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After Bergson: Temporal Countermoves in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *The Time Regulation*
Institute and Uwe Johnson's *Speculations about Jakob*

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Artun Ak

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

Dedication

To Thomas Wild for convincing me that literature and cinema are worth studying, and that little else can really beat the joy one gets out of spending time with them,

To all my undergrad literature and written arts professors (in no particular order: Francine Prose, Natalie Prizel, Matthew Mutter, Marina van Zuylen, Franz Kempf, Olga Voronina, Jonathan Brent, Wyatt Mason, Thomas Bartscherer, Alys Moody, and Mary Caponegro) for showing me all the good stuff out there, for which I am ever grateful,

To Kaitlin Karmen for fixing my dangling participles and those sentences of mine the tendency to sprawl of which could only compare to that of the American suburbia, and for being a source of endless support as I brought this paper to an end in the midst of COVID-19;

To all my friends, and especially to those who practice social distancing,

And to my parents for always being there.

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Introduction: Modernity, Time, Bergson

Dare to know! — this was Kant’s suggestion as the motto of the Enlightenment. In the coming age of modernity, humans would no longer be dependent upon others to understand themselves and the world, but instead they would bring their “self-imposed nonage” to an end by overcoming their laziness and cowardice. In its place, they would cultivate “the spirit of a reasonable appreciation of man's value and of his duty to think for himself.”¹ Free thought, hence freedom, would gush forth like spring water.

Freedom gushed forth indeed, whatever it is or was meant to be, with some side effects not fully advertised. “The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant,”² would write Adorno and Horkheimer in the shadow of National Socialism and the Holocaust, as the noble wish to understand oneself and the world had evolved into a will to dominate nature and other human beings. This destructive desire co-developed with the rise of homogenizing abstraction and mathematical thinking (what could not be described as a number was made into one), manifesting itself as science, technology, and industry. “Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it *liquidates* them.”³ The enlightened turned out to be even a bit of a sadist.⁴ And as World War II concluded and the Europeans found themselves surrounded by concentration camps and ruined cities, as Europe had *become* those things, modernity became suspect.

¹ Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”, December 1784, translated by Mary C. Smith.

² Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cummings, 1972 edition, Herder and Herder, New York, p. 3.

³ Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 13, emphasis mine.

⁴ From the Excursus II of *Dialectic*: “Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral in regard to ends; its element is coordination. What Kant grounded transcendently, the affinity of knowledge and planning, which impressed the stamp of inescapable expediency on every aspect of a bourgeois existence that was wholly rationalized, even in every breathing-space, Sade realized empirically more than a century before sport was conceived. The teams of modern sport, whose interaction is so precisely regulated that no member has any doubt about his role, and which provide a reserve for every player, have their exact counterpart in the sexual teams of *Juliette*, which employ every moment usefully, neglect no human orifice, and carry out every function” (p. 88).

Uwe Johnson of East Germany, often known for his post-war epic *Anniversaries*, was one such European. His father died in a Soviet camp during the war, and authorities interrupted his education because he did not support the communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which existed under the patronage of the Soviet Union. His 1959 novel, *Speculations about Jakob*, on which I will focus here, is about the mysterious death of Jakob, an East German railroad dispatcher: to the shock of everyone, he is run over by a train, and the book deals with the confusion about the incident. A heartbreaking love story and a captivating detective novel, it is also a piercing critique of modernity as exemplified by the scientific-Marxist government of GDR. Johnson was well aware of the political weight of his work: as the book went into print in the other Germany, he hopped off the train in West Berlin, just like his mother had done three years ago in 1956.⁵

Almost simultaneously, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar from Turkey, both of Europe and not, was serializing *The Time Regulation Institute (TRI)* in a newspaper, having started in 1954 (the work would be published as a book in 1961). There we hear from a certain Hayri Irdal, who writes about his relationship with clocks, alchemy, spirits, and Halit Ayarç, with whom he starts the Time Regulation Institute, a state-supported agency that aims to implement a standardized time-consciousness in Turkey for the sake of progress. On its surface, the book is a satire of the Europhilic Turkish elite that pushed for top-down modernization, but Tanpınar's critique extends to the last century of the Ottomans, during which modernization was initiated. What is more relevant here is that *TRI*, like Johnson's *Speculations*, interrogates modernity as such, especially when imposed too hastily on a society that is maybe not ready for it, causing what Tanpınar called "a crisis of self and consciousness."⁶

⁵ "Title Page of Uwe Johnson's *Mutmassungen über Jakob* Using the Pseudonym Joachim Catt," Arts in Exile.

⁶ Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir*, Dergah Yayınları, İstanbul, 1987, p. 112. Translation mine.

Here, I will consider Johnson's *Speculations* and Tanpınar's *TRI* as two critiques of modernity from the 1950s from two countries that were run by modern authoritarian governments. More specifically, I will focus on time and temporality, i.e. I will read these two texts as critiques of modernity's thinking about and perception of time. By "time," I am referring to both the daily experience of time (of seconds and hours) and the problem of historical time (past, present, future). I am considering two different but related questions: **(1)** "what time is it," and **(2)** "where are we in time?"

(1): If we understand the modern person to be, in the vein of Adorno and Horkheimer, a rational being who has a conscious or subconscious desire to dominate, for which he makes use of abstraction and numerical thinking, it is no surprise that the abstracted time of seconds, minutes, and hours is a useful tool for him. In the case of nature, he can get a better sense of patterns, or suggest patterns that approximate reality, which can aid his decisions surrounding intervention: "When exactly does X happen, how long does it take Y to grow?"

In the case of humans, the use of abstracted time as a tool of exploitation coincides *historically* with the rise of capitalism and wage labor, as we learned from E.P. Thompson. While the peasant's approach to time was task-oriented, as "sheep *must* be attended at lambing time... cows *must* be milked... [and] once iron is in the making, the furnaces *must* not be allowed to fail," when employers start hiring people, "they must *use* the time... and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent."⁷ As early as in the mid-1700s, The Crowley Iron Works in England was using timesheets to monitor their workers. Naturally, the long-term success of this new cultural system of labor and work depended on the collective adoption of abstracted time as

⁷ E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38, December 1967, pp. 60-61. Emphasis mine.

a standard, which was achieved through the aggressive preaching of the doctrine of time-thriftiness and the economic democratization of timepieces, which were, at their conception, serious status symbols, and therefore objects of desire for lower classes who wanted to at least present the appearance of hard work, success, and prosperity. A watch on one's wrist or a chain hanging from the button to the pocket of one's vest could "say" a lot about a person.

However, abstracted time as a tool for human control does not *necessarily* rely on it being coupled with the institution of wage-labor. Working with machines may result directly in some mental rewiring. As one of Thompson's sources claimed, "machinery seems to lead to habits of calculation... A machine worked so many hours in the week would produce so much length of yarn of cloth. Minutes were felt to be factors in these results, whereas in the Potteries hours, or even days at times, were hardly felt to be such factors."⁸ The operator of a machine is made conscious of time as a part of the production function, which produces, in return, a more general awareness and acceptance of abstracted time. Or, alternatively, think about a railroad worker, like Jakob, who is responsible for making sure that the trains are on time, all the time. For him, the adoption of abstracted time does not stem from the employer trying to get the most out of his labor, or from the nature of the machine, but from the presence of a schedule (pertaining to a transportation system that is, admittedly, machine-like), to which he must adhere.

Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whose philosophy of duration was highly influential for 20th-century philosophy and literary modernism, wrote exhaustively on the tyranny of abstracted time from the perspective of the self. Taking a stance against Kant's adoption of space as *a priori*, which had guided Kant's take on time, Bergson argues that while "time at first seems to us to be a measurable magnitude, just like space," pure duration, which is real time as originally

⁸ "An Old Potter," *When I was a Child*, London, 1903, pp. 16, 47-9, 52-4, 57-8, 71, 74-5, 81, 185-6, 191 (as quoted in Thompson; sorry).

perceived by human consciousness, is “not a quantity” but “the melting of states of consciousness into one another.”⁹ Abstracted time results in a static view of time — first one second, and then another — while our inner experience is one of movement, like seconds pouring into seconds as each second as a time-marker dissolves into oblivion (and even this specific attempt at description is a betrayal, as I *do* utilize the concept of the second). *Things move; they do not stop and go and stop and go*. With such claims against the hegemony of staticizing abstraction through spatialization (i.e. the perception of time through the lens of space, thus making it dividable and measurable), Bergson acquired for himself quite the enemies. Bertrand Russell, to take one high-profile example, called him an anti-intellectual, comparing him to ants and bees.¹⁰

Tanpınar explicitly counts Bergson as one of his influences in his often quoted “Letter to the Youth from Antalya,”¹¹ and in *TRI* there exists a *kahve* (a traditional, anti-hipster coffee shop) where “Bergsonian philosophy” is discussed among “Aristotelian logic” and “common gossip.”¹² The connection between Johnson and Bergson is a bit harder to identify. As far as I know, there is no evidence of Johnson having extensively studied Bergson, but his admiration of Faulkner is well-documented: he would read *The Sound and the Fury* aloud to his college friends in English, quickly translating the confusing passages to German when necessary.¹³ Faulkner, in return, was open about his agreement, as he once proclaimed in an interview with Loïc Bouvard, with “Bergson’s theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment in which I

⁹ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Edinburgh, Riverside Press, 1950, pp. 104, 107.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Touchstone, 1945, pp. 791, 793.

¹¹ Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, “Foreword,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 2, 2017, pp. 128.

¹² Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, Dergah Yayınları, 1987 (September 2019), pp. 131. Translation mine. If I am citing from this Turkish version and the text is in English, it means that I translated it myself.

¹³ Peter Nicolaisen, “Faulkner and Southern History: A View from Germany,” *Southern Cultures* 4, no. 4, 1998, pp. 31.

include both the past and the future, and this is eternity.”¹⁴ The other probable connection is through Walter Benjamin, whose ideas are materialized in Johnson’s works.¹⁵ Benjamin’s engagement with Bergson’s ideas is clear in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” where Bergson is said to “reject... any historical determination of memory,” and in whose philosophy “the eye perceives an experience of a complementary nature in the form of its spontaneous after-image, as it were”¹⁶ (I’ll come back to the issue of past/memory in a bit). Incidentally, Benjamin also considers Proust, Freud, Valery, and Poe next to Bergson in his essay, a list almost identical to the one given by Tanpinar in the aforementioned “Letter.” It turns out that Johnson and Tanpinar, while probably having never met and/or read each other’s work, were tapping into the same literary and philosophical traditions.

