**Time Denied: Late Stage Capitalism and its Temporal Effects**

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**ABSTRACT**

When talking about how cinema is affected by late-stage capitalism we have to look at the overall meaning of the film. But on occasion, these films incorporate stylistic but also temporal context. In this paper, I will use a traditional and contemporary phenomenological approach not just on the temporality aspect but the over the condition of cinema in late-stage capitalism. I will use *Children Of Men* to open up the ideas of how time within itself such as Heideggerian terms. Such as the single shot sequences can not only reveal to us how time can be disjointed from the comprehensive understanding of personal time. Also the use of narrative as a vehicle for disclosing and the emergence of the true nature of the world and the state that it is in. Not just Being-in-the-world but the actualization of how late-stage capitalism brings about this disconnection with time and ontological narrative.

Within this tension I will unpack it so we can see how time is both suffering from reification in the terms that Georg Lukács establishes and how being present-at-hand create a natural tension were capitalism exploits our own disjointed time but film is able to capture it in a manner that is not only presentable but it relates even though all experiences are unique in this fragmented reality.

**1.**

“It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.”   
― **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,***The Little Prince*

When we experience time in our own interactions it is a bit difficult to replicate since the methods of documenting these interactions according to our relation to the world in the time are hard to nail down in one complete piece. But thanks to the development of socio-economical conditions there have been films that can mimic these experiences. There is a uniqueness in the unfolding of late-stage capitalism that allows for cinematic camerawork and narrative to show us how these events are shown even in one continuance stream. Such films as *Children Of Men* not only give us this insight but the added effect of a decaying system. But what about how we experience the past in the same manner? This changes the formula, memories can be manipulated for many reasons. If we look at the past experiences and treat them with the same way that I argue for, we can see that phenomenology can help us establish a narrative that is able to make us see the corruption that late capitalism engages in.

Further exploring this By using phenomenology as a method to establish what is happening in our experiences but also in what the film achieves. One such method is how the horizon of possibilities is presented to us in this view and not only able to match the narrative direction that the films that I will apply this method too but also express the value that living in late capitalism gives us. It would be rather strange to avoid the fact that our interactions with objects in our horizon changes from person to person and even from person to object. Such as recalling memories is affected how late capitalism limits these views.

What late capitalism does to reality and the corresponding ontology is tricky in the sense that we have been manipulated and further compounded into this reality by the possibilities in horizon presented to us. That does not mean that there are alternative measures but at the current state, it would be like forcing a square peg into a triangle slot. Georg Lukacs makes a good point of how capitalism is as much a cultural force as a socio-economic one. The atomization of workers and the workplace leads us down a path where life outside of work is not just time-managed but time-negated. Lukacs build on Marx's idea of reification\*, expanding that this is not merely turning something subjective such as "good work" or "time well spent" into concrete objectivity. Pushing this further, Lukacs explains how reification works by commodification such as saying that they have Thing-worldness examples such as properties, relations, and man-made work become independent to man. This is also a ‘special' type of alienation where not only is it above the worker who labored over it but something that is standard to the world. By telling us that society is alien to the everyday person. But this is also a way to view it as a misrecognition in the similar way that Edmund Husserl used the term. Meaning that every facet of our lives is controlled by this ‘objectivity’ rather than directly by the individual which is the case.

Late capitalism and its decay have turned reification into some sort of behemoth monstrosity that robs us of future possibilities and platitudes in such a way that it does not give us any other ‘hope’ or alternative. Slavoj Žižek explains that “It’s easy to imagine the end of the world — an asteroid destroying all of life, and so on — but we cannot imagine the end of capitalism.”(Children of Men, 2007) The way that capitalism makes us dependent is by giving us the only faculty of hope that is immediately on the horizon for us. Blocking out all possible ways of actually changing the circumstances that are in our control. This is why the current ontology is not compatible with true vision beyond our perspective. In the way that *Children of Men* does this is by showing us not only a dying world but one where all futures are non-existent. There is no future nor is their hope. This can be seen with the main protagonist, Theo's depression and alcoholism. The world is the bleakest of all possibilities and yet capitalism is not only chugging along in a manner that makes us seem to like it is going to stick around forever. Materializing itself into this dystopian need to harm and do destruction onto others. This is done in an astonishing manner where single-shot sequences are used such as the ambush on a country road. The sequence is 247 seconds long but feels much longer. This not only mirrors how we perceive the world but also how we experience time. In such a way that the events that are unfolding, present and to be determined to give us the self-awareness that is crucial in laying down how Husserl’s interpretation of consciousness and time will benefit us. For Husserl, consciousness is essentially a temporal flow of impressions that are constantly different but unfold according to consistent basic structures (Dead Time, 195). These experiences from the most simple to the complex depend on reciprocation of retention and protection.

When we look at how time is used to tell the story of *Children of Men* we see a pattern. The assembling nature of scenes changes the tempo in a manner that makes the overall film reflect time-consciousness. This is done by establishing power over time, this is very explicit in the film. How the government has a stranglehold on freedom but also time and its perception. The citizens in 2027 England become dependent on the government to tell them their personal time such as when ‘baby Diego’ dies this event is not just noted with the date of his birth but also the hours and seconds that have passed. Since he is the last child to be born after the mass infertility disease and essentially the last bit of hope that people in that world left. This creates a form of solitude that is not only person but metaphysical such as the Levinas' early account on how phenomenology once is shown through the lens of solitude is "..a form of individuation in which the subject is encumbered by its own unsharable relation to being and desires an escape" (Dead Time, 195). Even though Levinas is pushing for the subject to look for an ethical escape I would argue that the subject wants an ontological escape. This escape is not the usual existential method where the person seeks to bring their own meaning upon the world and themselves but rather one where the person becomes part of the world through their own introspection and *trying* to see a much clearer reality that ultimately is fragmented.

