

slow tech

against chrononormativity

a tech worker's
perspective of
how we might
move towards a
less urgent and
more
sustainable
world

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dedicated to my rad boios

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for amanda phillips'
queer pixelations class

I'm working on this zine in a Global Panini while Palestinians are hit by Israeli airstrikes and evicted from their homes. Just a few months ago, multiple East Asian women were killed by a white supremacist in Atlanta, as police murders of Black people continue unabated.

This zine is a reminder to myself that we live in a world in constant crisis. It is me reflecting on my impulses to respond in urgent ways to each tragedy and to think we can solve complex problems quickly with technology. I'm wondering what it means instead to build towards liberation in a way that allows us to understand the gravity of the moment, but be soft with ourselves and understand that it is just as important to ground and care for ourselves so we can care and fight for others. That this is multigenerational.

Ironically, as much as I would like to write this zine at a more deliberate pace, I still need to have the pressure of externally imposed deadlines to force me to finish creative projects. Maybe one day I'll have the intrinsic motivation to create things I'm proud of for myself and my friends and comrades and not have to push myself to get things done in a couple of days.

Nonetheless, creating this zine and synthesizing and assembling disparate thoughts is extremely meditative and gets me out of what I call social media brain—when my mind jumps around and feels fragmented from too much time on twitter and instagram. I intend to update this zine as it feels good to do so. What does it mean to return to a project that has been released and to consider it never quite finished? To continue to bring in ideas that inspire me is a way to refuse the linear passage of time.

The following pages offer some eclectic thoughts that triangulate around liberating ourselves by slowing down.

chrononormativity

Conceptualized by Elizabeth Freeman[1], **chrononormativity** is a queer term describing how time moves in capitalist society. It is the pressure to go about life in a way that ensures maximum productivity and alignment with life events because we think we are supposed to conform to doing x thing at x time. It is about experiencing time and life in a linear way, in a way that leaves out disabled, poor, and queer folks.

slow tech

The tech industry adheres to many bullshit ideas. One idea is that tech can act as a quick solution to any problem, even if said problem is massive like poverty[2]. Learning to code can fix all your problems! No need for the slow sustained building of people power to create change. Move Fast and Break Things and you can circumvent all existing systems. Whose needs are being met by such tech though? I'm thinking about how our fast search results are thought to be curated by code, when the algorithm is trained by extremely underpaid workers[3]. From the white collar worker perspective, tech is about coding and designing at late hours to meet ridiculous deadlines.

Slow tech asks: how do we build deliberately and in a way that adheres to a pace of work that feels good for everyone and recognizes all the labor (not just of those who are typically considered "tech workers") that goes into making a tech system run?

Slow tech recognizes that the things that free up convenience for others tend to be the most exploitative and draining on workers.

Slow tech asks us to slow down so we can design and build a thing that actually considers and addresses the needs of everyone who will be using our tech (some examples being the visually impaired and people who aren't tech savvy).

Slow tech is recognizing that while there are small personal level things we can do to cultivate slower practices of making shit, we still exist within capitalism. So to enable us all to move at paces comfortable for each of us, we ultimately must free ourselves from the capitalist system that forces urgency upon us.

reparative design

Building on the idea of slow tech, reparative design offers creation as a means to help us heal from this fucked up urgent world at our own pace.

Kara Stone defines reparative design: "A long, slow art practice is a unique way into examining and repairing from the everyday. I propose that reparative game design is a method to work through difficult feelings, but it is also a means to stay in them as long as they need to be felt. Sometimes the work is to bring out difficult feelings. Sometimes the work is to make yourself and others feel worse." [4]

This is about creating with others as a means to strengthen bonds with community and in turn helps us feel better so we can be there for our community. It prioritizes our collective survival. And part of it is to "accept that there will be times when we really want to be productive but we just can't be."

cool tech hacks

is brad pressuring you to finish your project at work faster?

tell him the latest design program update crashed your computer. if that doesn't work then just smash your laptop and say a bunch of cicadas pushed it off the table. if that doesn't work, just tell him no

are you doomscrolling again on ur phone?

breathe. give ur phone to your roommate and ask them to hide it for 6 hours.

is ur cousin threatening to not tip the uber eats driver cuz the order is taking forever?

take ur cousin's phone and venmo the driver \$50

do you feel the urge to make an app to address a problem you noticed?

slap yourself. then go talk to your neighbors and figure out how you can help them by just doing something for them in real life.