(2): In comparison to “what time is it,” the question “where are we in time” has more macro-scale concerns. It is about the subject’s temporal position on a supposed line of general history. In the case of the infant Republic of Turkey, this question was a source of immense ontological anxiety. As Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic, put it on the tenth year anniversary of the republic, the Turkish nation was now supposed to leave behind “the lethargic mentality of past centuries” and embrace “the concepts of speed and action of our century.” Because the “torch” carried would be “positive science” as the nation “march[ed] on the road of progress and civilization,” the “civilized world,” which meant Western Europe and the United States, would see that “the Turkish nation... is a great nation.”¹⁷ The new country’s *raison d’etre* was to change the answer to the question of where we are in time from “in the past” to “in the now,” the “now” defined as the socioeconomic and intellectual position at which

¹⁴ Cleanth Brooks, “Faulkner on Time and History.” *American Fiction 1914-1945*, ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987, pp. 239.

¹⁵ For example, see: Gary Lee Baker, “The Influence of Walter Benjamin’s Notion of Allegory on Uwe Johnson’s *Jahrestage*: Form and Approach to History,” *The German Quarterly* 66, no. 3, Summer 1993, p. 318-329.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, 1968, p. 157.

¹⁷ “Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s Speech on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Republic,” October 29, 1933.

modern Europe was. Similar worries, on which these newer ones would be built, were already in place during the Ottoman Tanzimat, the unsuccessful reform period from 1839 to 1876.

As Reinhart Koselleck points out, “the pressure toward movement generated by this obsession with temporality”¹⁸ is characteristic of modernity, and both liberals and communists were/are guilty of utilizing the language of moving-forward for political self-advocacy. Atatürk’s “march on the road of progress” is a great example of this phenomenon. An underlying assumption of the Turkish project was that there is some sort of linearity and teleology to the historical development of nations, and given the appropriate nudges, the nation would get there, like a train on its tracks. This firm but troublesome belief in an overarching theory of history was also apparent in Johnson’s East Germany. Just like the way the Turkish elite believed in a historical endpoint of liberal freedoms and scientific rationality, the East German regime believed in a strict theory of history that claimed an eventual victory for the working class, and justified their daily violence according to that. In *Speculations*, this dogmatic historical-theoretical outlook is personified by Herr Rohlf, the state agent who is trying to recruit Jakob for a special mission.

These linear and teleological theories of history are examples of historical determinism, the cost of which is always a denial or a constraint of genuine human freedom — theoretical, real, or both. (The irony that the Enlightenment has brought us here leaves a sour taste in the mouth.) At this junction, Bergson’s line of thought in *Time and Free Will* can be extrapolated from its emphasis on the individual person to people and peoples. Bergson suggests that the Kantian answer to the freedom problem, i.e. that free will cannot exist *in* time, results from the homogenization of inner time through spatialization. When conceived as distinct spaces next to

¹⁸ Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Neuzeit’: Remarks on the Semantics of Modern Concepts of Movement,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe, New York, Columbia University, 2004, pp. 250.

each other, different states of consciousness are made into measurable magnitudes and rigidly separated from each other, making them prone to the questions such as whether State A results in State B or whether State C is the sum of State A and B. In reality, however, Bergson claims, the states of consciousness are “at once undistinguished and unstable, cannot be separated without changing their nature, and cannot receive a fixed form or be expressed in words without becoming public property.”¹⁹ In short, Bergson upholds freedom by showing that states of consciousness, being in duration, elude the structural inquiry of cause and effect. Freedom — because it is indeterminate, or, more precisely, indeterminable — cannot be denied, but neither can it be defined. Simply put, “freedom is... a fact, and among the facts we observe there is none clearer.”²⁰ And if free will is a fact, historical determinism is a farce, since historical movement is caused by many persons coming together, or against each other, and doing things in an indeterminable manner, any proposed law of which will be based on the above-explicated confusion.

Nevertheless, something akin to a description of freedom comes in another of Bergson’s books, *Creative Evolution*, where he expands his theory of duration to provide a non-deterministic account of evolution fueled by *élan vital* (vital impetus, life force), in which evolution goes forward *creatively*, by giving rise to something new that could not have been foreseen. The analogy here between evolution and human consciousness, both of them processual and indeterminable, suggests that *freedom is creativity*. It is no surprise that, as Ingeborg Nordemann points out, Hannah Arendt — for whom the primary political condition of men is natality, i.e. a constant giving-birth of something new — nods to Bergson’s *élan vital*

¹⁹ Bergson, p. 236.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

when she describes thinking and action as “pure being alive”²¹ in *The Human Condition*. So one could also draw a parallel between evolution and historical movement, the latter being, in a sense, the evolution of the political, with its own *élan vital* embodied in the natality of individual political actors.

To be clear, Bergson is not saying that the past has no bearing on the present. On the contrary, the past *always* has a bearing on the present as it flows continuously into the present, almost to the extent that it is ludicrous to talk about the past as separate from the present. The problem is that it is impossible for us to know the exact way in which the past will interact with the present and the kind of future that fruitful interaction will advantage.²² Leon ter Schure makes a similar point: “Bergson’s nonmodern ontology... gives us a unique sense of history’s creative potential... While presentism has turned past and future into nonentities, parts of an omnipresent present, a Bergsonian ontology of time and history allows us to imagine the past instead as a living resource for the invention of the future.”²³

Tanpınar’s Bergsonism is often read to be in a similar vein. In a now famous newspaper article from 1951 on the state of culture and literature in Turkey, Tanpınar first commends the poets of the old for their consideration of each other, past and future — “In order for each to complete one another within time, they envisioned the future as an indeterminate downward flow from their own thought and life... As the continual placement of stone over two or three generations eventually creates a building, so was it like this; people adopted an identity that was won over time.” — and then goes on to claim that “this is the thing we have lost in the years

²¹ Cited in Ingeborg Nordemann, “*The Human Condition*: More than a Guide to Practical Philosophy,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 74, no. 3, Fall 2007, p. 790.

²² This is partially why I chose the word “indeterminable” instead of “indeterminate” in my discussion of Bergson above. We, as creatures of intellect and staticizing abstraction, cannot determine it. Maybe something else can do.

²³ Leon ter Schure, *Bergson and History: Transforming the Modern Regime of Historicity*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2019.

following the Tanzimat: the idea of this continuity and wholeness.”²⁴ Ottoman and Republican modernizations were catastrophic because they resulted in a detachment from the past.

Throughout his oeuvre, Bergson formulates a process ontology in all realms of life (this is what Leon ter Schure calls nonmodern ontology), which Jonathan Jancsary eloquently defines as an ontology “that claims that nothing in the universe is ever fixed” and “that everything that exists is an ongoing and evolutionary process (*élan vital*) without a fixed goal.”²⁵ And the seed of Bergson’s entire thought can be found in *Time and Free Will*, which was his dissertation and first book, where the fatal mistake is shown to be spatialization (taking time to be like space, dividable and measurable), the result of which is a continuous detachment from tangible life as such, a cultural leaving-behind (as Tanpınar suggests in the case of Turkey), and an unjustified feeling of mastery over history.

So when I say that I am interested in Tanpınar and Johnson’s texts as critiques of modernity’s thinking about and perception of time, I mean that I am interested in the way in which they write *against* spatialization. To press the point: in the *ways*. Which is to say: I do not read them as strictly political or historical works, but also, and *even more so*, as aesthetic-philosophical texts — texts that take a stance against spatialization in an aesthetic manner. I am interested in the *countermoves* (images, jokes, linguistic shenanigans, et cetera) through which they formulate their critical viewpoints regarding the self, cultural trauma, and the historical-political process (*not* progress).

In the following pages: “A Reckless Mistress” focuses on the object of the clock in two key instances of Tanpınar’s *TRI* and what it does to its fellow lovers. “Jonas Blach’s Re-

²⁴ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, “The Change of Civilization and Inner Man,” *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, 1951. Translated by Kaitlin Staudt and published in *Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology*, 2020, edited by Alys Moody and Stephen J. Ross, p. 205.

²⁵ Jonathan Jancsary, “The Future as an Undefined and Open Time: A Bergsonian Approach,” *Axiomathes* 29, February 2019, p. 61.

Education in Time” reconstructs one main character’s narrative as a journey out of and away from spatialized time, focusing on a house cat, trains, and a timetable as crucial images. To conclude, I draw parallels between their respective countermoves, and highlight the personal/psychological and the political aspects of freedom and oppression raised by Tanpınar and Johnson.

A Reckless Mistress

Our narrator Hayri Irdal's benefactor, Halit Ayarci (whose name translates to "The Eternal Regulator"), founds the Time Regulation Institute to synchronize all the clocks in Turkey to boost efficiency and productivity. Fittingly, the institute's downfall is initiated by Ayarci's outrageous attempt to house his employees in Clock Villas, which, if people had approved, would have been designed by Hayri, who had just finished the architectural plans for the new building for the institute, which was modeled after a clock. This is high-caliber absurdist humor: we, the moderns, love clocks so much, as they help us track and manage spatialized time, that some of us may find it appealing to live in one — a *physical* expression of the fact that we already, eagerly, live in the spatialized time of science instead of in Bergsonian duration.

Much has been said about Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *The Time Regulation Institute* and how it critiques Turkey's adoption of modern temporality. The standard interpretation of the novel sees it as a straightforward sociocultural satire of the radical modernization project implemented by the Europhilic Kemalist elite, which included the reconceptualization of time as spatial and history as linear and teleological. This radical change, however, resulted in a lot of cultural discord and trauma, as Turks were too far away from European modernity. A good example of such historical grounding comes from Pankaj Mishra, who has written the introduction to the recent 2013 translation:

In the 1920s the Muslim-majority Ottoman Empire was radically and forcibly reorganized into a secular republic by Mustafa Kemal (better known as Atatürk), and everything in its culture, from the alphabet to headwear and religion, hastily abandoned in an attempt to emulate European-style modernity... They felt oppressed and humiliated by the power of the industrialized West and urgently sought to match it. But there was a tragic mismatch between the intentions of these hasty modernizers and the long historical experience of the societies they wanted to remake in the image of the modern West. Time, in fact, was rarely conceptualized as a linear progression in Asian and African cultures...²⁶

²⁶ Pankaj Mishra, "Introduction," in *The Time Regulation Institute*, New York, Penguin Books, 2013, pp. vii-viii.

