

Neoliberal “time regimes” and their relations to new technologies

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Abstract

This paper is trying to answer the following question: what is influence of new technologies related to time management on perception of time in neoliberalism? Capitalist and industrial methods of time management, related mostly to Taylorism and Fordism, have transmuted and become subject to neoliberal transformation. The important element of contemporary “time regimes” are information and communications technologies used to manage time of individuals. These non-human actors have agency enabling to affect social and technological reality. On the one hand, individuals use them to coordinate different types of social time, wishing to minimize negative consequences of present acceleration of cultural change, while on the other hand the new technologies accelerate the social time pace and speed up movements of our bodies that become subject to influence of Foucault’s technologies of power. Ironically, they constitute the strategy that is both releasing and subjugating towards temporality of individuals. An analysis conducted on the basis of the Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory allows to present both diversity and antinomy of practices and processes constituting the hybrid network spread around time management applications.

Key words

applications, new technologies, time regimes, actor-network theory, neoliberalism, pointillist time, social time

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Neoliberal logic is a radical form of capitalism, including the discourse of personal responsibility of social actors (Wacquant 2012: 66). According to this logic, a competent individual can properly manage time being one of the most important of development factors in capitalism. Time in neoliberal logic is not treated as a goal itself, but as a mean in order to achieve it. Rather than unwittingly succumb to its impact, neoliberalism makes us manage this limited asset. Time management includes the decision and choice making process and constitutes the process of planning, scheduling, organization of actions and assignment of time to certain tasks.

Being defined by capitalist and then neoliberal logic and willing to take personal responsibility for available time, individuals can use the set of instruments and techniques created for this purpose. Their popularity in the 1990s was proven by “self-help texts on how to manage individual’s time”, widely available in bookstores. (Adam 2002: 1). Nowadays, time management techniques and instruments proposed in guidebooks and training materials are in the digital form and the innumerable amount of time management applications is evidence of continuous popularity of this phenomenon.

New technologies used for time management and being subject to the analysis in this paper are a result of the socially established need of making choices on what to do with such a finite asset like time. Despite variety of possibilities, I have selected only a dozen or so applications that I found the most representative¹ for the purpose of this paper. I asked myself the following question: what is influence of new technologies related to time management on perception of time by neoliberal social actors? The goal of this paper is to try to refer to so defined research problem.

New ICT technologies serving as instruments for time management constitute an important issue regarding human temporality and social time². Computer programs and mobile

¹ Applications have been chosen on the basis of selection of Internet-acquired data. On the basis of the results found in the Google search engine after typing three following phrases being “Time Management Applications”, “List of the best Time Management Applications” and “Time Management Software” I have created the list of the thirty most recurring applications. I have indexed them in terms of time management methods and techniques. These are the methods called “Grocery List”, “Getting Things Done”, “Kanban” and “Time tracking” and the techniques called “Pomodoro” and “Eisenhower Matrix”. Among the obtained list I have selected eighteen applications I happened to use personally. The decision to use the autoethnographic perspective results from researcher’s awareness of being an element of the part of reality being analyzed. Additionally, “autoethnographic methods are highly suited to the task of conducting research on the digitally mediated experiences in everyday activities and in facilitating the development of new theories of digital being” (Riordan 2014: 1).

² Henri Hubert (1909) and Émile Durkheim (1912) were the first ones who identified the social aspect of time, occurring during the process of interactions among community members. Thanks to them time in social sciences is understood as a social construct and a deep structure of each culture and a hidden system of personal life, comprising of time-related benchmarks, behavior, concepts on continuity, evanescence, change and alteration (Hall 1984; Zerubavel 1981).

applications are a type of modern calendars used to manage temporality of social actors. They are initiating changes in methods of perception of time-related phenomena and they create a new kind of time called iTime. According to Ben Agger: “smartphones create a kind of iTime that challenges the pre-internet boundaries between public and private, day and night, work and leisure, space and time” (Agger 2011: 120), however boundary blurring, characteristic for iTime, results in some antinomy in neoliberal logic (Ciepley 2017). According to the thesis of this paper, I think we experience some cultural, technological and temporal paradox, as social time individuals try to master by means of new technologies has “infiltrated” this hardly manageable phenomenon via the same devices. New technologies have led to establishment of the new form of social time individuals have difficulties to live within, as it is incompatible with biorhythm of a human organism (Cifrić 2010).