passages from micha cardenas' "Redshift & Portalmetal"[5]

this is a poetic choose your own
adventure game based in a climate
apocalypse, pondering how we might undo
colonization
it meditates on what it means to survive
and wait for the right moment to act and
how we can find home in unstable chaos

living on the ice planet

"Space is cold, dark.
We travel in tunnels underground that spit
us out into tiled rooms.
We learn technologies of warmth,
technologies of sustenance,
and give them to each other as precious
gifts.
Walking above ground, I see a transporter
go past with a photo of a planet on it's
side,
shaping my imagination of this space I
inhabit.
Waiting in the underground tunnels,
I see photos on screens of my home planet's
dying ecosystem.
We have no home to return to,
intergalactic diaspora.
My father also took flight,
from the violence neocolonialism brought to
his homeland,
in a silver and orange arc in the dark sky,
yet the planet he landed on was as hot,
humid and fecund as his own.
The icy surface of this place is bright,
reflective,
I watch it through the windows,
disappearing under snow, again and again,
as we hold each other tight to stay warm.
We need to build homes where we go,
to carry them with us, and in us."

hack the border guard's network

"Diaspora, immigration, assimilation, all of these are hacks for defeating the innumerable technologies of borders that shape contemporary life under neocolonialism."

back home

"Back to my new home,
swirling in snow and ice,
the silence of arctic cold,
the slippery transparent floor,
layer upon layer of hardened water
crystals,
I realize that I can work for
decolonization of this new place,
because I must,
because I have nowhere to go where I am not
a settler,
everywhere I go I have to honor the
original peoples of the land,
and ask for their leadership and guidance,
and work to create space for them,
and step back."

step back

"Because solidarity matters,
love matters,
my sick and disabled loved ones have shown
me,
when I need help just to stand,
from the pain of transformation,
that we need each other,
interdependence.
We cannot just split endlessly into smaller
and smaller atoms,
more specific groupings,
tiny electron clouds,
because that would only lead to
individualism,
we have to help each other,
to be able to survive the tearing winds of
these worlds,
and travel across the stars together,
more important than anything else:
connected, connecting."

a silicon valley where we move slow and repair things

hackathons would span multiple weekends and would focus on helping improving existing infrastructure rather than creating something new

the latest iphone updates wouldn't break your phone if it was more than 2 years old

we wouldn't feel pressured to take shitty tech jobs

we would have energy after work to be ourselves

we would make the time to build tech that doesn't compromise our values and is accessible and usable for all people

we would look at what is already working at the community level and work to build from that point

random questions re: balancing work and creation and responding to shit and resting

what does it
mean that i
have to have
extrinsic
motivators
like
deadlines to
force me to
make shit?

is it
possible to
have bursts
of urgency
in healthy
ways?

why is it that
whenever i am
focused and in
the zone to
create things
that it means i
stay up way
past my bedtime
then fucks me
over for the
rest of the
week

how do i better
balance being
there for my
friends and in
the moment
communication
with the time i
need to focus
on making
stuff?

how can i
better
establish
routine and
ritual and
build time into
my day for
moving slowly?

how can i
better seize
those moments
of creativity
and
inspiration?

why do i feel
guilty if i
dont respond to
crises in the
moment as i see
others doing?

is there inherently going
to be long and intense
periods of work time needed
to synthesize thoughts
together to form a coherent
piece? is it ok when things
aren't coherent?

all we have is each other

and creating

and deepening relationships

and being goofy as fuck

lets abolish notions of time that
keep us from each other

tech allows us to do useful things
but i constantly remind myself that
until we gain control of the tech,
tech will have a net negative on
society

so lets figure out how we can
survive and support each other so
we can build the world we need and
wrest power from gross tech ceos

references

[1] Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Duke University Press, 2010.

[4] Greene, Daniel. *The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope*. MIT Press, 2021.

[3] Irani, Lilly C., and M. Six Silberman. "Turkopticon: Interrupting worker invisibility in amazon mechanical turk." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems*. 2013

[4] Stone, Kara. *Time and Reparative Game Design: Queerness, Disability, and Affect*. *Game Studies* 18.3 (2018). <http://gamestudies.org/1803/articles/stone>

[5] Cardenas, Micha. *Redshift & Portalmetal for desktop computer*, 2015. <https://micharoja.itch.io/redshift-and-portalmetal>

thanks for reading!

these orgs/people
are doing stuff
related to topics
in this zine that
inspire me:

design justice network
designjustice.org

tech workers coalition
techworkerscoalition.org

the nap ministry
@thenapministry

the booty of the zine

"transfixing" - the nytimes

"gorgeous" - GQ

"exhilarating" - boston globe

"hypnotic" - entertainment weekly

"mesmerizing" - newsweek

"electrifying" - ain't it cool news

read my longer meta
thoughts about this
zine:

bit.ly/slow-time-zine