The novel definitely lends (a lot of) hand to the interpretation that it is mocking this historical reality (and Turkish scholarship seems to converge around this take too). For example, early in the novel, Hayri claims that the more we wear our clothes, the more they absorb our identities and habits, and if someone else were to wear our clothes, they would start acting, thinking, and feeling like us. He knows this, because he has been through this. First he recalls how he fell in love with his ex-boss Cemal Bey's wife Selma Hanimefendi when he put on the old suit he was given by him. To Hayri's contentment, Cemal's less desirable traits such as snobbishness and unfounded seriousness were not also transferred. Next he remembers the serious transformation he went through when he put on the suit gifted to him by Ayarci, who did not want him to come to the opening ceremony of the institute with the clothes he had "at that time":

... I sensed a dramatic shift in my entire being. New horizons and perspectives suddenly unfurled before me. Like Halit Ayarci, I began to perceive life as a single entity. I began to use terms like "modification," "coordination," "work structure," "mind-set shift," "metathought," and "scientific mentality"; I took to associating such terms as "ineluctability" or "impossibility" with my lack of will. I even made imprudent comparisons between East and West, and passed judgments whose gravity left me terrified...²⁷

In short, with a simple change in outfit, Hayri is made into a modern man of reason and science, an instant Sir Francis Bacon. Tanpınar is mocking the 1925 hat reform that allowed Turkish men to wear only Western-style hats, while banning the fez and the turban from the public sphere (not wearing a hat was allowed). Atatürk's reason for the law was that civilized men "must show how civilized they are through their family life and lifestyles."²⁸ (The counter-demonstrations in the eastern city of Erzurum ended with the execution of at least thirteen people.)

²⁷ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, translated by Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe, New York, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 13-14.

²⁸ Kaya Genç, "Turkey's Glorious Hat Revolution," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November 11, 2013.

There is, however, a serious problem with saying that the Kemalist elite was doing something out of nothing, and that Tanpınar was aiming at this specifically, as the former is not true: starting in the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire was flooded by mechanical clocks used mostly to stay in sync with the prayer and fasting times determined by the “*mukavvit*”s (timesetters), who, recognizing the increasing need, had also become horologists. That is to say, an Islamic time-management system that was eerily similar to Ayarci’s Time Regulation Institute (not punitive, yes, but still seen as an authority on the topic) was already in place in the Ottoman Empire by the eighteenth century. Later, the “long nineteenth century” saw the Ottoman state experiment with modern methods of time-management to increase efficiency and organizational power, which became the early seeds of a culture that equated time-management with work ethic and material progress. In 1880, Ebuziyya Tevfik translated Benjamin Franklin’s *The Way to Wealth* into Ottoman Turkish, from which the phrase “Time is Money” was absorbed wholly by Ottoman literature and journalism. The Turkish modernization project did not start in 1923; it was brewing in the 18th century and definitely on its way in the 19th century. What can be said is that the Kemalist elite were dissatisfied with the success and the pace of the Ottoman-initiated modernization project, and they wanted to use their newly acquired authority to hyperaccelerate things through government mandates — and, as we know from Karl Polanyi’s work on capitalism in England, healthy and sustainable social change requires a proper, organic pace.²⁹

I borrow this historical correction to Mishra from Avner Wishnitzer, who claims that “in *The Time Regulation Institute*, Ottoman time is portrayed as being closer to ‘pure duration’ and, hence, related to one’s inner self. Ottoman time is represented in the novel by the time-setter (*mukavvit*) and horologist Nuri Efendi. For him, time was part of God’s creation, rather than a mechanism of organization created by humans. The exactitude that he preached was, therefore,

²⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, New York, Farrar & Rhinehart, 1944.

derived from piety, from the desire to adjust human life to divine rhythms.”³⁰ He continues that Nuri Efendi treated clocks like humans, showed passion toward them, and even “loved clocks, felt for them.”³¹

While I agree with Wishnitzer that the Islamic/Ottoman time, as portrayed by Tanpınar, seems to be much more heartwarming and personal than the cold instrumental time of Ayarçi (this warm/cold distinction comes from Wishnitzer), I disagree that the former is actually closer to pure duration. The change in the authority on time from a warmer to a colder one does not change the fact that there *is* an authority on time that disrupts the inner time of the living individual. Both the divine time and the modern time — both systems relying on spatialization — are against pure duration, which dwells and flows within the individual. Özen Nergis Dolcerocca gives the same verdict in her article where she takes Tanpınar to be first a Bergsonian modernist and then a social satirist: “[Both systems] are... oppressive to the subject’s inner temporal flow and to plural and incongruous temporalities.”³² Yes, Tanpınar does criticize the actions of the Kemalist elite (there is little reason to resent Mishra), but the more fundamental critique lies somewhere else, with the more basic problems of time and temporality.

One clever way in which Tanpınar delivers his critique, on which I will focus here, is through absurdist portrayals of various obsessive relationship(s) with clocks and watches. That the modern regime exemplified by Ayarçi is obsessed with clocks is already made clear with the Clock Villas and the clock-shaped institute building. So now I want to proceed to Hayri’s rebirth when gifted a personal watch (and Hayri should be considered as both an individual and also a

³⁰ Avner Wishnitzer, “Modern Turkey, Real Time, and Other Functional Fabrications in Tanpınar’s *The Time Regulation Institute*,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 2, no. 2, November 2015, p. 391.

³¹ Cited in Wishnitzer, who is using a different edition of the novel and translating it himself.

³² Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, “‘Free spirited clocks’: modernism, temporality and *The Time Regulation Institute*,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 2, 2017, p. 181. In my humble opinion, Dolcerocca’s article is the most insightful one on the topic among what I have read.

stand-in for the empire and the nation at-large, as seen in the Hat Law example above); and Nuri Efendi, the Sufi horologist, whose personal relationship with clocks is best described as an instance of fetishism. The former can be thought of as a summary of the book’s critical attitude toward spatialized time, while the latter ridicules man’s relationship with it.

Hayri’s Rebirth

“When my father recorded my birthday in the back of an old book as the sixteenth day of the holy month of Receb in the year 1310 of the Islamic calendar, he did so with the same conviction as I do now, in proclaiming that Hayri İrdal’s true date of birth was the very day he received this watch,”³³ claims Hayri. Three small but important things have to be fixed in the translation: (1) “received” muddles the locus of agency in the original Turkish, which literally translates to “the watch passed to my hand,” where the subject is the watch, not Hayri; (2) the Turkish text does not suggest an equality of conviction between Hayri’s father and him, but instead suggests that Hayri’s father was somewhat *wrong*, from Hayri’s perspective, in claiming that Hayri was born in the year of 1310 of the Islamic calendar (a literal translation, without the details, would be: “My father can record my birthday as 1310 as much as he wants, but I can say that my true birthday was when this watch passed to my hand); and (3) the Turkish reads not as “Hayri İrdal’s true date of birth,” but as “the *true* Hayri’s date of birth” (“asıl Hayri İrdal’in doğum tarihi”). The statement, then, amounts to Hayri saying that his biological birth in (Islamic) 1310 was a *false* birth, as it was the birth of the *false* Hayri, not the *true* one. That is, the *true* Hayri was born with the passing-to-his-hand of the watch.

However, Hayri makes it clear that he did not always see the watch as such a blessing.

The paragraph prior talks about the internal conflict the watch initially caused:

³³ Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, p. 21.

Twice a day, I would travel the long road between Edirnekapi and Fatih, taking my time and throwing each of my steps after a different dream. Though a passion muddled this happy life as I approached age ten. With the watch my uncle gifted me for my circumcision, the harmony of my life was almost broken. A passion, no matter how innocent, is a dangerous thing. That being said (“bununla beraber” — literally: “with that”), my happy constitution (“yaratılışım,” “as God created me,” literally: “what-I-was-created/constituted-as”) prevented *its* fully taking my life out of its trajectory. If anything, *it* gave it a direction. That is, my life took a shape with *it*. Also maybe *it* opened the real door of freedom for me.³⁴

I offer my own translation of this passage to show an important grammatical ambiguity in the series of “it”s of the original Turkish (italicized by me above), which is not captured by the Freely-Dawe translation. The Freely-Dawe translation accepts the more direct reading of the passage: Hayri is recalling how the watch initially disrupted his life, but how, thanks to his “spirited nature” (their rendering of “yaratılışım”)³⁵, the watch became something more useful, giving his life direction and shape, even opening the gates of freedom for him. Now, in this Freely-Dawe reading, the four “it”s refer to the passion that is the watch, but there is something peculiar happening with these pronouns, as, after the first one, it is not clear, from a strictly grammatical viewpoint, to what each “it” refers. The first “it” is definitely the watch, with the happy constitution preventing the watch from totally derailing Hayri’s life. There is no confusion there. The ambiguity is rooted in the second one — “if anything, *it* gave it a direction” — on the “it” of which Hayri further elaborates in the third and fourth sentences.³⁶ So we need to (try to) clarify what this second “it” is.

If we put the hermeneutical emphasis on “if anything” (the word in Turkish, “bilakis,” can also translate as “rather” or “indeed,” and refers to a kind of turn, a negation in meaning), the sentence can be read as: “Instead of derailing my life (because my happy constitution prevented

³⁴ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 23.

³⁵ They also make the rather long Turkish sentence into a quite short one, almost an aside: “But I was saved by my spirited nature.” This undermines the explicit (and implicit) emphasis on Hayri’s constitution as a counterforce to the watch.

³⁶ The two “it”s I have not italicized in the first two sentences of this quadruplet refer to Hayri’s life.

it from doing so) my watch gave my life a direction,” or, in other words, “it did not derail my life, but instead, it actually put it on rails,” it being the watch. This is reasonable, but it is still the case that the subject in the previous sentence, which is “my happy constitution,” carries over, because the new subject, *if* there is one, is not explicitly named. Tanpınar could have easily avoided this confusion by explicitly naming the watch in the next sentence, and writing, say, “therefore, my watch gave my life a direction instead.” In fact, in the original Turkish, the subject is not even a separate word but only implied in the conjugation of the verb to be an uncertain third-person singular. (The actual third-person singular pronoun in the original Turkish sentence refers to Hayri’s life: “it gave *it* a direction.”)