Applications as non-human actors

In order to give the thorough analysis of this illogical system of relations I am going to use the action network theory (ANT) by Bruno Latour (ANT). This method allows to understand how temporality of individuals is constructed. The analysis method is compliant with the rule of symmetric anthropology that assumes agency of both human and non-human actors (Latour 1993). Thanks to ANT it becomes possible to present the phenomenon of time management regarding extension of the term of acting into non-human objects, for example applications. ANT underlines agency of specific technologies, namely time management applications, that connect human and non-human actors via mutual relations. These applications “act”, “decide” and „determine” in terms of the contemporary form of social time and have influence on temporal relations in our surroundings (Latour 2005).

Being both a theory and a method, ANT enables extended understanding of variety of time management practices that belong both to the spheres of nature (adjusted to natural biorhythm of human organism under influence of neoliberal rhetoric) and culture. Use of smartphone applications can be included into social, cultural, economic and technological practices. Latour’s theory allows to understand social perception of time, transferred via technologies (Latour 1991), by partial reconstruction of social and technological relations and obtaining the complete insight into the phenomena of power and domination. Use of mutually supportive time management applications involves activation of various social, political, economic and cultural resources related to methods of work and leisure time organization.

ANT suggests to analyze culture as a process. New technologies in a form of time management applications are Latour actors established as result of processes of time spatialization and

commodification, creating new relations and new actants. Spatialization of social time occurs as reflection of time in space and time imagining and determination by means of numbers. As a result, indivisible quality of time becomes merged with space and limited to the qualitative form, namely some space-defining series of numbers. According to Henri Bergson, this leads to incorrect perception of time as an element that is separated and isolated from humans (Bergson 1910), however thanks to the process of spatialization time has become measurable and objectifiable.

On the other hand, time commodification is related to product (Appadurai 1996: 79; Harvey 2010: 37-38). Time has become a precious asset (according to Benjamin Franklin's phrase "time is money"). As early as in the Middle Ages time was an object of trade loans and credits were based on (Guriewicz 1985) and capitalism condemned time waste. Money and promptness have become characteristic in production, trade and services where punctuality, accuracy and timeliness started to bring profits. Currently, time should be well used and organized, as unmanaged time is wasted time. Time has become a characteristic framework for various types of human activities, seen in economic context. Time management applications are a technological and social effect of both processes that explain to some extent how the neoliberal concept of social time, constructed by new technologies, has been formed.

As I wish to maintain in this analysis the symmetry rule included in ANT, the paper considers both technological and social elements. Subtitles refer to various elements of applications, as well as processes and mechanism forming them. In the next part of the paper I am going to discuss the issue of Project Management Applications, presenting them in terms of coordination of multitude of social times described by George Gurvitch (1964). Then I shall look closely at Time Tracking Applications regarding to "time regimes" constituting the influencing element of power that enforces occurrence of specific time concepts (Sabelis 2007). I am going to consider temporal regimes in terms of power mechanisms and discipline (Foucault 1995), explaining what Productivity Applications are and considering the sophisticated network of relations established in the process of social time neoliberalization characterized by time-space compression (Harvey 1989). I am also going to discuss the issue of Pomodoro Timer Apps from the social time fragmentation point of view (Eriksen 2001). Finally, I am going to analyze Eisenhower Matrix Applications, referring them to the phenomenon of multi-temporality (Barker 2011). The symmetrical structure of the analysis is going to present how new technologies in a form of time management applications are connected with social processes within the single network of relations.

Neoliberalization of social time: Productivity Apps

Such applications as “Any.Do”, “Todoist”, “iDoneThis”, “1-2-5 List”, “Wunderlist”, “Remember the Milk” and “Things” are a kind of personal organizers. Being called “To-do lists”, they belong to Productivity Applications aiming at increased efficiency of individuals. These tools have been created to manage large numbers of tasks and they enable organization of daytime by drawing lists of things to be done, in the form of grouped notes and reminders. These applications replace a traditional notebook and their operation is based on the “Grocery list” management method (named after the method of information display similar to a shopping list). More developed Productivity Applications are usually designed in compliance with the GDT (Getting Things Done) method organizing tasks in accordance with process comprising of the following five stages: 1) *collection*, 2) *processing*, 3) *organizing*, 4) *review*, 5) *doing* (Allen 2001).

