically worthy of preservation in a more continuous and “legato” rhythm for moral labor that might compliment and offset the worst implications of the new forms of social time? If the answer to this question is yes, does that mean that a more conservative attitude is the only appropriate one? Would it be better culturally to turn away from the brave new world of financialized, flexibilized, precarious employment, reinvigorate the temporal regime of regularity and density, and extend the career model to those for whom it has always been a myth? Or is the conservative attitude just a

romantic delusion? Is there a third way? However we answer these questions, they cannot be addressed through labor market policies and other structural changes alone. On this existential level, the solutions we seek to the problem of time today must be cultural. We must address the moral dilemmas of a life lived after busyness.

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan uses the word “displacement” to characterize the relationship between, as he calls it, “chronoscopic” (late modern) and “chronological” (early modern) time. Like “replacement” or “annihilation,” this also seems too strong a word to me. The relationship is one of layering, tangling, and scraping—coexistence with a great deal of tension.

<sup>2</sup> Olick (2007:27) goes on to use a lovely set of musical metaphors for describing this sense of fragmentation, which fits neatly with the set of rhythmic terms I have developed in this study. “From the homophony of Church eschatology to the polyphony of national-statism to the polytonality of multiculturalism.”

<sup>3</sup> These critiques are troubling to me, not because of what they say about individuals in the new economy, but because they so rarely refer to actual experiences of real individuals. Even Sennett, who derives his critique from extensive interviews with workers, rarely provides the reader with direct quotes or field observations. But this is precisely what workers deserve--a levelheaded critique that seeks to accurately portray, in respondents’ own words and through their own experiences, what precisely is wrong with present circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> To his credit, Sennett’s is quite reflexive about and seeks to avoid his own tendency to be nostalgic for the industrial temporal order (for example 2000:106). In my view, however, nostalgia still comes through in his analysis.



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