If we decide that this is not just casual or sloppy writing on Tanpınar’s part, it can be read as an instance of linguistic doublespeak. Perhaps we are supposed to read the passage both ways, at the same time, with the last three “it”s referring to both the watch and the happy constitution. The watch scenario we have already clarified. Let us see what happens when we take the “it”s to be Hayri’s happy constitution: “Indeed, my happy constitution gave my life a direction. That is, my life took a form with my happy constitution. Also maybe, my happy constitution opened the true door of freedom for me.” Hayri is quite explicit with how the watch almost broke the harmony of his life, and how his happy composition (his “what-he-was-created-as”) has prevented the watch from totally derailing it. An inner dialectic was already established there: the watch and its spatialized time versus Hayri’s happy intrinsic composition, which includes the pure duration within him. With this instance of doublespeak, then, the dialectic is furthered: “indeed the watch gave my life a direction,” but “my happy composition [too] gave my life a direction; “my life took shape with my watch,” but “my life took shape with my happy composition [too]”; and “maybe my watch opened the true door of freedom for me,” “maybe my

happy composition [did].” His watch and his happy composition: two oppositional forces that constitute Hayri’s inner conflict.

In the next paragraph³⁷ where Hayri designates the passing-to-him of the watch as the birth of his true self (instead of the source of conflict it is), he first claims that his “life changed, [with] its deeper meanings suddenly emerging,” but then goes on to catalogue all the things he put behind him, i.e. lost, with the arrival of the watch, which “started its job [upon arrival] by clearing its surrounding and embracing its life-space appropriately”³⁸:

I forgot about those two glorious minarets carved out of chipboard that my uncle had given me... and so it was for the enormous kite I so lovingly assembled with the neighborhood children in the courtyard of our house, and the karagöz puppet set I bought after pilfering scraps of lead from various parts of the mosque and selling them to the chickpea peddler, and Ibrahim Efendi’s fickle goat I sometimes took out to graze in the cemetery in Edirnekapı and along the old city walls, suffering its mischief when I knew all too well that the stubborn beast wasn’t even mine. For me, the importance of each and every one simply disappeared.³⁹

Chipboard minarets, enormous kite, karagöz puppet set, fickle goat — what kind of losses are these? To start with the most general, these are all Hayri’s personal memories which constitute his perception of his own past. With the arrival of the clock, Hayri is made partially pastless. And in the case of minarets and the karagöz puppet set, this pastlessness becomes communal, as they symbolize tradition, Islamic and artistic. This is also further evidence for Dolcerocca’s argument that Tanpınar criticizes presentism in his work, presentism being the modern habit of seeing both the past and the future from the lens of the ever-powerful now, thus essentially obliterating them both.⁴⁰ The very idea of community, too, receives a blow: from the minaret of his mosque reads the imam the call to prayer, inviting the believers to pray together; the kite was

³⁷ Which, a bit arbitrarily, starts the next subsection, because he picks up the same theme and continues, as if he had to stop writing for some reason and now he is back to it.

³⁸ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 25. Note, also, the imperialism/expansionism of the clock with its life-space.

³⁹ Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, p. 21

⁴⁰ Dolcerocca, p. 188.

built by Hayri and the neighborhood children; and karagöz puppet shows, a famous Ottoman shadow theater, was/is communal entertainment for Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. With the arrival of the clock, they are no more important to Hayri, whose new state is one of blissful forgetfulness (even in regard to his own suffering: a paragraph ago he claims that the watch broke his life; a paragraph later he calls it, as it were, his real birth-giver).

The kite-goat duo, however, also have something to do with Hayri's direct temporal experience. As opposed to the acceleration of everything that the clock aims for (control of time = better organization = higher pace = higher productivity, which is just great from the perspective of modernity), a gliding kite and a grazing goat embody slowness, and we only have to look to ourselves to realize that slowness increases the awareness of time, of being in time. Don't we say, when we realize that it is already 8pm after a busy, high-pace day, that we "didn't realize it", it being that time passed that quickly, that time passed *at all*? The watch would of course like to do away with this duo: they might enable Hayri to think about time, or, worse, dwell in it. He might, God forbid, realize that there is something wrong with the watch's spatialized time.

But, paraphrasing Hayri, the *true* Hayri is born with the passing-to-him of the watch. The question to answer: what does "true" mean? A pastless modern lonely man of reason and work ("The first day I picked up the watch... I was attacked by the questions of why, how, and how so"⁴¹)? But we know Hayri does not succeed in being that kind of a man. While he respects Halit Ayarci the modernizer, he is often hesitant when it comes to listening to him and obeying his orders (most pronounced when Ayarci asks him to *invent* a historical figure to validate the institute, which, as Dolcerocca points out, is peak presentism), and when he first wears Ayarci's suit, he becomes more like him, but also swings back to his older "soft, complacent" self

⁴¹ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 30.

regularly, resulting in overall indecisiveness.⁴² The true Hayri, then, is the conflicted Hayri, and if you take Hayri to be the average Turkish citizen, you have a conflicted nation — her dialectic unsynthesized, her limbo eternal.

The result? “Need I say that only a few weeks after I received my uncle’s gift, it had become nothing but a mass of twisted and jagged bits of shiny and rusty metal and no longer served any purpose at all? The experience revealed two things to me: my overwhelming desire to take apart and understand every watch and clock I came across, and my total indifference to the rest of the world.” Can’t do with it, can’t do without it: a violent, destructive obsession, if you will, which brings us, thematically and narratively, to Nuri Efendi.

Nuri Efendi’s Clock Fetish

Fetishism, being a buzzword, means everything and nothing, and its use always risks some degree of pretentiousness, which obliges me to provide a history and a working definition of some sort. According to Roy Ellen’s overview,⁴³ the concept of fetishism comes from the anthropological study of religion, and was popularized in the 18th century by Charles de Brosses, who thought that the primitive peoples could not engage with abstractions directly and thus needed the help of tangible objects. Following him, Auguste Comte developed a theory of religious development in which religions evolved from fetishism to polytheism to monotheism. Later anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor rejected this claim, and saw fetishes instead as the physical objects either in which spirits lived or through which spirits worked. As the intradisciplinary confusion about the concept increased, many scholars abandoned it, but Marx, after reading de Brosses, used it to describe the nature of commodities. Commodities, he claimed

⁴² Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, p. 14.

⁴³ Roy Ellen, “Fetishism,” *Man*, New Series 23, no. 2, June 1988.

in *Das Kapital*, “appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race.”⁴⁴ He saw capital along the same lines too. Lastly, psychologists defined fetishism either as the use of non-genital objects for sexual pleasure or the perception of inanimate objects and otherwise asexual parts of the human body as erotic. Freud would further specify it and suggest that the fetish must be the after-effect of a sexual impression from the individual’s childhood. Ellen suggests that in the core of these three types of fetishism lie four cognitive structures and processes that construct a fetish:

1. A concrete existence or the concretization of abstractions;
2. The attribution of qualities of living organisms, often (though not exclusively) human;
3. Conflation of signifier and signified;
4. An ambiguous relationship between control of object by people and of people by object.

(2), which is animism and more than often anthropomorphism, and (4), which is the object being capable of acquiring power over the subject, thus becoming subject-like itself, are clear. (1) and (3), however, need clarification.

(1): Concretization might mean two things: either something extremely abstract (an all-knowing God; a nation) is made into something extremely concrete (a marble statue; an animal) or something that is treated to be concrete even if it is not (Ellen talks about “thingified” verbal signs), or, alternatively, a social relationship is objectified into a thing, such as in the case of money, which “is seen to ‘objectify’ transactions and reduce them to a single physical medium.”⁴⁵ In short, an idea is made into an object that can be related to and worked with more directly.

For (3), Ellen gives the example of the Catholic mass and transubstantiation, where “the host does not simply represent the body of Christ, but — miraculously — becomes the body of

⁴⁴ Cited in Roy, p. 216.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 222.

Christ.”⁴⁶ In the case of a fetish, the object *becomes* the thing that it stands for, and is treated as such.

After his uncle gives him a watch, Hayri starts skipping school and spends most of his time with Nuri Efendi at the latter’s atelier, where “there were only clocks.”⁴⁷ Nuri Efendi of Hayri’s youth is a mid-height, skinny, but energetic man of sixtyish years old, who chooses to listen to all the watches in the atelier as he rests. He is a bit Sisyphean too: when he is angry or in a bad mood, he goes to the mosque’s courtyard and carries a seemingly ancient, heavy rock here and there on the courtyard. I suggest his relationship with clocks and watches fulfills all the four requirements of fetishism as described above.

(1 – concrete existence/concretization): This one is not specific to Nuri Efendi, but is the general state of all clocks. A clock, of course, exists concretely, but additionally, it is the concretization of spatialized time, which, in Bergson’s account, abstracts the concrete inner experience of time. It makes spatialized time into an object, giving it a physical representation in the form of a circle that is divided into spaces, each referring to a temporal interval, with its two or three hands showing you “where” you are in this series of spaces.

(2 – animism/anthropomorphism): As Hayri puts it, Nuri Efendi does not really separate clocks from humans. For him, they have hearts that stop and brains that malfunction, and when they are sick, they should be treated “like... patient[s], like... pe[ople] in need.”⁴⁸ One of the clocks he is genuinely worried about is “missing both his legs.” That he sees clocks in highly anthropomorphic terms is made explicit in one of his philosophical reveries: “God made man in

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴⁷ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

his image; and man invented the clock akin to himself.”⁴⁹ Clocks, in one sense, are alive for Nuri Efendi.