Being an effect of social and economic changes occurring in neoliberal times, Productivity Applications are designed to assist individuals in efficient execution of planned tasks and pursuing such values as productivity, effectiveness, innovativeness and creativity. Using such tools is compliant with neoliberal logic that orders to make efforts in order to maximize time exploitation and increase economic efficiency. Productivity Applications are a display of the process of neoliberalization, being expansion of the free market sphere into all symptoms of human activity, including temporality of individuals. Within the process of time neoliberalization social time has merged with values related to individual responsibility and flexibility (Hassan 2009; 2012). As a result, we are witnessing modern and very neoliberal attitude to time, characterized by focusing on future and planning, as well as by belief that correct time management leads to development and personal fulfillment of individuals.

Consequently, time management applications are a technology supporting and strengthening needs of persons wishing to achieve neoliberal values. Within information society neoliberal logic creates the time management need by means of new technologies (Harvey 2005: 3-4). Individuals and society groups feeling a need to be more productive and efficient realize this need with use of applications. New technologies help to intensify the phenomenon of time-space compression, that can be perceived as an alternative way to express promptness within social reality (Harvey 1989: 284-285). From the anthropological point of view time management applications are smart instruments to control time of individuals and construct social temporality within neoliberal hegemony.

Time coordination tools: Project Management Apps

Such tools as Trello or Asana, known as “Project Management Applications”, or “Task Management Software”, have been developed for project management. The “project management” term includes the idea of temporary enterprises and untypical actions taken in order to achieve a certain goal. New technology actors have influence on a way of realization of actions, within which undertaken activities are called tasks. Applications are an important link connecting actions and people, while projects these applications are used to realize for are usually performed by a group of people known as team. Project Management Applications enable cooperation of persons living in various locations all over the world. Such applications as Trello and Asana replace a traditional cork board, however they are not spatially limited³. A virtual board can be used by many people assigned by their employers with certain tasks to be performed.

Use of Project Management Applications enables management over tasks and time needed to perform them. Application of specified tools results in selection of techniques used to eliminate differences in perception and attitude to time. Gurvitch underlined the need to become aware of existing variety of times and attempts to master them by means of systemic solutions. This French researcher underlined that communities could not be able to survive without numerous attempts to standardize various social times (Gurvitch 1964: 31-33). Nowadays, such attempts are made via applications that have been developed as instruments designed to synchronize rhythms of different human temporalities. By means of applications people try to coordinate time of individuals who live in different locations all over the world and are embedded in different social times. Variety of time perception ways is particularly discussed in the field of international business (Gesteland 2012: 63-72).

The most important function of Project Management Applications is coordination and synchronization of actions performed by persons focusing on the same tasks. Both Trello and Asana are the examples of new technologies taking over such functions of social time as adjustment of collective life rhythm and coordination of activities of individuals. Realization of these functions via applications results from growing difficulties in terms of defining what the nature of social time is. Current time management methods in terms of time coordination

³ Trello and Asana are virtual boards consisting of lists of columns and cards. Each card may include additional elements in the form of additional information, comments, checklists and graphic and text appendices. Marking cards with colorful labels is the additional function designed for better organization of cards. Moreover, each task can be assigned a due date of completion. Cards can be dragged and dropped among lists they are assigned to. Lists are given specific names, so they can be matched to specifics of projects being realized. The usually applied method is Kanban, in which our virtual board is divided into three following sections 1) *to do*, 2) *doing*, 3) *done*.

are different than for linear temporality among laborers working in factories for 12 hours each day. Laborers were socialized and disciplined to be punctual on the „dead on time’ basis. Factory owners required them to approve spatial and time-related logic of capitalist labor process, that considered time wasting as a misdemeanor.

The analogical mechanism is present in neoliberalism where time is coordinated with use of new technologies. By means of applications all managers and supervisors have insight into realization “process” for tasks assigned to employees. Such applications as Trello collect information on who, how fast and with what effect performed an assigned task. The analysis of these data allows for “optimization” of labor and “improvement” of the project realization process. These are activities analogical to the processes of labor management and organization, implemented by Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor in factories. The assumptions on the basis of which the foundations of the capitalist production process have been developed are used to design contemporary applications.