The ontological reality that late capitalism gives us is made out to be one where our own consciousness starts to interact with the world but only things that can be grasp provided from wage labor. We know when to the time stamp in and when to time stamp out before we even realize that time has passed. Once the power over time is expressed in this way we can start to see our work reflect in the manner in which we are supposed to feel gratified. Meanwhile, many things such as xenophobia, racism, and prejudices happen in the background. This too is shown in *Children of Men*, in the way how people casually pass by cages full of detained immigrants. Even as the film acknowledges them we see time somewhat speed up as if it is our own conscious state to the only glimpse what is ‘real' or ‘hidden'. The horizon that we gaze on can only hold so much information before any intention can be made. The structure of perception and tone is made by these events both folding and unfolding. Modes that let us operate in the ‘now’ are objects that are made available to us.

Žižek notes, in *Children of Men* that “the background persist”(Children Of Men, 2007) in the film no matter how much of the personal introspection is done by Theo. The background remains steadfast even as the plot and narrative look bleak. Since no one can conceive the future and dreams are limited, late capitalism functions in the same manner and said by Alain Badiou:

“To Justify their conservatism the partisans of the established order cannot really call it ideal or wonderful. So instead, they have decided to say that all the rest is horrible. Sure, they, say, we do not live in a condition of perfect goodness. But we're lucky that we live in a condition of evil. Our democracy is not perfect. But it's better than the bloody dictatorships. Capitalism is unjust. But it's not criminal like Stalinism" (Fisher, 5)

This not only echoes the themes of *Children of Men* but also how we are told to deal with time. When we complain that the time we lost be it at work or at a function, then we are told that this is the best thing we could be doing out of all possibilities. Limiting our dreams to a temporal state cursed by late capitalism. The background that late capitalism establishes for us is one were the everydayness is turned into time accumulated or time wasted. Meanwhile, society functions in the easiest way possible.

Much like how the 2008 economic crash allowed for new norms to be established within the society and culture of the united states, Such as working more than 40 plus hour work weeks. Or having less than a hundred dollars in your savings account. This normalcy within the background of our society grounds our future and possibility to what meager existence we can hash out. Limitations placed on us affect our horizons to the point where we negate all possible futures that are within reach. Just as *Children of Men* shows us how Theo does not care what other people do, but he cares enough to do something because of his memories of his life with Julian and the loss of their infant. This caring is able to break the current reality in the film. When the single-shot sequence showing us the ambush is done not only to get the ‘modus' of the calamity of the scene but Theo’s reaction to seeing his once close lover dead much like his child. The future was closed for Theo leading up to the events but once passed that point of her death, he is free. Free to go against the government and defy the xenophobic abuse of refugees. Hope is shown and established when Kee gives birth to the first child in decades. The scene that follows is once again a single-shot sequence in the middle of a warzone as Theo tracks down were the Fishes are holding Kee and baby, when he does they escape the fighting. Within the sequence, the fighting comes to a standstill once everyone hears the cries of the newborn child. Even if for just a moment hope blossomed and their horizons became enough to bare. The pretension and retention of the time-sequence breakdown and reassemble themselves becoming something anticipated by the people who ate thrust into this conflict. The next scene they find a boat and row out to the buoy, but in a manner of seconds that break from the background is broken when fight jets bombard the refugee camp of Bexhill. Making the background and horizon revert back into what was "normal". But the hope of the future and what is to come from it can only further be developed with time.

What about our past time experiences? Surely our memories are able to use this method on how time-consciousness is processed? Well, yes but the method in which the mode is identified it becomes a bit tricky. Since we know that memories can be unreliable so can be our perception of time. Boredom and boringness are factors but also the get corrupted by late capitalism need to atomize and create an industry from it. Just recalling events from our past can be made easier if we can remember events if they were exciting or fun but once they are boring they are harder to fully grasp what “joy” we had. Heidegger viewed boredom and boringness by differentiating between three aspects: "[1.] that which is boring in its boringness; [2.] becoming bored by this boring thing and being bored with such a thing; [3.] boredom itself" (Heidegger 1995, 83). So I can start to think where once we are bored with an object this is when we become bored, but capitalism takes this and turns it into an industry where we can not only archive these feeling but also paint them anew. The current ontological conditions allow for companies to sell our memories and experiences so they can end up being data that is further collected. This becomes a way for time to manipulated in both films and in our reality.

In conclusion, late capitalism has done a number on our perception of time through exploiting our need to understand and experience time. Given that films like *Children Of Men* that not only show us what this reality is but also how there is a way to understand it. As time-consciousness is available in our phenomenology that too becomes a way to evaluate how time is spent and how it can be understood through different levels retention and pretensions. Once we step away from the conditions. For the time being late capitalism has a stranglehold on how we perceive our way of life in a manner that at least lets us reflect on our own reification. The immediate horizon is both shown to use and hidden in plain sight, just enough to reveal itself to use but outright snatched from under us.

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