(3 – conflation of signifier and signified): A clock signifies time, which, in return, signifies order (prayer times, Ottoman bureaucracy, modern work regiment) and progress (“Time is Money”). Nuri Efendi has a habit of gifting watches to his poor friends, saying: “Take this! Take possession of your time... The rest is on God!..”⁵⁰ And those who thus “take possession of their time” become happy as if they can thus immediately make things up with their wives, as if their child will recover from a disease faster, and as if their debts will disappear immediately. Nuri Efendi and his friends think of the possession of a clock as equivalent to, not only signifying, the possession of order (making things up, healing back to health, not having debt), which brings us to:

(4 – ambiguous power relationship): Nuri Efendi, despite being seen as wise by many, doesn’t have much for education under his belt, except for one to two years of religious tutoring. He claims that clocks have been his teachers: “It is the clocks that made me a man!”⁵¹ Clocks, then, have immense power and control over Nuri Efendi, enough to reconstitute him into a man, while in fact, as he concedes, clocks are invented by humans. A similar ambiguity in the power relationship is also to be seen in another reverie of his: “Man must never forsake his clocks, for consider his ruination if forsaken by God!” In other words, if man forsakes his clocks he will suffer as if God has forsaken him. But isn’t man to clock what God is to man, i.e. its creator? and is it not the creation, according to the Islamic theology Nuri Efendi is relying on, that should suffer in the case of a forsaking? With the clock it seems to be the opposite, with the creation

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 32.

having more power over the creator — in fact, as much power as the creator’s creator (i.e. God) has over the creator (i.e. man).

Given that Nuri Efendi exhibits all four cognitive structures and processes of fetishism, we can diagnose him with confidence. However, on a much less pedantic note, and here I find the Barthesian punctum of the entire episode, there is one instance where Nuri Efendi can be accused of harboring sexual sentiments for the clocks he is tasked with fixing and setting up:

Upon receiving a timepiece from a customer, he’d say, “Now, don’t come back to pick this up until I send word that it’s ready!” Or sometimes he’d cry out to a customer already halfway out of the workshop, “Now, don’t you rush me! For I won’t be rushed!” After opening up the watch or clock entrusted to him, he would place it in a glass jar and simply observe it, sometimes for weeks, without laying a hand on it, and if it began to tick, he would lean over the jar and listen. These deliberations gave me the impression that Nuri Efendi was more clock doctor than repairman.⁵²

I do not know what kind of doctors Hayri consults with, but none (that I know of) would undress their patients and simply watch them for even a quarter an hour, let alone for weeks (if they, somehow, do, we would report them to the authorities). I say “undress” instead of “cut open” — which would have been more analogous, given that Nuri Efendi eventually “operates” on the clocks after he opens them up — relying on Hayri’s initial description of (some of the) clocks in Nuri Efendi’s atelier: “... some supernaked, some only uncovered at the top...”⁵³ His second plea to his customers, “don’t you rush me,” is reasonable: maybe he works better when not under pressure. But what about the first one, “don’t come back until I send word that it’s ready”? If someone comes and their watch is not ready, he can just send them back and make them come tomorrow, and maybe he does not want to be disrupted, but there is always the chance of some other customer coming and requesting something. It is more as if he does not want the owner of the supernaked watch to see what he is doing with it, as if he wants to have his private time and

⁵² Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, p. 29.

⁵³ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 31. “Supernaked” is my hopeless translation of “çırılçıplak,” where “çırıl” (which means nothing on its own) intensifies “çıplak” (which means naked).

space with it, as if he is doing something profane with it. In the light of this reading, Ayarci's Clock Villas and the clock-like institute building sound like ideas out of Ayarci's perverse dreams, outgrowths of his erotic obsession. Not convinced? Just refer to the great wise(ish) pervert of high literature, dear Humbert Humbert:

And I was such a thoughtful friend, such a passionate father, *such a good pediatrician*, attending to the wants of my little auburn brunette's body! *My only grudge against nature was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out* and apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the seagrapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys.⁵⁴

Uh... Oedipus?

On the one hand, Mother Meanest, giving Hayri a ruinous (re)birth. On the other hand, a fetish, an object of desire, a Lolita of a sort. After seeing what it has done to Hayri and Nuri Efendi, how are we supposed to make sense of the clock?

I think the answer lies in the 1951 article I previously quoted in the introduction, where Tanpınar describes the Turkish disconnect from the past through Freudian lingo: "If I were brave, I would say that we are living through a type of Oedipus complex, the complex of a man who kills his father unknowingly."⁵⁵ Well, Tanpınar turned out to be brave enough to write so: Dr. Ramiz, Tanpınar's parody of a Freudian psychoanalyst (at one point he prescribes Hayri the dreams he is supposed to see at that point in his mental "recovery"), diagnoses Hayri with a father-complex, and even claims that Mübarek, the standing clock at home that shows whatever time it feels like showing, a non-clock clock if you will, must have dethroned Hayri's actual father at one point. Their session comes to an end with Tanpınar talking *through* Dr. Ramiz: "Look around us, we are always complaining about our past, we are all occupied with it. We

⁵⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, Crest Reprint, 1955, p. 151. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Tanpınar, "The Change of Civilization and Inner Man," p. 209.

want to change it from inside... What is all our talk about the Hittites and Phrygians? Is it anything different from a father-complex?"⁵⁶

If the past is our Laius, who is our Jocasta? On the way to whom does the modern kill his father? In whose arms does he wish to rest? (Okay, it does not hang itself, but:) The clock and its spatialized time, I suggest, is Tanpınar's implicit answer. And Tanpınar's parody of Freud, it seems, is only a pseudo-parody.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ For an unorthodox take on *TRI* that takes the psychoanalytic symbolism seriously and claims that Hayri also has a mother-complex, see: Süha Oğuzertem, "UNSET SAATS, UPSET SIHHATS: A Fatherless Approach to The Clock-Setting Institute," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 19, no. 2, Fall 1995, pp. 3-18.

Jonas Blach's Re-Education in Time

One of the main characters in Uwe Johnson's *Speculations about Jakob*, Jonas Blach is a philologist and a social theorist at the English Institute in East Berlin. He works for the state, and wants to stay loyal to it. Over the course of the book, however, we observe the decline of his belief in the scientific socialism of the German Democratic Republic. This is most properly exemplified in a late-in-the-book rant:

A single infraction against the theory scares us away, but what if it was necessary?... And the Red Army's advance against the Hungarian revolt is nothing but a successful experiment in the physics lab. Is it tolerable that reality takes place and we censure it according to its adherence to or infraction of theoretical rules?⁵⁸

Now, one could trace the story of Jonas' breaking-off from theory and his approach to physical reality, but I am more interested in what enables the theorizing in the first place: the modern understanding of daily time as seconds and moments on the one hand, and the concept of history (from past to future) as scientifically comprehensible on the other. The feeling of comprehension and control induced by the abstraction of daily time through its spatialization into intervals⁵⁹ enables the modern man to come up with grand theories of the historical process, such as the Marxist theory of history (class struggle, labor revolts, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the promised land), supposedly explaining it all.

So I focus on two specific scenes where Jonas gets the chance to reflect on his understanding of time and history in an attempt to suggest that Jonas' rant against theory has as its basis the dissolution of that understanding. His encounter with Cresspahl's cat makes him

⁵⁸ Uwe Johnson, *Speculations about Jakob*, trans. by Ursule Molinaro, New York, Grove Press, 1963, p. 212. As for the original German text, I am using the recently published (2017) critical edition: Johnson, Uwe, *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, Rostocker Ausgabe, Band 2.

⁵⁹ "... in a word, we project time into space, we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or a chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another," as Bergson says in *Time and Free Will* (p. 101).

question clock time, while his coincidental presence at Jakob's tower while he has to organize the passage of Soviet soldiers, who are going to Hungary to suppress a revolution, gives him a reason to question the Marxist theory of history, and whether history can be theorized like that at all. In the end we have a baffled Jonas, whom the state eventually throws into jail for disloyalty.

Cresspahl's Cat

Near the middle of *Speculations*, Jonas is sent away by his boss on a working vacation, during which he is supposed to produce a text outlining his thoughts on a reformed socialism: a socialism that is less rigid and more humane. He decides to stay in the countryside with Heinrich Cresspahl, his girlfriend Gesine's carpenter father. There he meets Cresspahl's cat, who accompanies him throughout his writing process, lying on an armchair, wandering around the desk. The first time they encounter each other, she is seated on the chair "so upright and dignified"⁶⁰ that Jonas feels the urge to greet her verbally, "good afternoon" — to which she does not respond.

Their relationship that starts with the cat's non-response becomes more and more about communication itself, and underlying communication is always the issue of understanding: we communicate with each other to understand and to be understood. In one scene where this is explicit, she wants him, or seems to want him, to let her out by opening the window, which she indicates by "turn[ing] her head to his side." Once he opens the window and she slides out, the third-person narrator declares, "he had guessed right: he had *understood* her"⁶¹ (er hatte sie *verstanden*).

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Speculations*, p. 133. (*Sehr würdig aufrecht*, a more literal translation of which would be "very dignifiedly upright".)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Communication requires language, an array of both gestural (physical) (“turning her head to his side”) and verbal (“good afternoon”) signs, but its presence alone is not sufficient to ensure understanding. Occasionally there exists a basic difference in the perception of the thing to be communicated. Such is the case with time, I suggest, when Jonas, near the end of their encounter, bothers the cat while she is trying to sleep. They are within different temporal frameworks: the former within that of abstracted time (of hours and seconds), the latter within an organic one, that of Bergsonian duration — and Jonas becomes aware of this perception gap as the scene comes to a close. I quote his internal monologue describing this non-understanding (which I will [ab]use as a springboard):

Does it amuse you to write that kind of stuff, she said. One’s got to live somehow, everybody is best, chto lootshe tshevo. You wouldn’t happen to have a little milk, would you...?... See how my moustache quivers. When I wanted to go to bed, she was lying on her flank, beside her outstretched legs. I crouched by her chair. Our heads were on the same level. She curved her neck and firmly posed a paw on my wrist, letting me feel the claws. My hand wandered to her shoulder and to the hard sturdy neck and pushed the skin up toward her jaw. Until, in a single shiver, she slid over on her back and rolled her head against the arm of the chair and squirmed and stretched against my hand, but never completely off-guard. All of a sudden she came to, extremely cool and awake, and pushed me away with incredible elasticity, curled herself into a castle wall and immediately disappeared into sleep. I felt bad. I should have noticed sooner: at the proper moment. For a second I had bothered her. A cat doesn’t measure time in seconds.⁶²

“Does it amuse you to write that kind of stuff, she said.” German: “Und das schreiben Sie so zu Ihrem Spass?” What kind of stuff? We have one sentence of his: “we are incorrigibly dedicated to the notion of progress.”⁶³ We are also told that there is a paragraph in Jonas’ monograph on “material and subjective consciousness.”⁶⁴ He is, in short, writing a theoretical work, which seems to be a bit detached from the world. Cresspahl, while finding Jonas’ thinking “amusing,” describes his formulations as “sorcery... nasty cartoons of the world,” “an accurately

⁶² Ibid., p. 142.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 143.

calculated world,” the “truth” of which “looked unfamiliar.”⁶⁵ As he quips, “what did [progress], after all, mean?”⁶⁶ Cresspahl’s claim that Jonas’ is writing “all out his own head” (*aus seinem eigenen Kopf*) turns out to have two valid interpretations: (1) he is writing out of his own head, without any other books as references, and (2) he is writing *all* out of his own head, expounding pure theory, as head is the home of intellect.