Time regimes: Time Tracking Apps

The main function of tools known as Time Tracking Applications (such as Klok, Roadmap or Everhour) is calculation and monitoring of labor time for persons using them. Time Tracking Applications record a real-time course of tasks users usually perform using a computer. The basis operation performed in these applications is to start a counter, when a task is initiated, and to stop it immediately upon its completion. These tools replace traditional clocks and stoppers and provide additional functions allowing to correct or modify registered time. With their support individuals can analyze collected data and then decide on how to spend their leisure time.

Time tracking applications are designed for individuals, entrepreneurs, small businesses and freelancers. Many of these instruments are provided with the labor time tracking function for small teams. These tools are also used by home office workers who send reports containing data collected by applications to their employers once per month. Time Tracking Applications are tools to monitor time of employees and enable thorough monitoring of tasks being performed. On the basis of data collected by applications employers can conclude which employees have too few or too many tasks to perform and how project assumptions are adjusted to actual assets and personnel. The applications enable digital surveillance of employees by monitoring their efficiency. They help to provide an employer with detailed information on how an employee used time at work and to assess whether visited websites and used applications were related to their official duties.

The mechanism of employee time monitoring is the neoliberal laboratory of power, the Panopticon (Foucault 1995: 204). The applications can serve as monitoring tools and oppressive instruments defining temporality of individuals. The modern approach to time was firstly developed in capitalist factories where a time regime symbol was a clock mounted over an entrance gate. Industrial time regimes are still deeply embedded in culture, therefore they provide grounds for hidden values, ways of thinking and logic of activities, however time management methods have transformed, indeed. The new character of post-industrial time regimes is a result of deregulation of standards related to blurring of boundaries between labor time and leisure time. The division for private life and professional life is becoming challenged. Temporal regimes that have changed under influence of new, flexible forms of employment, such as home office work, offer variety of tools, for example applications. These tools make individuals be able to monitor and organize labor by efficient merging of private and professional spheres of life (Niehaus 2013). Sometimes such time management programs and applications have influence on temporality of certain social actors. They belong to the group of new disciplinary tools. These are “small things” used “for the control and use of man” (Foucault 1995: 141). Such applications as Time Tracking master human temporality and use neoliberal power mechanisms to subject human bodies to discipline [Foucault 1995: 138]. They are one of subordination elements of the new regimes that create docile bodies.

Though applications are particularly useful to watch and monitor employees, they are also used to keep track on personal life. Undertaking actions in order to become disciplined is called self-management. Realization of the idea of self-management performed by taking personal responsibility for processes of planning and organization of own labor are supported by the applications belonging to the group of so called Website Monitoring and Managing Distractions. The examples of these applications are Rescue Time and Time Doctor. They have been designed to record time spent on Internet browsing and monitoring and listing of visited websites. The assumed effect of use of these tools is identification and then elimination of the so called “time wasters” that distract us from work to be done. Thanks to such applications we have access to detailed statistics indicating which websites devour our time to the largest extent. Within neoliberal logic of power applications support the world-wide phenomenon of time management. Use of tools serving to coordinate ourselves constitutes realization of the neoliberal form of governmentality (Foucault 1991), care of the self (Foucault 1986) and technologies of the self (Foucault 1988). Contemporary time regimes are still oppressing time models, however, in their case individuals can organize and discipline on their own, thus adopting responsibility for their own lives and decisions. The motive of self-discipline

understood as controlling one's internal desires and caprices is a key element of rationalization processes related to popularization of the capitalist ethic of work. Nowadays, temporal patterns have become internalized by the society to such an extent that it is not necessary to administer pressure from outside anymore. Neoliberal individuals self-impose established time regimes on themselves, rule themselves and, finally, become their own wardens. Thanks to neoliberal mechanisms of power it is not necessary anymore to erect watch towers and employ plenty of supervisors enforcing monotonous subordination that has often aroused anger. Subordinates are supposed to discipline themselves and bear material and mental costs of supervision that is performed within the sophisticated network of interactions that have influence on people willingly trying to become serfs.

