

The Digital Architecture of Time Management

Abstract

There is a widespread assumption that digital technologies are radically altering our perception of time: that we live too fast, that time is scarce and that the pace of everyday life is accelerating beyond our control. The iconic image that abounds is that of the frenetic, technologically tethered, iPhone-addicted citizen. Paradoxically, digital devices are seen as both the cause of time pressure as well as the solution. The lecture will argue that while there is no temporal logic inherent in technologies, artifacts do play a central role in the constitution of time regimes. We make time with machines.

Professor Wacjman will illustrate this argument by exploring the vision of 'intelligent' time management that drives the design of digital calendars. Drawing on interviews with software engineers, she will argue that the shift from print to electronic calendars embodies a longstanding belief that technology can be profitably employed to control and manage time. This belief continues to animate contemporary sociotechnical imaginaries of what automation will deliver. In the current moment, calendars are increasingly conceived of as digital assistants whose behavioural algorithms can solve life's existential problem – how best to organise the time of our lives. In sum, the aim here is to contribute to STS scholarship on the role of technology in shaping people's experience of time.