To rephrase the initial question: does it amuse Jonas to write theory that is detached from reality? More importantly, who is asking this? Obviously not actually the cat, since *Speculations* is not a fable, yet Jonas imagines the question to be coming from her mouth. Either this is him interpreting the cat's gestures and attitude toward him as asking this question, or, or maybe at the same time, this is Jonas *projecting* his own worries about his enterprise on her, worries that have been brewing since he came to stay with Cresspahl. Jonas’ trip to Cresspahl’s town, the goal of which was to think, makes Jonas reconsider his position as a full-time thinker. He calls himself a “spectator of life... on the outside, apart, always ready to judge.”⁶⁷ He admires Cresspahl’s capacity to be in the world, with other people and nature. As Gesine puts it, “my father is esteemed by the world and respected, and cats run after him.”⁶⁸ Also note Cresspahl’s job as a carpenter: he is a work-er in the Arendtian sense, building a world by building furniture, objects that will stay in the world and constitute it. When Jonas gets to work with nature, sawing off branches, he feels “rather pleased with himself,” “very satisfied with his fatigue.”⁶⁹ Reflecting on his physical labor, “he only wished that he, too, had worked on something useful and tangible

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 133-134.

during the week.”⁷⁰ A dire confession lies in his reflection: his theory work is both useless and intangible.

But Jonas never confesses anything *to* Cresspahl, nor does Cresspahl say anything to Jonas about how he sees his way of thinking. Once does Jonas tell Cresspahl that he is only trying to speak his mind, which is not really a comment related to his thinking but to his character: he doesn’t want to seem hubristic. Jonas’ imagination, however, makes the cat talk, converting her into the vehicle of his (self-)interrogation. What Johnson might be suggesting is that their relationship is an exemplary encounter between (what may be called) pure intellect and pure instinct. The relationship between Cresspahl and Jonas is significant, as it puts a worldly man against one who is detached from the world, but they are both men, who are capable of reason and possess intellect. Cresspahl’s cat, however, is an animal, an instinctual creature who *cannot* work with abstractions, whose allegiance is directly to life itself. She is Jonas’ antithesis, his foil.

“*One’s got to live somehow, everybody is best, chto lootshe tshevo. You wouldn’t happen to have a little milk, would you...?... See how my moustache quivers.*” Jonas imagines her to be uttering these sentences too. All of them exhibit insouciance, characteristic of your average cat: the first one is a truism (unless one chooses *not* to live); the second one is a logical impossibility (if everyone is best, then no one is); *tshevo* (*tschewo*) might be a shortened version of Russian *nitschewo*, a word that, according to Katherina Filips, makes regular appearance in post-war German memoirs and means “it doesn’t matter”⁷¹. The fourth, her request, requires little explanation.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁷¹ Katherina Filips, “Typical Russian Words in German War-Memoir Literature,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 8, no. 4, Winter 1964, p. 409.

The fifth one (in German: “... *sehen Sie mal, wie mein Bart zittert*”), however, while still nonchalant — but also the last thing she “says” before Jonas starts petting her — becomes more intriguing when combined with the third-person narrator’s peculiar pre-internal-monologue observation that “there were twenty-three hairs in her moustache”⁷² (“*Sie hatte dreiundzwanzig Barthaare*”). Why mention it? In conjunction with the time as movement instead of a collection of moments argument, I suggest: it is much harder to count the individual hairs of a moustache when they are quivering than when they are stationary. As they move, they blend into each other, resembling a brush. They lose their singleness and, if you will, become a continuum, a range of hair. Right before we read Jonas’ account of him petting the cat and her escaping the petting, we are given a more basic image highlighting the difference between movement and non-movement. While the latter is a collection of points/moments, hairs quite literally standing side by side, the former is them losing their pointness, blending into each other. And if life, as Bergson insists, is movement and change, treating it like non-movement and analyzing it thus, which is what intellect tends to do, will result in serious non-understandings.

Now to the actual incident of petting and avoiding the petting. “*I crouched by her chair. Our heads were on the same level. She curved her neck and firmly posed a paw on my wrist, letting me feel the claws.*” Seeing that Jonas might start petting her (for the first time), the cat warns him with her claws of... something, potentially of her not wanting to be touched. However, he doesn’t get it, and “[*his*] hand wander[s] to her shoulder and to the hard sturdy neck and push[es] the skin up toward her jaw.” As if knowing deep inside that the cat will not like it, Jonas externalizes the petting by assigning the agency to his hand and not himself. That the act is somehow interruptive, and maybe even destructive, can also be read in the harshness of

⁷² Ibid., p. 142.

the original German, which is rich in certain especially rough consonants⁷³ (h's, n's, t's and s's), has two rhyming triplets (and one rhyming double), and is written almost exclusively in short words — somehow reminiscent of a military march: “*Meine Hand stieg unter ihrer Schulter auf ihren starken harten Hals und verschob ihre Haut zum Kinn hin.*”

This keeps going, “*until, in a single shiver, she slid over her back and rolled her head against the arm of the chair and squirmed and stretched against my hand, but never completely off-guard.*” What is lost in this translation of “*stretched against my hand*” is the visual and aural similarity of *wälzen* (*wälzte gegen meine Hand*) to *walzen*, to waltz. In fact, *wälzen* actually means to roll or to wriggle, both being much more fluid actions than stretching. She is countering the military march with a much less rigid, curling movement — resonating maybe with a dance against Jonas’ hand, the choreography of which is not clear to him (hence neither to us), as if to mock the said march, marches being the epitome of choreography and fairly simple to predict. And the waltz, in spite of its rigid choreography, being a dance, is a pre-intellect, primordial activity that may be the closest thing for humans to pure free movement. What is accessible to Jonas and us, however, are the (supposed) stops of this waltz, indicated by Jonas’s time-markers — “*in a single shiver*” (*in einem einzigen Zucken*), “*all of a sudden*” (*unversehens*), and “*immediately*” (*unverzüglich*) — one per sentence after the petting commences and until the petting ends, suggesting that he needs them to make sense of what the cat is physically doing. Her “*incredible elasticity*” is hard for Jonas to comprehend and needs to be made rigid, and is made thus.

The outcome of the petting, and I suggest also of this rigidification, is her “*curl[ing] herself into a castle wall and immediately disappear[ing] into sleep.*” Earlier we got a

⁷³ Also: producing a consonant always involves complete or partial closure of the vocal tract, resulting in an interruption of the airflow.

description of what that castle wall looks like: “higher at the curve of the back, lower at the semicircle of neck and head and all four paws plus tail; her head was almost completely surrounded by the rest of herself.”⁷⁴ Simply put, she hides her head from Jonas with her body. The castle wall comparison, however, elevates the level of impenetrability suggested by this disappearing-into-sleep, as if Jonas has no way of getting to the cat now — or, maybe, if we were to anthropomorphize the cat for a second (and we wouldn’t lack company in doing that: the third-person narrator claims once that she is “reflecting on many things”⁷⁵), we could say that Jonas now has no access to the cat’s head, “head,” where her understanding of things such as time lies.

So Jonas proceeds: “*I felt bad.*” The translation “*bad*” is a bit misleading, as the term *betrübt* in the German original would translate better as “saddened” or “distressed,” or even more literally, emotionally muddy, clouded. While the former implies guilt, which would simplify the reading by suggesting that Jonas simply regrets having bothered the cat, the latter implies an emotion that is directed more toward oneself. Jonas is sad himself, for himself, because he has no access to whatever the cat has — but he is now aware of the perception gap: “*I should have noticed sooner: at the proper moment. For a second I had bothered her. A cat doesn’t measure time in seconds.*” The first two sentences expound his temporal framework of moments and seconds (recall the aforementioned waltz stops), while the third posits the existence of a difference. But this is only a negative statement. It is about the cat’s non-understanding of seconds, and says nothing about how a cat measures time (if a cat measures time at all). Jonas is only reminded or left with the awareness of another way of perceiving and being in time.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

In sum, then: Jonas comes to Cresspahl's house to work on theory, but the more time he spends with Cresspahl and his cat, the more skeptical he becomes about his abstract enterprise. He is much more content as he sees the branches of a tree and interacts with the cat, i.e. as he gets involved in life. But he cannot fully understand the cat: yes, he can interpret her gestures and let her out of the window, but he does not, and most likely cannot, understand the cat's internal time. He tries to describe the nature of the disruption using his own temporal framework, "*for a second I had bothered her,*" completely oblivious to what that one second must have felt like to the cat, for whom there are no seconds, or moments, but only the flow of sleep, which has now been cut short.

That the pet functioning as Jonas' foil is a cat, and not, say, a dog or a bird, is significant. No other pet is allowed as much freedom, and no other pet shows as much inclination for freedom. Dogs cannot leave their owners for more than five minutes, and house birds, when released from their cages, are likely to come back to their cages eventually. Cats, on the other hand, disappear for hours, jump on cupboards, and are only nice to you when they need food. At least, that is the mainstream image of a pet cat, and this image works rather well as an embodiment of uninhibited life. Their ballerina-like elasticity and flexibility also creates a useful contrast to the rigidity of abstracted time. What is also of value is the feminine article attached to the cat in German (*die Katze*, which the translation cleverly keeps by addressing her as she). Mind you, Johnson could have degendered the cat if he really wanted it by using the diminutive, *das Kätzchen*, but he did not, thus inviting us to consider the gendered history of this difference between reason/intellect and feeling/instinct, the former masculine, the latter feminine.⁷⁶ During the Enlightenment, the masculine-feminine divide would find itself as the Mind-Nature divide,

⁷⁶ See Christina A. James, "Feminism and Masculinity: Reconceptualizing the Dichotomy of Reason and Emotion," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17, no. 1, 1997.

science being a patriarchal marriage of these two, in which Mind, the husband, has dominion over Nature, the wife.⁷⁷ In the scene with Cresspahl's cat, however, Mind fails to comprehend Nature, let alone dominate it.