Time fragmentation: Pomodoro Timer Apps

Pomodoro Timer Applications such as "Focus Booster" or "Flat Tomato" are online tools allowing users to divide planned tasks into fragments. Similarly to the old-fashioned Pomodoro method, Focus Booster is simply a watch that determines work rhythm in the form of prolonged sessions with short pauses in between. The classic version of this technique uses a kitchen timer in the shape of a tomato to divide work into 25-minute intervals separated by pauses lasting 3-5 minutes. After four such sessions there should be a longer pause lasting 15-30 minutes. This work rhythm type enables individuals to achieve an increased level of productivity.

The Pomodoro technique used in applications is related to the process of time fragmentation. Duration of human life has been stratified and fallen apart into thousands of elements in the form of opportunities and information available on the day-to-day basis (Eriksen 2001: 47; Giddens 1991: 190). "Fragmented" timeframes constitute clear discontinuation of the linear form of time that used to be omnipresent in the Western world. Growing time fragmentation has transformed linear time into pointillist time that consists of unrelated dimensionless moments (points) (Bauman 2017: 32). The new form of time has been implemented in the reality of high speeds where the final effect of acceleration is elimination of time understood as continuity (Eriksen 2001). Acceleration of social time in the network society is an effect of development of media and communications technologies that, to a certain extent, "produce" more fast time by means of immediate access to information (Virilio 2000; Giddens 1990). The information revolution and technological development, including dissemination of communications technologies (mostly telephones, personal computers and the Internet), have resulted in significant changes of social life rhythms and time acceleration.

Applications supporting fragmentation of social time of individuals do create the new form of Taylorism and Fordism. A symbol of these capitalist and industrial forms of organization is a production line at a large car factory where employees perform continuous and simple operations. Fragmentation of actions accelerate the product manufacturing process on a conveyor belt. The role of new technologies is continuation of these types of activity organization, when maximum work intensification by means of effective division into production stages is assumed. Applications create divided and fragmented temporality that was initially typical for the European and North American industrial civilization. The process of Taylorization has gone beyond brick-walled factories and has been currently covering various human life aspects that have become subject to specialization and fragmentation. These processes have been accompanied with neoliberalization and the ICT revolution. As a result, we witnessed establishment of the “post-Fordist society, one that is predicated upon acceleration, flexibility and the «informationalization» of nearly every register of economy and society” (Hassan 2009).

As it can be concluded from the aforesaid considerations, there is some irony in the idea of Pomodoro Timer Applications. Applications satisfy the need of time organization for individuals and their mechanisms enable living in the contemporary, fragmented culture of hurriedness, that constitutes the growing challenge within the pointillist time. On the other hand, use of Pomodoro Timer Applications leads to intensification of the social time fragmentation process.

Multitemporality: Eisenhower Matrix Apps

Such applications as The Nozbe or TaskCracker allow to prioritize daily tasks and activities, dividing them into such categories as important, unimportant, urgent and not urgent. These categories are compatible with Eisenhower Matrix being the decision-making technique used in time management. Eisenhower Matrix Applications emphasize task prioritization. Assigning a value to each enterprise by means of an application is compliant with neoliberal logic that assumes advising individuals to determine priorities by filling their time with activities helping in realization of defined goals. Task prioritization is supposed to help focusing on achieving effects. In accordance with the Eisenhower Matrix technique, it is recommended to write down the list of all activities we planned to perform in the short and long time perspectives and then to divide them into the four following categories:

1. Important and urgent activities, so they should be performed as soon as possible. They result from the short time perspective.

2. Important, though not urgent activities. These are usually activities that should be performed regularly in order to achieve effects, for example writing a doctoral thesis. They require the longer time perspective.
3. Activities we find unimportant, though urgent. For this method it is advised to delegate as many activities from this category as possible, i.e. to make somebody else do them, that may cause ethical concerns.
4. Unimportant and not urgent activities. Double negation indicates these activities should not be performed at all.

Division of tasks based on opposite values (urgent vs. not urgent and important vs. unimportant) indicates two completely separate temporal arrangements. First of them is related to fast realization of tasks within the short time perspective, while another one within the slow and long-term perspective. Eisenhower Matrix applications are recommended to be used for tasks assigned only to the following two categories: 1) urgent and important and 2) not urgent and important. First of them is related to the longer perspective of activity, while the other one to subordination in the short perspective. As a result, two types of temporality are becoming to be present within modern time. Though both time rhythms oppose each other, the paradox included in neoliberalism blurs these boundaries, creating the reality that merges slowness and promptness within single global culture. Overlapping of two opposing temporal structures resulted in a qualitative change in the form of merger of separate time rhythms. We witness the change in time perception and experiencing, expressed in such terms as multi-temporality (Barker 2011) and heterotemporality (Hutchings 2008: 160-176) articulating plurality and not singularity of its nature.