What also needs to be highlighted is the seemingly formal and hierarchical aspect of the relationship between the cat and Jonas (which does vanish near the end, when they play on the floor together). Her initial description as sitting "so upright and dignified" and the use of the German formal "*Sie*" when she asks whether Jonas is enjoying writing theory paints her to be something of an authority figure, a teacher if you will. Furthermore, she doesn't call it "stuff" in German, which sounds not only colloquial but also playful, but simply a vague "das," which makes her "sound" much more condescending.

Jakob's Timetable

Having finished the manuscript and resigned from his job, and having been dumped by his girlfriend (yes, Gesine loves Jakob), Jonas goes to Jakob's dispatch tower to talk to him (no, not [really] about Gesine). Coincidentally, while he is there, a group of Red Army soldiers traveling by train to Budapest, Hungary to suppress the Hungarian Revolution have to pass through Jakob's station. Jakob does not take the opportunity to slow down the army or prevent the army's arrival in Budapest, which he could have done by cooperating with another dispatcher who was already doing that, but instead, he orders that guy to be tagged, clears the tracks of other trains (commercial etc.), and facilitates the army's passage. After the entire ordeal comes to an end, he looks at his timetable: "There is a big empty square on the train sheet between time

⁷⁷ Bill Moyers, "Evelyn Fox Keller: The Gendered Language of Science," Bill Moyers (Interview), May 6, 1990.

and space, instead of the usual neat tight ingenious crochet work, and what runs horizontally through all this emptiness? three lines and a half.”⁷⁸

Some historical context is needed. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was not just another uprising against a regime under the Soviet influence. Lasting slightly less than two weeks, it was notoriously unorganized and lacked a leader. What started out as a student protest resulted in the collapse of the government and the rise of urban militias willing to fight the Soviet army. Writing on the incident a year later, Hannah Arendt would claim that the revolution countered the almost automated process in which Soviet totalitarianism had reproduced itself throughout Eastern Europe, and would suggest that “if there was ever such a thing as Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘spontaneous revolution’ — this sudden uprising of an oppressed people for the sake of their freedom and hardly anything else... then we had the privilege to witness it.”⁷⁹

Here I will not engage with questions such as whether the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic, the GDR, and the Soviets were *really* Marxists and whether they were *really* the voice of the proletariat and so on. The fact that the Hungarian revolutionaries established Councils “to restore order and to reorganize the Hungarian economy on a socialist basis, but without rigid Party control or the apparatus of terror”⁸⁰ suggests that they might have been the real socialists in that historical moment. However, it is still the case that all these states adopted ideologies heavily tinged with Marxism, if not based explicitly on it, and Johnson describes the GDR to be particularly so in *Speculations*. When Herr Rohlf, the state agent, first takes Jakob in for a friendly talk, the narrative is interrupted by an anonymous dialogue between two people at a bar, drinking and speculating on what Rohlf might have told Jakob: “probably gave him the

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” *The Journal of Politics* 20, no. 1, Feb. 1958, p. 8.

⁸⁰ UN report quoted by Arendt.

thumbnail course in history from the Theory of The Surplus Value to the intensification of the class struggle by the avant-garde... irrationality of life... which came into the world with capitalized private ownership of machines and raw materials and money.”⁸¹ And there is an exquisite delight in finding out that this caricatured version of Marxist thought (capitalism gave birth to irrationality? really?) is not that different from what comes out of Rohlfs’ automated mouth: “I based my reasoning on the facts. I told him that the Soviet Union abolished private ownership of machines and raw materials and the wage system... and after so much filth, incredibly, a new State was born which managed labor fairly...”⁸²

The most revelatory statement Rohlfs makes during their talk, however, at least for our purposes, is that “by now any means seemed justified against stagnation and regression, against a change back to the old; against all those who resist the change toward the new, the future.”⁸³ The future is doomed to come, but Rohlfs, being a good modern and a Marxist, expounds a progressive view of history by bundling the future with the new and opposing it to “stagnation and regression,” thus suggesting that the new/future will bring progress (i.e. result in betterment), and thus legitimizing all the actions of the extremely new Soviet Union and its proxies, who are, supposedly, the real progressives and the vehicle of labor-friendly change, including the brutal repression of the Hungarian Revolution, which also could have been a positive change, but alas!

Rohlfs does not say this explicitly to Jakob, but the following comment by one of the bar-drinkers lurks in the background: “The victorious capitalists abused the defeated and encouraged exploitations through private ownership and reinforced retrogression in life’s evolution on earth”⁸⁴ (in der Entwicklung des Lebens auf Erden). That is to say, socialism is an evolutionary

⁸¹ Johnson, *Speculations*, p. 36.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 37

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

step, a quasi-biological necessity, hence inevitable. These bar-drinkers say so, because the state says so, and they say so, because their Marx supposedly said so.

Eternally moving forward, and inherently inevitable — what better symbol is there for history, as understood by Johnson’s GDR, than a magnanimous train, with its tracks, on which it is dependent, standing in for the supposed predictability of history’s unfolding? And what better symbol for the theory than the timetable that shows the where and the when of the train?

A literal reading of Jakob’s timetable could be: as the Soviet troops arrive at the station and Jakob decides to let them pass, they have to stop more and more normal scheduled trains to empty the tracks for the army trains. The more trains they stop, the more the “neat ingenious crochet work” (the timetable) is disfigured — all the alterations must be recorded on it to be able to track them — and because they stop all the scheduled trains, an entire chunk of the schedule is trashed, which results in “a big empty square,” implicitly recording the time during which the army passes through the train station.

However, the section building up to the timetable is littered with moments and details suggesting that the timetable should be read symbolically. When Jakob, right before the army passage starts, remembers that Jonas is also in the room, he turns to him and says, “All this is secret you understand, and if you’d rather go out,”⁸⁵ but Jonas indicated that he wants to stay. That this matter should be kept secret is of political importance on its own, but what matters for us is the fact that Jakob turns and acknowledges Jonas (telling us to remember his presence too), who already has started his personal interrogation of how he thinks about time, hence also history, and who now finds himself in the middle of history *par excellence*, with the chance to experience first-hand how things *actually* happen. Then there is Jakob’s insistence, both before and after the fact, that there is no way to stop the Russians — (before) “As though ten minutes

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

made a difference,”⁸⁶ (after) “They’d still have made it by tomorrow morning”⁸⁷ — highlighting the concept of inevitability. And then there is the moment when the waiting soldiers are “eager for a bit of conversation with the overtired irritated crowd that stood waiting,”⁸⁸ irritated because their lives have to stop to give way to these carriers of theory. In fact, all life has to stop: just to let the soldiers go through, “trolleys and trucks and private cars and pedestrians” must be brought to a halt by “motorcycles” (unclear, but probably the city police) with “crossed, uncrossed, crossed arms,”⁸⁹ which resembles the way in which columns of time and space (to mirror the narrator’s description⁹⁰) interact to give birth to the usual neat tight ingenious crochet work, the timetable — which becomes significant once you remember the potential incompatibility established in the previous section between theory and life.

Such use of what’s happening in the streets with the cars etc. to interpret the timetable can also be supported by the extreme ambiguity of the sentence introducing the description of the timetable: “And now let’s see what we have accomplished?”⁹¹ Who is this “we”? What have “we” accomplished? This “we,” arguably, is everyone involved in the passage of the soldiers, including those who had to cross and uncross their arms.

Now to the timetable as theory. On a usual (and even that, “usual,” is within the lexicon of predictability) day, it is a neat tight ingenious crochet work (ein säuberliches dichtes kluges Knüpfwerk). Neat, or clean: the lines are perfectly parallel, there is an abundance of right angles, it is the visual embodiment of order, it *is* order, it is eloquent — but also “säuberliches,” *too* clean, *disturbingly* clean. Tight, or thick, or dense: little can get through it; it is not flexible, but

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 196.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Vertical and horizontal lines divided the sheet on the slanting chart-board before him into time and space sequences of scheduled and unscheduled events” (p. 17).

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 197.

also it covers a lot of space, is overarching, tells a lot, or pretends to tell a lot. Ingenious (and this is probably the most telling attribute): carries the trace of a human, or, more specifically, of intellect; it is the product of intellect, and, for the observer, it has an allure, a degree of fascination, it results in an emotional obsession with rational perfection. And a crochet work: in addition to all that is already said, it exhibits a pattern, and more than often, it is only one pattern and one only. This, of course, is nothing like history, which is neither orderly, nor rigidly predictable, nor tamable by intellect, nor the repeat of an immortal pattern.

And now there is a big empty square in the middle of this crochet work. Why? Here I extend the previously mentioned “we” to the real originators of everything happening in East Berlin with the Russian soldiers and Jakob’s trains, to the Hungarian people, to the We the People of Hungary. There is a hole in the theory because students in Hungary left their classrooms and flooded the streets to protest Soviet totalitarianism. There is now space on the paper that is disordered, loose, untheorized/untheorizable, unpatterned. That is, of course, the space of history: “A big empty square... between time and space.” In German: “ein grosser freier Platz... zwischen Zeit und Raum.” Big/groß highlights the significance of this space, of how much a group of people can do, i.e. alter reality, when they freely get together and revolt, to do ‘etwas Großes’, something great, say “no” — which is quite a bit. In fact, according to Arendt, such spontaneous events “constitute... the very texture of reality within the realm of human affairs, where the ‘wholly improbable happens regularly’...”⁹² The condition of political life, which is all human life, is that the unpredictable must, somehow, and paradoxically, always be expected, because, and here the original German must be considered, for this space is “frei,” not only empty but free — it is the large space of freedom where people author miracles.⁹³

⁹² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 300.

⁹³ Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom,” in *Between Past and Future*, New York, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 169.

But people also need literal, physical space to act in. They need squares (here the English translation works), city squares, town squares, where they can get together and let their voices be heard, this being meant in the broader meaning of “voice,” vocal or otherwise. On October 30, 1956, for example, armed Hungarian protestors attacked the State Security Police units on the Republic Square. More peacefully, in 1989, Chinese students would protest on the Tiananmen Square, the oppression of which was nowhere near being peaceful. That is to say, squares (Plätze) have always been crucial to revolutionary and protest movements as spaces of organization, cooperation, and action.

And harking back to Bergson, this “square,” this figurative space being between time and (actual) space (zwischen Zeit und Raum) echoes the claim that illusions of determinism are animated through the spatialization of time. The space of history — of politics, of freedom — is such that it defeats all calculation by separating time from space, i.e. by disrupting the analysis that projects the latter on the former. Imbued with *élan vital*, freedom is its fact.

Jonas’s Verdict

A single infraction against the theory scares us away, but what if it was necessary?... And the Red Army’s advance against the Hungarian revolt is nothing but a successful experiment in the physics lab. Is it tolerable that reality takes place and we censure it according to its adherence to or infraction of theoretical rules?⁹⁴

Jonas nails it when he claims that the Red Army’s advance was a physics experiment, a physical intervention, the basis of which was a physics-like understanding of history that treats it like a natural system with seemingly reliable laws, using which one can predict its results. The Red Army’s intervention, from the Soviet viewpoint, was an intervention, a correction, a bringing-it-back to the tracks of the train of history.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Speculations*, p. 212.

But there are no tracks of history, as history is no train. The neglect of this basic fact results in the censure of reality whenever it doesn't fit in the theory of history, the intervention in Hungary being one such censure. Then, the violence of the suppression was twofold: (1) physical (almost 4 thousand people died in sum, with near 15 thousand more wounded)⁹⁵ and (2) (and this might be the more cruel facet) metaphysical, as in a violence against reality from the metaphysical realm where ideas reign over tangible reality.

Jonas the social theorist, having realized all of this, is confused: "What is certain is not certain, what is will not stay that, and never becomes today right now. I don't understand."⁹⁶ As the book ends, he enters Herr Rohlf's car, holding his wrists out for the handcuffs. We are not told explicitly of what he is being accused. Most likely: of treason, for working on reform plans. But also likely, at least symbolically: of losing some of his conviction in the age of modernity.

⁹⁵ J. Györkei, A. Kirov, and M. Horvath, *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956*, New York, Central European University Press, 1999, p. 370; UN General Assembly *Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary*, 1957, Chapter V, footnote 8.

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Speculations*, p. 212-213.

Concluding Remarks

Why do the employees of Halit Ayarci's Time Regulation Institute oppose Hayri designing the Clock Villas after he built the institute (sort of) in the image of Mübarek, the standing clock from his childhood house? As Hayri reports, the same words crowd all of their mouths: "Oh dear, you cannot play with [i.e. mess with] man this much."⁹⁷ Dr. Ramiz, the psychoanalyst, clarifies: "Don't mix them up, my sir! The home is to one side, human consciousness and science is to the other!."⁹⁸ Here lies, in a sense, the entire problem: modernity insists on the abstracted and staticized time of science as *the* time, and imposes it, in reality and in theory, on man, whose basic experience of time is one of flow and duration, and who is always uneasy in the face of hours and seconds. Goethe might have provided us with the best literary representation of this situation when he gave the elderly Faust, the modern man *par excellence*, the seemingly innate desire to *dam the water* and stop its movement. In the process of building his kingdom, Faust first goes delirious and then dies, after which he is dragged off-stage like an old useless rag by Mephistopheles' minions.

In the tactics Tanpınar and Johnson use to make their critical points clear, I see two commonalities that should be pointed out: (1) the use of the animal as a signifier of difference, and (2) the use of the object of spatialized time as a signifier of antagonism.

(1): The way Johnson uses Cresspahl's cat as a moment of revelation and education for Jonas has already been made clear in the chapter on *Speculations*. Their encounter is an exemplary one between human intellect and animal instinct, the former having little to no trace of the latter, hence incapable of understanding life in its processual nature. Tanpınar, too, makes use of an animal, the fickle goat that Hayri's watch exiles upon its arrival. While it is true that

⁹⁷ Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*, p. 374.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

the goat seems to be a minor aspect of the book length-wise (it appears on one single page of the almost four-hundred-page work), it is in what I would call the executive summary section of *TRI*, the first thirty-five(ish) pages where Hayri gives us an expansive overview of the rest of his memoir à la *Bildungsroman*. That is to say, it is there to set up the rest of the book.

Also note how both animals are anthropomorphized. Such anthropomorphization allows our characters to connect to these animals with their own human means, enabling discourse of a peculiar, reflexive kind, i.e. allowing a discourse with oneself through said animals (e.g. Jonas talking to himself by putting words in the cat's mouth). The most radical version of this in modernist literature might be T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, his collection of children's (?) poems about a community of extremely human cats, where, for example, Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer are "highly efficient cat-burglars... and remarkably smart at a smash-and-grab,"⁹⁹ and Growltiger, the racist cat, cannot stand the Persians and the Siamese. There, it is the reader himself who is pushed into a reflexive discourse, with the animals functioning as mirrors, showing the reader, and man at-large, at his absolute lows — and I myself feel content when his victims make Growltiger walk the plank. As opposed to T.S. Eliot, Tanpinar and Johnson rely on the animalness of these animals, highlighting the inherent difference between animal and man, instinct and intellect.¹⁰⁰

(2): Jakob's timetable for the trains and the clocks in *TRI* are analogous, as they both track where you are in spatialized time. The clock tells you your location in terms of hours and minutes, while the timetable, when understood to be a symbol of the Marxist theory of history in

⁹⁹ T.S. Eliot, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, New York, Faber and Faber, 1939. Available from the Gutenberg Project: <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/eliotts-practicalcats/eliotts-practicalcats-01-h.html#chap033>

¹⁰⁰ This "inherent" difference is now being challenged by many philosophers, such as Gerard Kuprus, who suggests during a discussion of the possibility of animal suicide that "we should shift away from the paradigm of the Cartesian abyss of difference between human rationality and animal instincts" ("Continuum and Temporality," *Animal Sentience*, 2018). There is — thankfully, from my scholarly perspective — no reason to believe that Tanpinar and Johnson were with Kuprus there.

Speculations, marks your historical progress. Both function as the loci of the antagonism between spatialized time and Bergsonian duration. Hayri's watch exiling Hayri's old life is described as the watch first clearing the space around itself and then embracing its life-space adequately — the resemblance to Hitler's *Lebensraum* is probably not by mistake, which would put Tanpınar squarely with the Adorno-Horkheimer evaluation of the Enlightenment. In *Speculations*, the Hungarian Revolution results in the “undoing” of the timetable, creating an unaccounted for space amongst the predrawn tidy boxes. With Nuri Efendi, the problem seems to be less of an antagonism than a desire-induced loss of control, which ridicules the idea of the modern man as one of unaffected reason, suggesting a contradiction between modernity's self-image and its reality.

In directly using the object of spatialization to deliver critique of temporality, Tanpınar and Johnson are following a modernist tradition that extends (at least) to director Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi masterpiece, *Metropolis*, with the rather large “clock machine,” where the antagonism is represented through a battle of muscles between the man and the clock. The worker who is working the machine has to swiftly move the clock's arms so that they point to the lit bulbs around the clock. It is an arduous process. They sweat; their faces reflect pure agony. When Freder, the boss's son, decides to become a class traitor and tries to work the machine, he is eventually “crucified” on the clock with his arms stretched sideways, making it explicit that the clock, being a vehicle of control, symbolizes the oppression of the workers (Christ and his followers) by their bosses (the Romans).

Similar to Lang, Tanpınar and Johnson designate spatialized time as oppressive, but not only in the economic sense. In fact, only in Tanpınar does the critique become explicitly economic, when the Time Regulation Institute, in an attempt to boost efficiency and

productivity, fines people if their watches are not synchronized to the state's official time. Both texts, I would say, are more interested in the personal/psychological and the political aspects of the oppression(s) caused by spatialization.

In Tanpınar, Hayri is *attacked* by the questions of why and how upon the watch's arrival, questions enabled by the spatialization of time which underlies cause-and-effect inquiries. His happy constitution, however, fights back, the result of which is disharmony. This disharmony is also a national/cultural, and thus political, one, as the modernizing forces (of Tanzimat, of Kemalists) insist on a sudden detachment from the past for the sake of the future supposedly known in advance, hence not a future at all but just an extension of the present. Therefore, in a roundabout way, not embracing spatialized time becomes a crime, an act of political dissent.

In Johnson, spatialized time first reveals itself as an epistemological barrier: Jonas cannot understand the cat. With the Hungarian Revolution scene, it is shown that historical determinism, an outgrowth of spatialization, enables direct political oppression, as it justifies all corrective interventions against those who resist what is thought to be the inevitable movement of history. It is also significant that Jakob refuses to delay the arrival of the Red Army in Hungary, citing the inevitability of the revolution being crushed. He even goes on to say that it would have been stupid to abide by one's convictions in the face of this situation. Johnson creates an opposition between principled political judgment and scientific reason, and the triumph of the latter within the political, it seems, results in one's complicity in political oppression.

To wrap it up, I would like to point out one last tactic by both Tanpınar and Johnson, for which I could not find an appropriate place in the paper proper: the idea of an accident. In Tanpınar, Hayri İrdal is impelled to write the story of his life after Halit Ayarci dies in a car accident. This is grim irony: Halit's name means Eternal Regulator, and he, it turns out, cannot

counter his own death. The metaphorical nature of the event is intensified by the fact that it is a car accident, the car signifying not only technical expertise (remember Ataturk's "positive science" as "torch"), but also the concept of movement ("march on the road to... progress"). On a much more direct level, however, it speaks to the impossibility of such eternal regulation, as spontaneous occurrences are facts of natural and political life, impossible to dismiss. The frustration and shock caused by this unpredictability is mirrored in the first sentence of *Speculations*: "But Jakob always cut across the tracks."¹⁰¹ Jakob's death is outrageous because he "always cut across the tracks;" he has been with the railroad for "seven years;" "anything that rolled on rails, if it rolled anywhere, he heard it, believe me;"¹⁰² and yet, he dies by getting hit by a train. Reason suggests that he cannot, he should not, die that way; it goes against the order of things, and yet, he dies. Then, to the question of "if *always*, how *but*," Johnson and Tanpinar reply: reality, as it is free and creative, has a way of eluding reason.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, *Speculations*, p. 7.

¹⁰² Ibid.

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