The need of temporal self-management has been increased together with time delinearization within which two opposing temporal structures coexist. Multi-temporality has led to negative results related to desynchronization of the high-speed society (Rosa 2003). In its most powerful expression the social life transformation, being mostly intensification of the phenomenon of time acceleration, led Western societies to sensory deprivation (Virilio 1995). The excessive number of stimuli, opportunities and choices, characteristic for the contemporary kind of temporality, is not favorable for systematic and planned activity. Prioritization performed in compliance with the categories proposed by Eisenhower Matrix Applications is supposed to help individuals to be successful in the heterotemporal time structure by gaining skills in the field of better planning, realization of defined tasks and more efficient work.

Final analysis

New technologies have bipolar influence on experiencing and perception of time by neoliberal social individuals, merging features that mutually exclude each other. Within interactions between technologies and social aspects we can observe occurrence of paradoxical phenomena characteristic for neoliberalism, that can be noticed using the Latour method. The characteristic feature of internal antinomy of neoliberal temporality, called iTime and included by applications, is blurring of boundaries. We can witness disappearance of clear separation between public and private matters, leisure time and work, promptness and slowness or short and long perspectives. New technologies lead to intensification of time-space compression. Discrepancies occurring within neoliberal temporality can be seen in such applications as Productivity, Project Management, Time Tracking, Pomodoro Timer and Eisenhower Matrix. On the one hand, new Technologies are a way to release oneself from time regimes. Individuals seek them by means of freedom. The broadly defined need for time management has been borne from the desire to release time of individuals. People reach for applications in order to minimize negative effects of pointillist time. In this regard time management instruments help to synchronize and coordinate various rhythms of social life, related to variety of times created by each social group or class. Use of applications is the strategy developed by people in the culture of hurriedness, lack of time and overworking. New technologies master time, arrange activities of individuals and allow them to be more efficient. To a large extent the control gaining process is to dominate time in order to provide material profit and social advantage (Adam 2002). Ironically, when compared to the first aspect, the second method of affecting the time experiencing process by technologies is related to the contrary direction of flow of energy needed for activities to be performed by actors (Latour 2004: 67). Smartphone applications do not release us from a time regime, but they constitute it, leading to acceleration and fragmentation of time. Being instruments for creating neoliberal temporal regimes, new technologies also create the continuous change in the way of perception of time-related phenomena, intensifying the process initiated in capitalism. Sometimes, time management instruments include the aspect of agency, as they define both ourselves and social time and subjugate to neoliberal work ethic implied in such idealistic terms as self-development. Applications are a result of neoliberal values and are just another form of control. They constitute an element of smart power mechanism used by individuals to control themselves and become their own wardens. Being a specific element of contemporary “time regimes”, new technologies are used to manage time and discipline our bodies by means of mechanisms of power.

As a result, contents related to time management are created by institutions of power that pretends to refer to freedom. They are a neoliberal product created as a cure for maladies of neoliberalism. Social time individuals try to master by means of smartphones and computers initially transformed into this hardly manageable form via the same technologies. This paradox within the relation network I have described in this paper generates energy driving mechanisms of power, thus creating neoliberal *perpetuum mobile*. Is it possible to stop this speeding machinery by means of time management applications? Is it possible to be released from temporal captivity by applying the rules compliant with the cunningly masked mechanism of power, described by Foucault?

The time regime mechanism seems to be ceaseless and self-regulatory. This regulation is based on the rule saying that as social time related to more and more advanced fragmentation continuously accelerates, the need for control becomes increasingly greater. On the other hand, more and more advanced technologies mastering temporality of individuals lead to an accelerated life pace. These instruments are supposed to maintain continuous productivity of individuals and give directions for actions supporting the logic of the system. However, is it possible to attempt to release from time regimes via their supervisors? Is there any warden in this neoliberal Panopticon that such a deal could be clinched with?

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